

# What Does ASEAN Mean to ASEAN Peoples? Survey Findings from the Philippines\*

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## Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a grouping or coalition of 10 member states in Southeast Asia that works to foster regional cooperation. It was formed on 8 August 1967 with Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand as its founding members. ASEAN's membership has grown over the years with the joining of Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam.

Based on the Bangkok Declaration of 1967, ASEAN aims to promote economic growth, social progress, and cultural progress in the region through joint endeavours; foster regional peace and security; encourage active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical, and scientific fields; promote partnerships in the development of agriculture, industries, trade, and transportation and communication facilities within the region; promote Southeast Asian studies; and maintain 'close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes, and explore all avenues for even closer cooperation' (ASEAN, 2016).

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\* All tables and figures in this chapter were derived from the survey data.

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A turning point in ASEAN's history, which is considered a major milestone in the regional integration of ASEAN, was the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015. The ASEAN Community is composed of three pillars: the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, and the ASEAN Political-Security Community.

Each pillar has its own blueprint. The AEC Blueprint, adopted by the ASEAN leaders in November 2015, forms part of a general master plan called *ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together*, which is geared towards the realisation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. The said concept envisages:

a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centered ASEAN Community, where our peoples enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms, higher quality of life and the benefits of community building, reinforcing our sense of togetherness and common identity, guided by the purposes and principles of the ASEAN Charter ... a peaceful, stable and resilient Community with enhanced capacity to respond effectively to challenges, and ASEAN as an outward-looking region within a global community of nations, while maintaining ASEAN centrality ... vibrant, sustainable and highly integrated economies, enhanced ASEAN Connectivity as well as strengthened efforts in narrowing the development gap. (ASEAN Secretariat, 2015: 13)

As ASEAN approaches its 50th founding anniversary in 2017, it is timely to ascertain the public's perception of the association to determine the gaps and areas for improvement. The region and the world when ASEAN was born 50 years ago were very much different to how they are now. ASEAN should evolve with and adapt to the times and must remain relevant and responsive to the needs of its peoples.

For this aim, the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) commissioned the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) to carry out a research project as part of the ASEAN@50: Retrospectives and Perspectives on the Making, Substance, Significance, and Future of ASEAN project. The research is aimed at making inferences about the level of awareness of the Filipino people of ASEAN as well as their aspirations, concerns, and hopes for the association. The results are intended to inform ASEAN's policies, programmes, and projects.

## Methodology

The study was carried out through a purposive online and paper-based survey and focus group discussions (FGDs) with select target groups. ERIA provided the instruments used for the survey. Additional efforts were made to simplify some of the questions for the FGDs, particularly the statements on the expectations and aspirations for ASEAN.

To find respondents for the survey, invitations were sent by PIDS to people in government, academe, the business sector, and civil society organisations/non-governmental organisations (CSOs/NGOs). The survey was also advertised through the PIDS social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter); the institute's electronic newsletter, *PIDS Updates*; and personal contacts.

The FGDs were comprised of three sessions. The first session was with the youth sector in Butuan City, the regional centre of Caraga (a region in Mindanao). Another FGD targeted the business sector and was held in Cebu City (in the Visayas). The third FGD was held in Quezon City (in Luzon) and comprised a mixed group of representatives from government, academe, business, and NGOs/CSOs. Given the limited resources available for this project, the selection of strategic areas for the FGDs was intended to obtain, as far as possible, a broad spectrum of views and opinions on ASEAN.

## Results and Discussion

### Profile of survey respondents

The survey had a total of 289 respondents (Table 1). The largest group of respondents was from the government, followed by those from academe, CSOs/NGOs, business, and others. 'Others' comprised students, staff of international organisations, and media personnel.

Three-quarters of the survey respondents were over 30 years old, and there were equal proportions of respondents aged 31–49 and those aged 50 or older. There were slightly more male than female respondents.

**Table 1: Profile of the Survey Respondents**

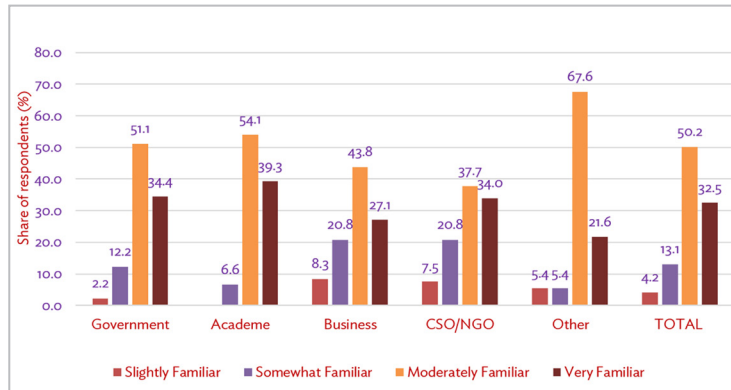
	Number of Respondents	Share of Respondents (%)
<b>Affiliation</b>		
Government	90	31.14
Academe	61	21.11
Business	48	16.61
CSO/NGO	53	18.34
Others (mostly students)	37	12.80
<i>Total</i>	289	100.0
<b>Age</b>		
15-30 years	73	25.26
31-49 years	108	37.37
50+ years	108	37.37
<i>Total</i>	289	100.00
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	150	51.90
Female	139	48.10
<i>Total</i>	289	100.0

CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

## Awareness of ASEAN

Across the age and affiliation groups, the majority of the survey respondents were moderately familiar with ASEAN (Figure 1). Slightly more respondents from academe had greater familiarity with ASEAN than those from the government. The majority of the FGD participants said that they had learned about ASEAN at school, while the out-of-school youths said they heard about ASEAN on the radio or television.

