

# THE ASEAN COMMUNITY: ARE THE MALAYSIAN YOUTHS AWARE AND PREPARED?

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*Emulating the initial success of European regionalism, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has set its objective to forge closer integration among member countries and embarked upon the ambitious project of creating an ASEAN Community. The idea for a regional community identity was first discussed during 1997 Informal ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur. The ASEAN community idea is also part of the ASEAN 2020 Vision. The ASEAN's Nineteenth Bali Summit signifies an important milestone for ASEAN since all member countries agreed to form a formal regional Community by 2015. The joint statement of the 2003 Summit emphasised the commitment of the ten-member countries by declaring that, "an ASEAN Community shall be established comprising three pillars, namely political and security cooperation, economic cooperation, and social-cultural cooperation..." (Declaration on ASEAN Concord II 2003). In 2015, Malaysia, as the chair of the twenty-sixth ASEAN Summit took the lead by the formally declaring the formation of the regional community. The slogan, "One People, One Community, One Vision", exhibits ASEAN's confidence to build a sustained regional identity years to come.*

Nonetheless, it has been argued that ASEAN is an elitist and state-centric organization. It lacks public involvement in the process of regional identity formation. There is also a huge gap between the public and the elite in terms of decision-making process especially in regards to the formation of the ASEAN Community (Benny, 2015; Abdullah & Benny, 2013; Benny & Abdullah, 2011; Moorthy & Benny, 2012a, 2013; Collins, 2008; Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970; Hewstone, 1986). The European experience, for instance, has clearly shown that public opinion needs to be gauged and attended to for the success of the integration and for making effective decisions. Theories of regional integration have also shown that opinions and participation of the public determines the success of such efforts. Furthermore, given the current plurality of political, economic and social systems in the region, Moorthy & Benny (2012a) argue that it is difficult to determine public opinion through a direct voting mechanism similar to that of the European. Thus, a more feasible measure needs to be used effectively. There were also lack of comprehensive studies to measure people's understanding, opinion, attitude or even aspiration on the ASEAN Community. It cannot be denied that some works have been conducted on the public opinion on the ASEAN Community (Benny, 2015; Abdullah & Benny, 2013; Benny & Abdullah, 2011; Moorthy & Benny, 2012a, 2013). However, there tends to be a vacuum in terms of understanding the youth perception on the regional community building. This is not to mention the absence of studies about public aspiration of the three pillars of the ASEAN Community.

## THE STUDY

In the case of Malaysia, there were almost none that attempted to gauge the youth's opinion on the subject. Studies on the ASEAN community are numerous, yet these studies were conducted by government officials and academics using an elite decision making approach for assessing establishment processes

or social, political, and economic challenges of ASEAN (Acharya, 2003; Hew, Wah, & Lee, 2004; Hew, 2007; Guerrero, 2008), as well as the readiness of the business sector for the AEC (Abidin, Loh, & Aziz, 2012; Mugijayani & Kartika, 2012). Studies on public opinion about ASEAN are quite rare. There have only been a few studies so far involving public opinion about ASEAN (see Abdullah & Benny, 2013; Benny, 2014; Benny & Abdullah, 2011; Benny, Moorthy, Daud, & Othman, 2015a, 2015b; Benny, Rashila & Tham, 2014; Benny, Siew Yean, & Ramli, 2015; Moorthy & Benny, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Thompson & Thianthai, 2008), but those studies were based on the public opinion surveys conducted between 2009 and 2010 and did not discuss opinions, attitudes and aspirations for the ASEAN Community among Malaysian youths. Studies conducted by Benny (2015) investigate the awareness and perception of the relevancy of the ASEAN Community among the public in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Yet, his analysis was limited to the study on the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) aspect.

Therefore, this study is to fill those gaps. It is generally aimed to examine Malaysian youths' opinion especially on their understanding, attitude, awareness, and preparedness to the establishment of ASEAN Community. The youths – those who are in the age between 15 and 40 years old – are a very important segment of people not only in Malaysia but also the whole ASEAN region. It is expected that population of youths in Southeast Asia will increase to 55% by 2020.

This study differs from the previous studies in three ways. Firstly, none of past studies focused on the opinion and attitude of Malaysian youths on the ASEAN Community. Secondly, the object of this study is different since it involves data from six different zones in Malaysia– the central, northern, south, Eastern part of peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak. Thirdly, the study involves a big number of respondents, with about 5,032 Malaysian youth being interviewed.