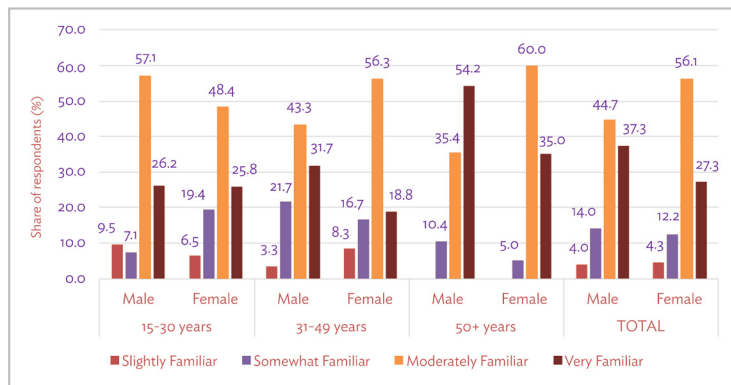
**Figure 1: Share of Respondents by Age**



CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

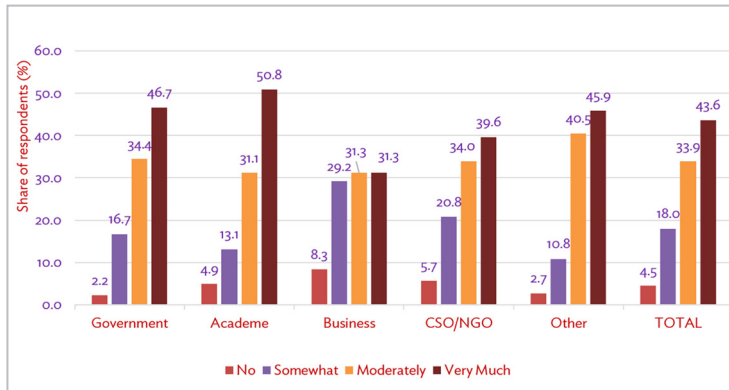
For all three age groups (15–30 years, 31–49 years, and 50+ years), there were more survey respondents who were moderately familiar with ASEAN than those who were very familiar with it (Figure 2). Most of the respondents aged 15–30 and 31–49 were moderately aware of ASEAN, regardless of their gender. Those aged 50 or older who expressed moderate familiarity with ASEAN were predominantly female. However, a slightly larger proportion of men aged 50 or older reported a high awareness of ASEAN.

**Figure 2: Awareness of ASEAN by Gender and Age**



The majority of the survey respondents from academe and government felt very much as ASEAN citizens (Figure 3). Many of the CSO/NGO respondents had the same sentiment, while an equal number of respondents from the business sector felt either very much or only moderately that they were ASEAN citizens. This feeling of ASEAN citizenship was validated in the FGD with the business sector, in which respondents also said they considered themselves as ASEAN citizens. Respondents in the ‘other’ category conveyed a strong affiliation towards ASEAN.

**Figure 3: Feeling of Being an ASEAN Citizen by Affiliation**

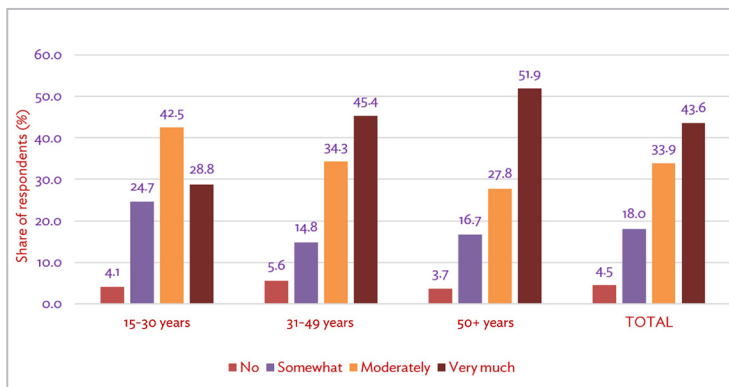


CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

One participant from the mixed FGD argued, however, that it would be more appropriate to use the term ‘ASEAN national’ rather than ‘ASEAN citizen’ because the attachment felt by many towards ASEAN was more in terms of one’s identity as a Southeast Asian rather than in terms of his/her rights and duties, which the participant noted was what citizenship was all about.

The feeling of being an ASEAN citizen increased with age among the respondents (Figure 4). The majority of the younger respondents (15–30 years) in the survey felt moderately as ASEAN citizens, while all except one of the participants in the youth FGD said they did not feel they were part of ASEAN. They said they had no idea of what ASEAN did and added that they did not receive enough information about the association.

**Figure 4: Identification as an ASEAN Citizen by Age**



In contrast, the older respondents (31–49 years and 50+ years) considered themselves very much as ASEAN citizens. This can be attributed to the greater awareness of ASEAN through work or personal experience as one advances in years. Most participants in the mixed FGD said they learned about ASEAN through their work. For example, a participant from the NGO sector who was a member of the ASEAN Farmers' Association said that ASEAN was always a part of his group's discussions with the Department of Agriculture.

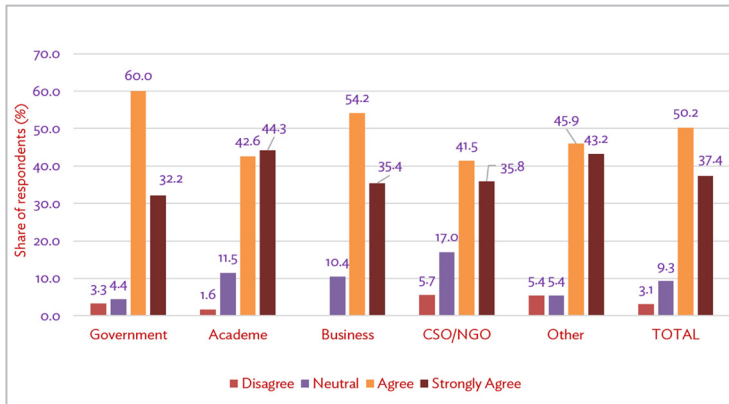
There was a consensus across the groups that media coverage of ASEAN was not enough (Figure 5). The survey respondents from government felt most strongly about this, followed by those from the business sector and others. The youth respondents in the FGD said they knew more about the United Nations than ASEAN, while a participant in the mixed FGD noted the absence of the ASEAN flag in offices and schools.

When asked whether they agreed with using school textbooks to increase social awareness and educate young people about ASEAN's progress, achievements, and challenges, there was strong agreement among the respondents from government, academe, CSOs/NGOs, and others (Figure 6). Those from the business sector also answered in the affirmative but were slightly less enthusiastic about the idea.

Survey respondents aged 15–30 and 50+ years, particularly the younger respondents, expressed strong agreement with using school textbooks to educate young people about ASEAN (Figure 7). However, those aged 31–49, although in agreement, agreed to a lesser extent; slightly more respondents from this age group chose 'agree' than 'strongly agree'.