## RESEARCH VARIABLES AND INDICATORS

Research variables used in this study are organized based on the three specific research objectives. In order to achieve the first research objective - to examine the extent which the Malaysian Youths know and understand about the ASEAN Community, we measure: firstly, the objective awareness of the ASEAN Community (four open-ended indicators); and secondly, the subjective awareness (measured with 6 six-scale Likert indicators). Most subjective awareness indicators were adapted from the public opinion study conducted by Abdullah, Benny, and Omar Din (2010) and Moorthy and Benny (2012b).

The study also attempts to investigate attitudes among the youth towards ASEAN Community. This objective is measured by using 17 six-scale Likert indicators that consist of four indicators of a perceived relevancy, six indicators of perceived benefits and seven indicators of supports. Details of the questions are presented in the appendix.

Finally, this study assessed the readiness among Malaysian youth for the ASEAN Community. This variable is analysed by using five six-scale Likert indicators that was developed together by the research team through a series of focus group discussion (FGD).

## METHODOLOGY

### Survey Design

This study used a survey method in collecting responses based on the three major objectives highlighted earlier. A set of structured self-administered questionnaire in Bahasa Malaysia was used. The questions were tested during two pilot tests. Modifications were made after the pilot tests. Each pilot study involved 20 respondents. The pilot studies were conducted in Bangi, Selangor (representing urban area) and Changloon, Kedah (representing rural area).

The survey sampling utilized multi-stage purposive sampling method in twelve areas (six each in urban and rural areas) in six zones in Malaysia. The stages of sampling are as follows. Firstly, the survey was divided into six zones, where the Peninsular Malaysia was divided into four zones – north, south, central, and east. Sabah and Sarawak were the remaining zones. Secondly, each zone was further divided into two areas – rural and urban. The study decided to select 60% respondents from urban area and 40% respondents from rural area: Kota Bahru and Kuala Krai in Kelantan representing the peninsular's eastern zone; Johor Bahru and Pontian in Johor representing the southern zone; and Alor Setar and Kodiang in Kedah representing the northern zone; Bangi and Kuala Selangor in Selangor representing the central region of the Peninsula. In Sabah and Sarawak, Kota Kinabalu, Keningau, Kuching and Serian represented the two states respectively. Finally, in each of the twelve areas, the respondents were selected by quota sampling based on major ethnic groups that represents the Malaysian population (48% Malay, 24% Chinese, 12% Indian, 16% Sabahan and Sarawakian indigenous groups).

The survey was conducted between August and September 2015. The study targeted 500 respondents in each urban area and 330 in each rural area. Enumerators from each area with the assistance of the local Youth and Sport office were assigned to collect and compile the data from the survey. The enumerators directly met and interviewed respondents each areas or zones assigned to them.

### Methods for Analysis

The study used univariate statistics procedures to obtain a descriptive statistical profile of the respondents. Whenever relevant, data were analysed using the univariate analysis statistics such as frequency, percentage, and mean. To simplify the analysis, the frequency distributions of 6-point scales were regrouped into three response categories – tend to agree, tend to disagree and undecided. Thus, those who disagree and completely disagree were combined into one group of “disagree”; those who agree and completely agree were combined into one group of “agree”; and those who somewhat agree and somewhat disagree were combined into one group of “undecided.”

## RESPONDENT PROFILES

The respondents involved in the study consisted of 5,032 Malaysian youths. About 3,009 respondents (59.8%) live in urban area while 2,032 respondents (40.2%) in rural area. In term of gender, 54.6% of respondents were male while 45.4% were female. In urban areas, 55.1% respondents were male and 44.9% were female. In rural area, male respondents made up 53.8% of respondents, while the remaining 46.2% were female.

In terms of age group, 24.8% of respondents came from 15-18 years old group, 20.8% in the 19-24 years old group, 16.8% were in 25-30 years old group and 37.6% were from 31-40 years old group. In urban area, 24.6% of respondents were from 15-18 years old group, 22.1% were from 19-24 years old group, 16.0% were from 25-30 years old group and 37.3% were from 31-40 years old group. In rural area, 25.0% of respondents were from 15-18 years old group, 18.8% were from 19-24 years old group, 17.9% were from 25-30 years old group and 38.3% were from 31-40 years old group.

For the type of occupation, 22.7% of respondents worked in the government sector, 25.3% in private sector, 23.0% doing business, 9.4% students, 5.2% university or college students, 12.9% housewives, 0.8% others and, 3.3% were not working. In urban area, 21.6% of respondents worked in the government sector, 24.8% in private sector, 23.4% doing business, 7.6% students, 3.5% university or college students, 15.0% housewives, 0.8% others, and 3.2% were not working. In rural area, 24.2% of respondents worked in the government sector, 19.8% in private sector, 22.3% doing business, 12.2% students, 7.7% university or college students, 9.8% housewives, 0.7% others and, 3.3% were not working.

The majority of respondents were SPM/SPMV school leavers; 20% has either Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), Sijil Tinggil Agama Malaysia (STAM), other certificates or diplomas; 13.5% have bachelor degree, 3.6% master degree and 0.8% doctoral degree. However, there are also 22.6% of the respondent hold Sijil Rendah Pelajaran Malaysia (SRP) or Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) certificate; 1.2% holds on Ujian Penilaian Sekolah rendah (UPSR); and 1.6% does not have formal education.

**Table 1: Respondents Profile**

Demography		Urban Areas (n = 3,009)	Rural Areas (n = 2,023)	Overall (n=5,032)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	44.9%	46.2%	45.4%
	Female	55.1%	53.8%	54.6%
<b>Age group</b>	15 – 18 tahun	24.6%	25.0%	24.8%
	19 – 24 tahun	22.1%	18.8%	20.8%
	25 – 30 tahun	16.0%	17.9%	16.8%
	31 – 40 tahun	37.2%	38.3%	37.7%
<b>Occupational background</b>	Government sector	21.6%	24.2%	22.7%
	Private sector	28.8%	19.8%	25.3%
	Student	11.1%	19.9%	14.7%
	Doing business	23.4%	22.3%	23.0%
	No job	3.2%	3.3%	3.3%
	Others	11.90%	10.50%	11.00%
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Malay	46.8%	48.8%	47.6%
	Chinese	24.5%	21.2%	23.1%
	Indian	12.7%	10.7%	11.9%
	Sabahan / Sarawakian	14.6%	17.0%	15.6%
	Others	1.4%	2.4%	1.8%
<b>Religion</b>	Islam	56.3%	57.0%	56.6%
	Buddhism	21.1%	16.1%	19.1%
	Hinduism	11.3%	9.2%	10.5%
	Christianity	11.1%	17.7%	13.8%
	Others	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%

In terms of ethnicity, 47.6% respondents were Malay, 23.1% were Chinese, 11.9% Indian, 10.9% Sabahan, 4.7% Sarawakian, and 1.8% from other ethnicities. In the cities, 46.8% respondents were Malay, 24.5% were Chinese, 12.7% Indian, 10.2% Sabahan, 4.4% Sarawakian, and 1.4% from other ethnicities. In the rural, 48.8% respondents were Malay, 21.2% Chinese, 10.7% Indian, 11.8% Sabahan, 5.2% Sarawakian, and 2.4% other ethnicities.

The majority of respondents (56.6%) were Muslims, 19.1% Buddhists, 10.5% Hindus, 13.8% Christians, and 0.1% others. In the urban areas, 56.3% of respondents were Muslims, 21.1% Buddhists, 16.3% Hindus, 11.1% Christians, and 0.2% others. In the rural areas, 57.0% of respondents were Muslims, 16.1% Buddhists, 9.2% and Hindus, 17.7% Christians.

## AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE ASEAN COMMUNITY

### Subjective Awareness of the ASEAN Community

To measure the subjective awareness of the Malaysian youths on the ASEAN Community, four (4) six-scale Likert indicators were posed to respondents (see Table 2). The study found that majority respondents (59.8% in general, 59.9% in urban areas, 59.7% in rural areas) claimed that they have heard or read about ASEAN Community. Only 7.0% (7.2% in urban and 6.6% in rural areas) was not aware of the ASEAN Community. However, nearly one-third of them (33.2% in general, 33.0% in urban, and 33.7% in rural areas) was not sure whether they have heard or read about the regional integration initiative.