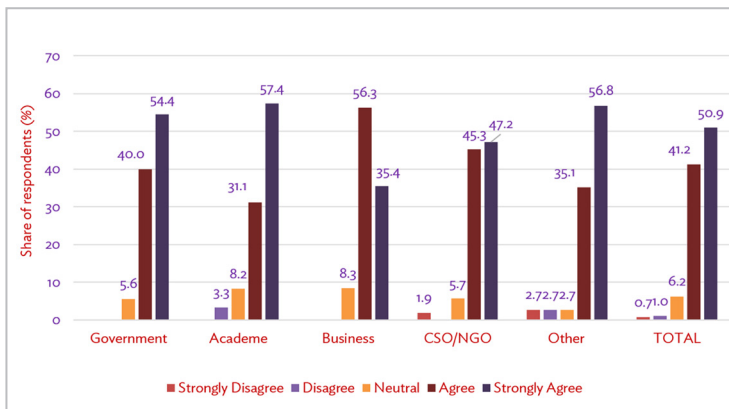
The majority of participants in the three FGDs thought that ASEAN and its goals, programmes, and activities should be introduced and taught in schools. Those from the business sector said awareness-raising should start during primary education, while more advanced topics about ASEAN, such as those that require broader international consciousness, should be taught in secondary and tertiary education. A few participants emphasised the importance of regularly updating of textbooks and noted that some textbooks with ASEAN content were not updated.

**Figure 5: Agreement That Media Coverage of ASEAN Is Not Enough by Affiliation**



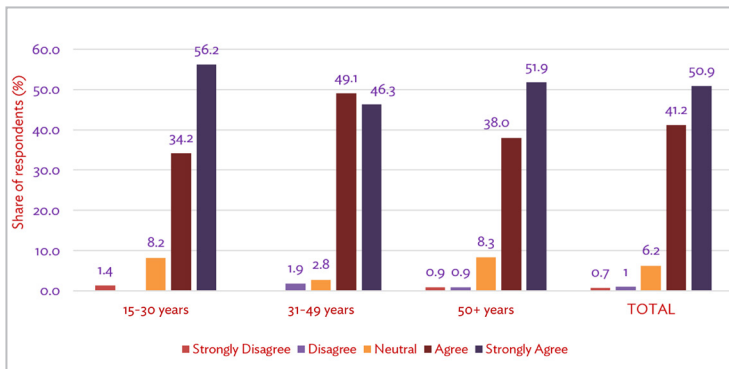
CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

**Figure 6: Perception on the Use of Textbooks to Promote ASEAN by Affiliation**



CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

**Figure 7: Perception on the Use of Textbooks to Promote ASEAN by Age**





## Membership of ASEAN

For all groups, the majority of the survey respondents (between 85% and 97%) had favourable views on the Philippines' membership of ASEAN (Figure 8). The largest percentage of those that responded positively came from government, and the lowest was from the business sector.

More than 9 out of 10 respondents across all age groups also thought that being part of ASEAN was favourable for the Philippines. This coincides with the results of the FGDs, in which all participants expressed positive views on the Philippines' membership of ASEAN.

For instance, while awareness of ASEAN and what it does was low among the youth participants in the FGD, they all agreed that membership of ASEAN was good for the Philippines in terms of trade; peace-building; resolving territorial conflicts and problems related to food security, hunger, and technology; and receiving aid in times of need. Nevertheless, most felt that ASEAN was not doing anything to help the Philippines resolve its geopolitical conflict with China. They added that they felt that in terms of assistance in resolving the situation, the United States was doing more than ASEAN.

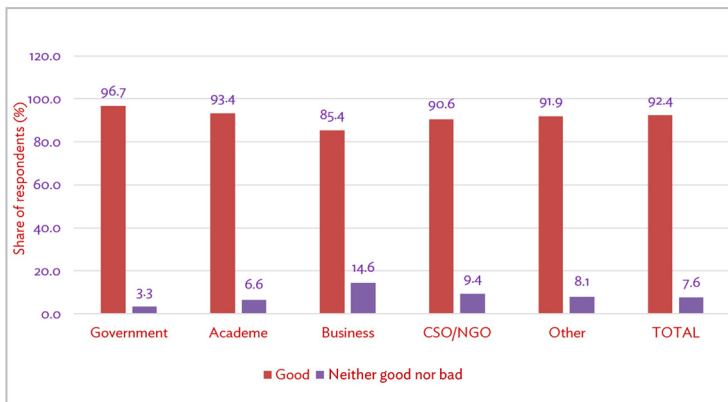
Meanwhile, the most cited reasons by the business sector participants were related to trade (namely, the ease of importing and exporting due to fewer trade barriers), ease of travel across ASEAN, and more employment opportunities for professional workers. On the latter, the youth participants noted that ASEAN membership was good for creating more jobs for the Philippines, which they said had a low capacity in this area. They added that being part of ASEAN helped Filipino workers access jobs in other ASEAN countries. The participants from the business sector also viewed ASEAN as a good platform for harmonising the political and economic agenda of the member states and for having a unified stand in addressing the issues faced by each member and ASEAN as a whole.

However, while membership of ASEAN was generally perceived to be positive, more respondents thought the Philippines benefited only moderately from ASEAN (Figure 9). Among the business sector respondents, slightly more respondents chose 'somewhat' than 'moderately'. This corroborates the business group's tepid response to the question on the Philippines' membership of ASEAN, which, although positive, was not as warm as the other groups (Figure 8). Despite this, more survey respondents, regardless of their affiliation, said they would be extremely concerned if the Philippines were to leave ASEAN (Figure 10). Participants of the three FGDs gave the same response. The youth, in particular, said they thought leaving ASEAN would weaken the Philippines because it would be alone in solving its problems, particularly disasters and territorial conflicts.

One respondent used the analogy of the Philippines not having friends if the Philippines were to leave ASEAN. All of the participants of the mixed FGD said they wanted the Philippines to keep its ASEAN membership.

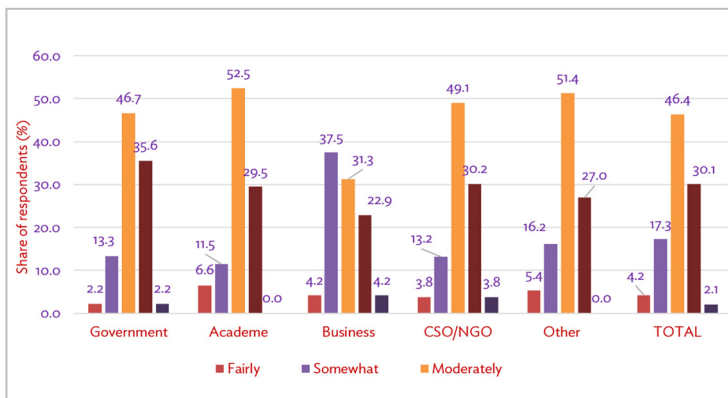
In terms of ASEAN’s future, the majority of the respondents were moderately optimistic, with the largest percentage coming from the CSO/NGO sector (Figure 11). This may have been due to the moderate familiarity of the respondents with ASEAN’s activities and/or the perception that the Philippines had only moderately benefited from its membership of the association (Figure 9).

**Figure 8: Perception of the Philippines’ Membership of ASEAN by Affiliation**



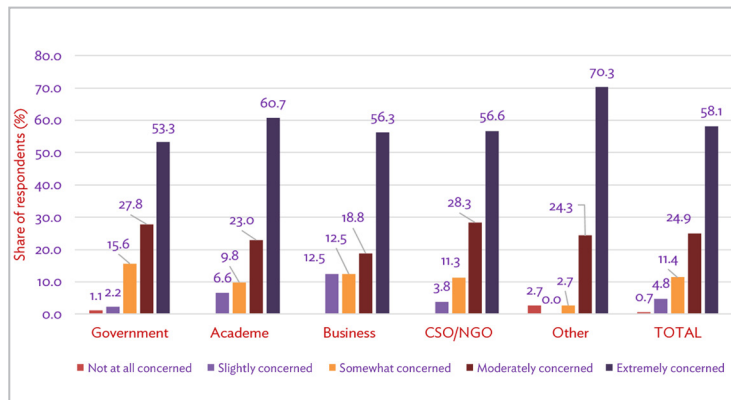
CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

**Figure 9: Extent of the Benefit from ASEAN by Affiliation**



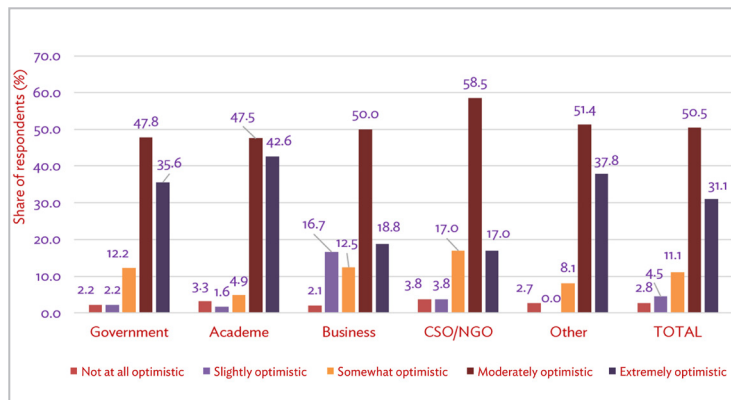
CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

**Figure 10: Feeling if the Philippines Were to Leave ASEAN by Affiliation**



CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

**Figure 11: Perception of ASEAN’s Future by Affiliation**



CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

## Pressing problems

From a list of choices, the respondents were asked to choose five items that they thought were the most pressing problems facing (a) the Philippines and (b) the ASEAN Community today and until 2025.

The results differed for the two settings. As shown in the summary graph in Figure 12, the top five issues chosen by the respondents for the Philippines were (1) the availability of affordable Internet connections, (2) poverty, (3) corruption, (4) agriculture and food security, and (5) energy provision and prices. Meanwhile, the most pressing problems for ASEAN were (1) climate change and natural disasters, (2) territorial/maritime disputes,

(3) trade, investment, and regulatory coherence, (4) agriculture and food security, and income disparity and social inequality, and (5) corruption.<sup>1</sup>

The only common response was agriculture and food security, which is indicative of the urgency and gravity of this problem at the local (country) and regional (ASEAN) levels. This also shows that the survey respondents were acutely aware of the mediocre performance of Philippine agriculture, which has accentuated concerns about food security, especially among the poor and the vulnerable. They were also aware of the need to boost agricultural performance and ensure food security in the face of a growing ASEAN population, and the higher priority that ASEAN Member States have apparently given to investing in regional production networks in manufacturing and related activities and services.

Meanwhile, in the FGDs, the most common answers in terms of the top five issues for the Philippines were corruption, poverty, and climate change and natural disasters. For ASEAN, aside from corruption and climate change and natural disasters, the most common answers were poverty, unemployment, and trade and investment.

The top five pressing problems for the Philippines validate the most immediate concerns facing the country today. As a foremost concern, information and communications technology services in the Philippines, including the Internet, are among the most expensive in ASEAN. As explained in a PIDS discussion paper (Albert, Serafica, and Lumbea, 2016), fixed telephone services in the Philippines in purchasing power parity US dollars cost US\$36.15 per month, the highest in ASEAN. Meanwhile, mobile cellular services and fixed broadband services are priced at US\$22.24 per month (second highest) and US\$51.59 per month (third highest), respectively, based on data from the International Telecommunication Union. Price, nevertheless, does not translate into quality services. Despite the high cost, Internet speeds in the Philippines are among the slowest in the Asia-Pacific region. According to the *State of the Internet* report by Akamai (2015), a cloud data network that monitors Internet traffic, the Philippines' average connection speed was 2.8 Megabits per second (Mbps) for the third quarter of 2015, significantly less than the global average connection speed of 5.1 Mbps and the second lowest in the Asia-Pacific region. The Philippines also ranked third in terms of the lowest peak connection speed, at 25.3 Mbps, much slower than the global average of 32.2 Mbps. This is a big concern because the Philippines' services sector owes much of its stellar performance to improvements in information and communications technology, which has been instrumental to the robust growth of the information technology-

<sup>1</sup> Territorial/maritime disputes were not in the original list of problems in the questionnaire provided by ERIA. However, the PIDS research team decided to add this item in view of its growing domestic and regional relevance.

business process management industry. In 2015, the industry generated more than US\$22 billion in revenue and more than 1 million full-time jobs (IT and Business Process Association of the Philippines, 2016). Poor-quality services by Philippine telecommunications firms will create a significant hindrance to the continuous growth of the information technology-business process management industry and to the services sector as a whole.