The study also found that only slightly more than one-fourth of the respondents (27.4% in general, 27.6% in urban areas and 27.2% in rural areas) were aware of the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC). The largest portion of respondents (49.6% in general, 46.5% in urban areas and 54.3% in rural areas) was not sure if they are aware of the APSC.

**Table 2: Awareness of the ASEAN Community**

Demography		Urban Areas (n = 3,009)	Rural Areas (n = 2,023)	Overall (n=5,032)
<b>I have heard or read about the ASEAN Community</b>	Tend to agree	59.9%	59.7%	59.8%
	Tend to disagree	7.2%	6.6%	7.0%
	Not sure	33.0%	33.7%	33.2%
<b>I have heard or read about ASEAN Political Security Community</b>	Tend to agree	27.60%	27.20%	27.40%
	Tend to disagree	25.90%	18.50%	22.90%
	Not sure	46.60%	54.40%	49.70%
<b>I have heard or read about the ASEAN Economic Community</b>	Tend to agree	30.9%	27.2%	29.4%
	Tend to disagree	21.5%	17.8%	20.1%
	Not sure	47.6%	55.0%	50.5%
<b>I have heard or read about the ASEAN Socio- Cultural Community</b>	Tend to agree	22.6%	18.3%	20.9%
	Tend to disagree	48.4%	54.6%	50.9%
	Not sure	13.6%	11.8%	12.9%

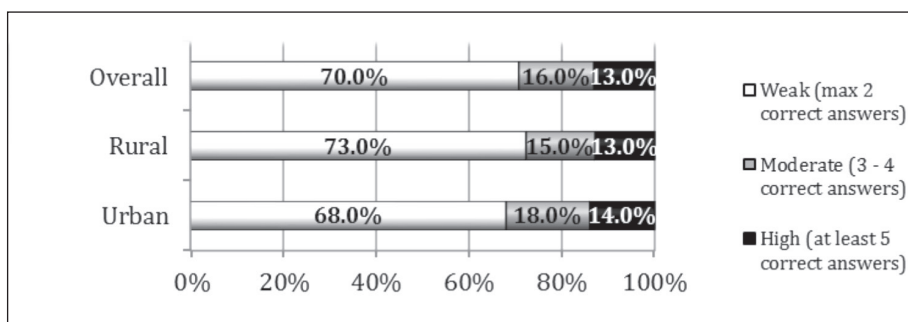
Similar findings can also be found in the exposure of respondents the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The study found that only less than a third of respondents (29.4% in general, 30.9% in urban areas and 27.2% in rural areas) were aware of the AEC. The majority of respondents (50.6% in general, 47.6% in urban areas and 55.0% in rural areas) were not sure if they are aware of the AEC.

For the awareness of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), the study found that less than a quarter of respondents (20.9% in general, 22.6% in urban areas and 18.3% in rural areas) were fully aware. The majority of respondents (50.9% in general, 48.4% in urban areas and 54.6% in rural areas) were not sure if they are aware of the AEC. Among the three pillars of the ASEAN Community, it seems that the unawareness of ASCC is the weakest among the Malaysian youth.

## Objective Knowledge Pertaining to the ASEAN Community

To measure the objective knowledge of the Malaysian youths on the ASEAN Community, six open-ended objective questions were asked. The level of awareness was measured by the number of correct answers to the objective questions. Thus, if a respondent could not correctly answer the question or did not answer a question, the study categorized them as unaware respondents. The answers and level of awareness are displayed in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Objective Knowledge of the ASEAN Community**



The extent of objective knowledge based on right answers for objective questions

In addition, the study assessed the extent of objective knowledge by analysing the number of correct answers for the six objective questions. The study found that majority respondents (70% in general, 68% in urban and, 73% in rural areas) were weak in their objective knowledge that they could only answer maximum two correct answers. Only 16% among the Malaysian youths (18% in urban and 15% in rural areas) were able to answer three to four questions correctly, thus can be categorized having moderate knowledge. Finally, there were only 13% of the Malaysian youths (14% in urban and 13% in rural areas) were able to answer five to six questions correctly.

## ATTITUDE TOWARDS ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ASEAN COMMUNITY

In this study, attitude of the Malaysian Youth towards the establishment of ASEAN Community is measured using three variables – perceived relevancy, perceived benefits and support for the ASEAN Community.