Meanwhile, as the second most serious concern selected by the majority of survey respondents and one of the top issues by the FGD participants, high poverty incidence remains a daunting challenge for the Philippines. While the country has enjoyed rapid economic growth, averaging 6% during 2010–2016, not all segments of the population have enjoyed this growth. Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority estimated a poverty incidence of 21.6% in 2015. While this was significantly lower than the 25.2% reported in 2012, it is still rather substantial. The figure could have been further reduced if not for major setbacks that affected the Philippines between 2012 and 2015, particularly climate-related disasters. The problem of high poverty incidence has framed the current discussions of the policy community in pushing the government's development strategy and agenda forward with inclusive growth as a critical goal.

Corruption, as the third most pressing concern chosen by the survey respondents and one of the top issues identified by the FGD participants, is related to the general perception of the persistence of corruption and its relative worsening in recent times, as reflected in the corruption perception index released by Transparency International. In 2015, the Philippines ranked 95th out of 168 countries in the index, 10 places lower than its ranking in 2014 (85th). In 2013 and 2012, it ranked 94th and 105th, respectively. In this regard, the government has recently established Project Repeal, which is intended to reduce the regulatory burden on firms. The project requires government agencies to implement the Anti-Red Tape Act more resolutely and included the issuing of an executive order establishing a freedom of information framework and implementation plan in the government.

Unreliable power supply and the high cost of electricity in the Philippines were also top concerns among respondents. Energy woes affect not only local households and businesses but also discourage foreign investors. The Philippines' power rates are among the highest in the world. A study by International Energy Consultants in June 2012 (see KPMG Global Energy Institute [2013]) shows that the average retail tariff charged by Meralco, the country's largest distributor of electrical power, of US\$0.2026 per kilowatt-hour, is the ninth highest in the world and the second highest in Asia (KPMG Global Energy Institute, 2013). Sixty-five percent of this tariff consists of generation costs, which are borne by power producers. The government is undertaking an ongoing review

of the energy and power policies and plans in consultation with various stakeholders. It is important to pin down and revoke any policy, regulatory, or institutional issues that have contributed to high power costs.

Meanwhile, the pressing problems identified for ASEAN reflect the transnational scope and the seriousness of climate change, territorial/maritime disputes, and trade and investment issues. These are not new problems in the region, yet they have inarguably intensified over the years. The region of Southeast Asia is one of the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The Asian Development Bank (2009) attributes this to several reasons, including the region's large and growing population (as disasters are partly a function of population exposure), its long coastlines, the high concentration of human and economic activities in coastal areas, the dependence on agriculture as a source of livelihood for a large segment of people, and the reliance on natural resources and the forestry sector for growth and development.

In terms of territorial or maritime disputes between ASEAN Member States or with other neighbouring countries, the most immediate issue that comes to mind is the conflict in the South China Sea. The participants in the FGDs likewise associated territorial or maritime disputes with the South China Sea dispute. As a highly contested territory, the dispute involves the competing claims of Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Viet Nam. In July 2016, the Hague's Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled in favour of the Philippines. The court concluded that China's claims of historic rights to the disputed areas in the South China Sea were without legal basis, and thus its activities within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, specifically '(a) interfering Philippine fishing and petroleum exploration, (b) constructing artificial islands and (c) failing to prevent Chinese fishermen from fishing in the zone' were an infringement on the Philippines' sovereign rights (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016). China refused to accept the ruling. But, nevertheless, a recent state visit by President Rodrigo Duterte to China appears to have helped improve the relationship between China and the Philippines.<sup>2</sup>

Corruption, agriculture and food security, and income disparity and social inequality also emerged as among the top problems for ASEAN today and until 2025. ASEAN is a major nexus of growth in the world, and its member states have exhibited relatively strong economic performance. However, this survey reveals several major regional challenges that indicate the priorities ASEAN leaders should have in the immediate future.

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<sup>2</sup> Recent news reports indicate that Filipino fishermen now fish in the traditional fishing grounds in the Scarborough Shoal without harassment from the Chinese coast guard. Whether this is a short term or permanent arrangement has yet to be established.

The least chosen issues for the Philippines were (1) non-tariff barriers/measures and gender parity; (2) the right to public participation; (3) trade, investment, and regulatory coherence; (4) territorial/maritime disputes; and (5) customs issues. These reflect the respondents' perceptions that these items are not significant concerns for the country. This could have been because of the perceptions that these problems have already been addressed or are already being acted upon, or that these problems are of regional, rather than local, concern. This can be seen for territorial/maritime disputes and trade, which although regarded as among the least concerning problems in the Philippines, emerged among the top, pressing problems in ASEAN.

Meanwhile, for ASEAN, the following were the least chosen by the respondents as pressing problems: (1) health services and energy provision and prices; (2) affordable Internet connections; (3) quality education, and land and water use and access; (4) unemployment; and (5) public participation. While Internet connections and energy provision and prices were not concerns for the respondents for ASEAN, these items were among the top five pressing problems for the Philippines, reflecting the survey respondents' perceptions that these were domestic, rather than regional, issues. The low level of concern for the other problems may be indicative of views that measures are already being made to solve them, and thus they are no longer pressing problems for ASEAN.

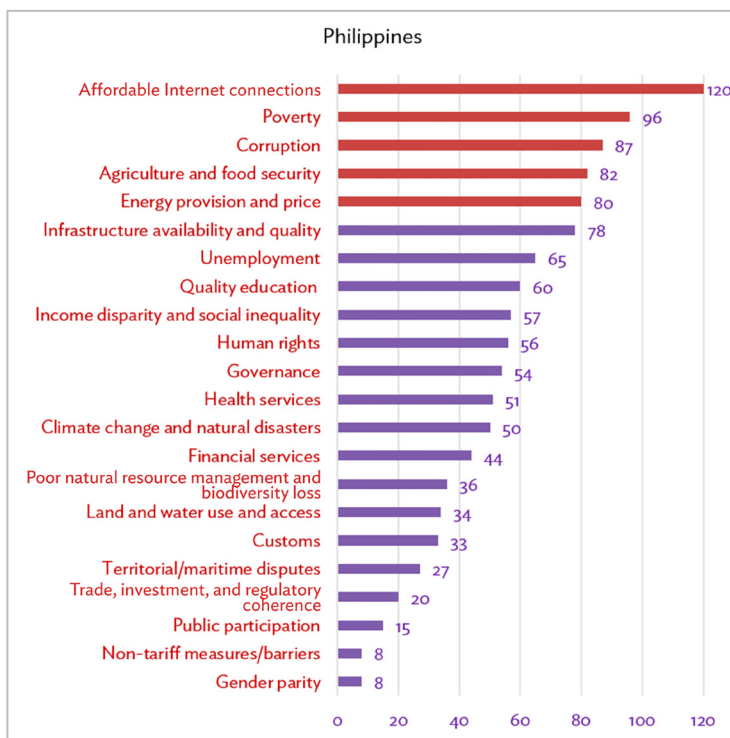
## Addressing the problems

Using the same set of problems, the survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought that the government of each ASEAN Member State should act independently in addressing the problems or whether the governments should act jointly and/or concertedly under ASEAN.

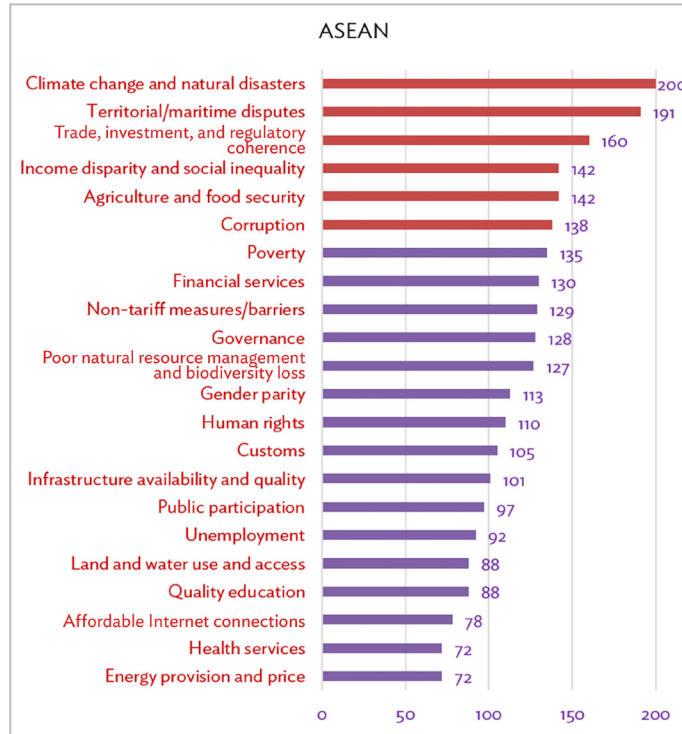
Figure 13 presents the summary results. For 21 of the 22 items, the majority of the respondents said that ASEAN should address the issues as a group. This view was most prominent (by between 75% and 95% of the respondents) for the following issues: (1) agriculture and food security, (2) climate change and natural disasters, (3) non-tariff barriers/measures, (4) territorial/maritime disputes, and (5) trade, investment, and regulatory coherence. That four of these items also surfaced as among the top five most pressing problems in ASEAN (i.e. climate change, territorial/maritime disputes, trade, and agriculture and food security) further validates the importance of these issues in the region and the need for international cooperation in addressing them. Of the five issues identified by the survey respondents, two were also mentioned by the FGD participants: territorial/maritime disputes and climate change and natural disasters.

The only issue regarded by the survey respondents as within the ambit of individual member states to tackle was corruption. In the FGDs, the participants also selected corruption as well as human rights, poverty, unemployment, and the lack of affordable and quality education. Notably, corruption emerged as one of the top, pressing problems in the Philippines. The respondents' opinion that it should be addressed by the member states individually confirms their view that corruption is more of a domestic concern and an issue that can be more effectively addressed by the individual countries.

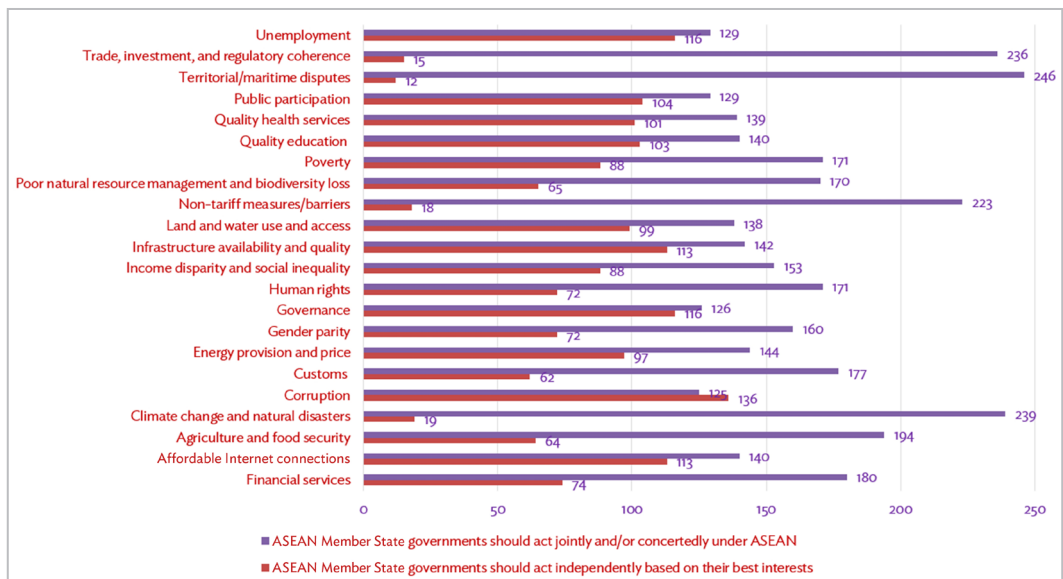
**Figure 12: Pressing Problems for the Philippines and ASEAN**  
(number of responses)







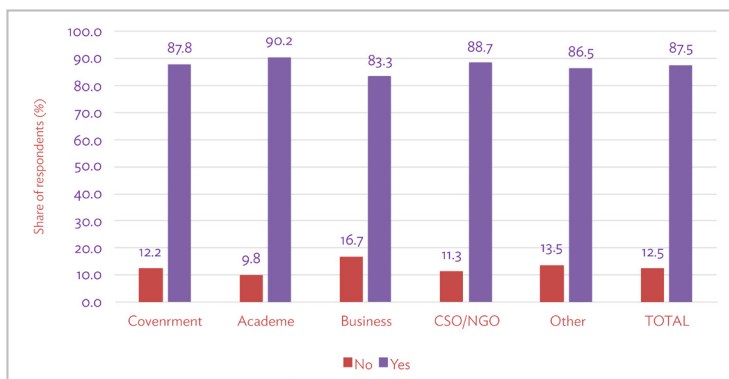
**Figure 13: Perceptions on Independent or Joint Action for Addressing Problems in ASEAN**  
(number of responses)



## Expectations for ASEAN

The majority of the respondents replied positively when asked whether they had aspirations, expectations, concerns, or hopes for ASEAN (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Aspirations, Expectations, Concerns, or Hopes for ASEAN by Affiliation**



CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

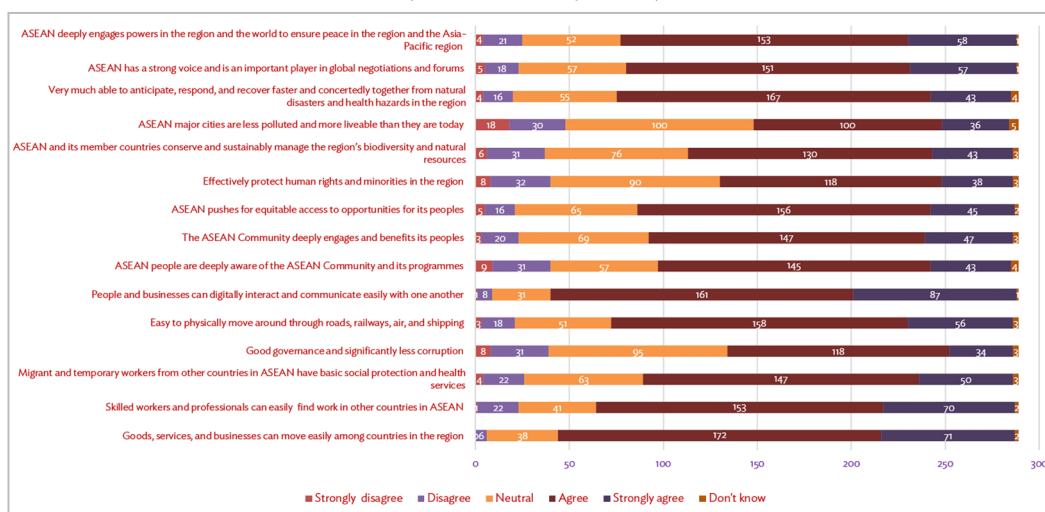
To probe their responses, the respondents were asked to state their agreement or disagreement with 15 statements describing specific situations in ASEAN.<sup>3</sup> They were asked how likely they thought the situations were to happen by 2025 and expressed their views using a six-point Likert scale (strongly agree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree, don't know).

For all 15 statements except for one, the majority of the respondents agreed that the situations described were likely to happen by 2025 (Figure 15). The exception was the statement: 'ASEAN major cities are less polluted and more liveable than they are today.' For this, there were equal numbers of survey respondents who were neutral and who agreed with the statement. This indicates a certain ambivalence towards the realisation of the scenario. This result coincides with the views of the business sector participants

<sup>3</sup> The situations given were the following: free movement of goods, services, and business among ASEAN countries; ease of finding work within ASEAN by skilled workers; basic social protection and health services to migrant and temporary workers; good governance and less corruption; ease of physical movement due to good infrastructure; good digital connectivity; ASEAN peoples have deep awareness of the ASEAN Community and its programmes; the ASEAN Community deeply engages and benefits its peoples; equitable access to opportunities for ASEAN peoples; effective protection of human rights and minorities in the region; proper conservation and sustainable management of the region's biodiversity and natural resources; less polluted and more liveable cities; effective response and fast recovery from natural disasters and health hazards; ASEAN has a strong voice and is an important player in global negotiations and forums; ASEAN deeply engages powers in the region and the world to ensure peace in the region and the Asia-Pacific region.

in the FGD. Their expectations were lowest for this item along with two other scenarios. The youth sector participants in the FGD also felt that having liveable cities would be difficult to achieve and thought that whether this could be attained would depend on the officials of the ASEAN Member States and their citizens. A similar result was seen in the FGD with the mixed group of participants. This reflects pessimism about the quality of life in ASEAN cities, which face the problems of congestion, lack of infrastructure, and rapid urbanisation due to the growth of in-migration from rural areas, and these problems constrain the delivery of quality services.

**Figure 15: Expectations for ASEAN**  
(number of responses)



Furthermore, it is interesting to note that a number of respondents were neutral about the statement regarding good governance and low corruption. While the majority (118 respondents) agreed that the scenario would likely happen by 2025, 95 respondents chose not to take sides, indicating they were uncertain about whether the scenario would be achievable in the future. This reflects the perceptions about the extent of the corruption problem in the minds of some of the respondents who felt doubtful whether the situation could change for the better. In the youth FGD, the participants said that corruption would be impossible to eradicate. One participant even said she thought corruption was inborn in the culture of ASEAN countries. Even in the FGD with the business sector and the FGD with the mixed group, participants had the lowest expectations of a reduction in corruption. Accepting corruption as a fact of life is different from accepting that nothing can be done to minimise, if not eliminate, it. The responses, which cut across different types of respondents, seem to reflect how much

corruption has impaired the social fabric. Corruption is a very serious social problem that ASEAN leaders and the community need to deal with effectively.

This ambivalence was likewise seen in the statement on the effective protection of human rights and minorities in the region. A total of 118 respondents thought this scenario would likely be achieved by 2025, but 90 had neutral opinions. Participants of the youth FGD thought this scenario would be achievable depending on the country's leaders. Those from the business sector expressed pessimism about the attainment of this goal.

The only statement for which most FGD participants expressed optimism was for the ease of the movement of goods, services, and businesses across ASEAN. Generally, the participants thought this scenario would be attainable by 2025. This reflects high confidence in terms of achieving the objectives of the AEC but not in terms of the ASCC objectives, which call for a more people-centred and inclusive ASEAN.

## **Aspirations and hopes for ASEAN**

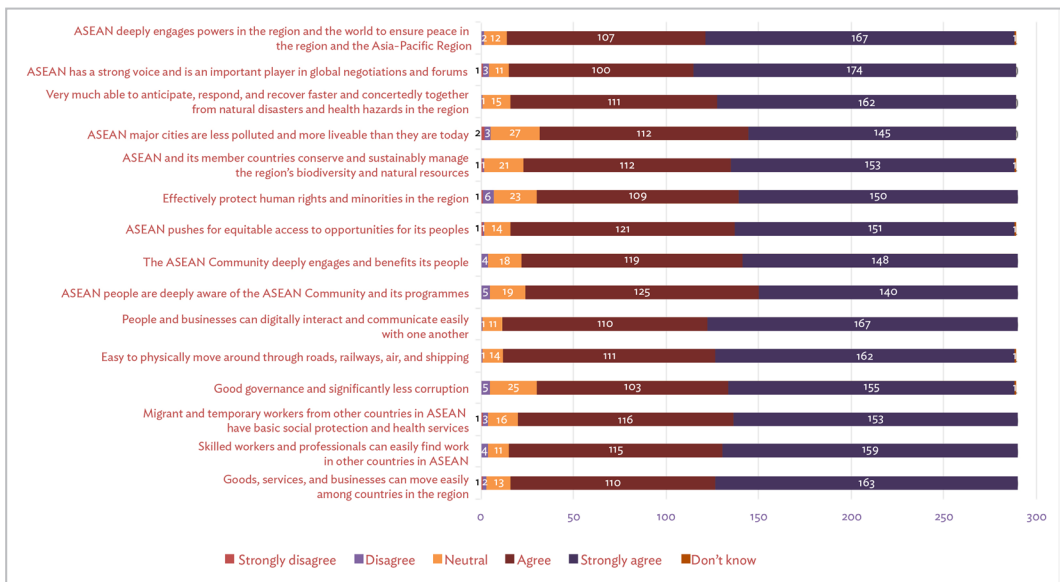
Using the same set of statements, survey respondents were asked to express their aspirations for ASEAN by 2025. The possible responses were 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neutral', 'strongly agree', and 'don't know'.

For all 15 statements, the majority answered 'agree' or 'strongly agree', with more survey respondents choosing the latter (Figure 16). Specific answers were obtained in the FGDs. Participants from all three FGDs aspired for economic growth for ASEAN. A participant from the business sector expressed hope that the ASEAN Member States would soon be able to rank among China, the Republic of Korea, and Japan and added that Singapore might be able to lead ASEAN in this regard. However, he added that a progressive ASEAN could only be realised if the member states consolidate their political power through the integration agenda. The participant said that to make this happen, member states needed to be able to play an active role in the global negotiations and forums that directly affect the ASEAN region. Another participant supported this view and said that through strategic alliances, competitive advantages could be attained when negotiating and trading with nations outside of ASEAN. Another participant related territorial disputes to this, stating that conflicts in geopolitical jurisdictions could be won through a unified stand and support for the concerned member state.

Similar views were expressed by the participants in the youth FGD. The concept of cooperation among ASEAN Member States, of treating each other like ‘brothers and sisters’ and having peace and unity in the region, entered the discussion as one of the aspirations for ASEAN. While cooperation among member states in addressing territorial and maritime disputes was not mentioned, unlike in the FGD with the business sector, the youth participants expressed hope that member states would help one another, especially in times of calamity and disaster. They also mentioned good governance, the absence of corruption, and member states benefiting from ASEAN’s programmes and projects as among their hopes for ASEAN.

Education was also mentioned during the business sector FGD. One participant proposed that ASEAN could be instrumental in building quality education through faculty and student exchanges and the training of professionals in member states.

**Figure 16: Aspirations for ASEAN**  
(number of respondents)



## The ASEAN Secretariat

The majority of the survey respondents agreed with the idea of upgrading the capabilities of the ASEAN Secretariat to meet its increasing challenges (Table 2).

In the FGD with the youth participants, however, none of the participants had heard of the ASEAN Secretariat. In the FGD with the mixed group of participants, all participants were aware of the ASEAN Secretariat, but its mandate and functions were not commonly known. One participant added that based on its name, she thought it provided ‘secretariat’ or administrative services to ASEAN, in particular during meetings and conferences. One added that the ASEAN Secretariat should promote itself by publishing specific position papers, similar to those published by the staff members of other international organisations.

**Table 2: Agreement with Upgrading the Capabilities of the ASEAN Secretariat to Meet Its Increasing Challenges**  
(number of respondents)

Affiliation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Government	0	1	2	34	53	90
Academe	0	0	1	23	37	61
Business	0	0	3	22	23	48
CSO/NGO	0	0	3	22	28	53
Others	1	0	0	13	23	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>289</b>
Age	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
15-30	1	1	4	30	37	73
31-49	0	0	2	43	69	108
50+	0	0	3	41	64	108
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>289</b>
Sex	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	1	1	5	60	83	150
Female	0	0	4	54	81	139
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>289</b>

## Summary and Conclusions

Both the survey respondents and the participants in the FGDs were not only aware of ASEAN but also moderately identified as ASEAN citizens (with the feeling of ASEAN identity growing with age and experience). There was recognition that the association had become a mechanism through which member states were able to discuss issues of common concern. Many also thought that membership of ASEAN had benefited the Philippines, albeit only moderately. This may be attributed to the limited information on ASEAN and its activities and accomplishments disseminated to the public through the media.

To remain relevant, ASEAN has to be more responsive to emerging and prevailing issues across the region, notably climate change and natural disasters, territorial and maritime disputes, trade and investment issues, agriculture and food security, and income disparity and social inequality.

By and large, there is hope that ASEAN, in a changing world, will find opportunities for mutual cooperation as it pursues a common vision for the ASEAN peoples. This rests in part on the ability of its member states to work harmoniously with one another and contribute actively towards the realisation of the ASEAN Community Vision. ASEAN should provide a strong leadership role to integrate its member states, which individually also face a host of development issues and challenges. As ASEAN's coordinating body for the implementation of its projects and activities, the ASEAN Secretariat also needs to strengthen its capabilities to provide effective technical support in meeting the association's goals and aspirations.

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