### Perceived Relevancy of the ASEAN Community

The first variable of attitude – perceived relevancy – is measured using four (4) six-scale Likert indicators that assess the relevancy of ASEAN Community as well as each of its three pillars. In general, the majority of respondents perceived the ASEAN Community as relevant for them. However, the numbers of those who were not sure were quite significant.



**Table 3: Perceived Relevancy of the ASEAN Community**

Demography		Urban Areas (n = 3,009)	Rural Areas (n = 2,023)	Overall (n=5,032)
<b>The relevance of the ASEAN Community for Malaysia.</b>	Tend to agree	47.6%	46.6%	47.2%
	Tend to disagree	7.7%	6.3%	7.2%
	Not sure	44.8%	47.1%	45.7%
<b>The relevance of the ASEAN Community in ensuring national security.</b>	Tend to agree	52.5%	48.9%	51.1%
	Tend to disagree	6.9%	5.1%	6.2%
	Not sure	40.5%	46.1%	42.8%
<b>The relevance of the ASEAN Community for supporting sustainable economic growth.</b>	Tend to agree	50.3%	46.5%	48.8%
	Tend to disagree	6.0%	5.1%	5.6%
	Not sure	43.6%	48.4%	45.5%
<b>The relevance of the ASEAN Community for social and cultural development.</b>	Tend to agree	47.8%	45.0%	46.8%
	Tend to disagree	7.2%	5.7%	6.6%
	Not sure	45.0%	49.2%	46.6%

The findings of the study are as follows. Firstly, the majority of respondents (47.2% in general, 47.6% in urban and 46.6% in rural areas) agreed that the ASEAN Community is relevant to Malaysia. Only 7.2% of respondents (7.7% in urban and 6.3% in rural areas) thought that it is not relevant. However, those who were unsure to the ASEAN Community's relevancy (45.6% in general, 44.7% in urban and 47.1% in rural areas) formed almost the same percentage with those who thought it as relevant.

Secondly, more than half of respondents (51.1% in general, 52.5% in urban and 48.9% in rural areas) agreed that the ASEAN Community is relevant to ensure Malaysia's security. Only 6.2% of the respondents (6.9% in urban and 5.1% in rural areas) thought that it was not. However, there were quite substantial number of those who unsure of this relevancy (42.7% in general, 40.6% in urban, and 46.0% in rural areas).

Thirdly, nearly half of respondents (48.8% in general, 50.3% in urban, and 46.5% in rural areas) agreed that the ASEAN Community could support sustainable economic growth for Malaysia. Only 5.6% of the respondents (6.0% in urban and 5.1% in rural areas) thought that it was not. However, there were quite substantial number of those who unsure of this relevancy (45.6% in general, 43.7% in urban, and 48.4% in rural areas).

Finally, almost the majority of respondents (46.8% in general, 47.8% in urban, and 45.0% in rural areas) agreed that the ASEAN Community could contribute to the Malaysia's social and cultural development. Only 6.6% of the respondents (7.2% in urban and 5.7% in rural areas) thought that it was not relevant. However, there is also quite a big percentage that was not sure with the statement (46.6% in general, 45.0% in urban and 49.3% in rural areas).

### **Perceived Benefits of the ASEAN Community**

The second variable of attitude – perceived benefits – is measured by using six (6) six-scale Likert indicators that assess the benefits of ASEAN Community. In general, respondents were in favour of the ASEAN Community. They perceived that the community is beneficial to the country. However, the number of those who were not sure was also quite significant and in some indicators outnumbered those who perceived the benefit of ASEAN Community.

**Table 4: Perceived Benefits of the ASEAN Community**

Demography		Urban Areas (n = 3,009)	Rural Areas (n = 2,023)	Overall (n=5,032)
<b>Benefits of the ASEAN Community for the economic growth.</b>	Tend to agree	35.30%	41.60%	37.80%
	Tend to disagree	9.80%	9.10%	9.50%
	Not sure	46.80%	44.20%	45.70%
<b>Benefits of the ASEAN Community for strengthening business.</b>	Tend to agree	46.4%	46.3%	46.4%
	Tend to disagree	7.3%	5.0%	6.4%
	Not sure	46.3%	48.7%	47.2%
<b>Benefits of the ASEAN Community for a better security</b>	Tend to agree	49.4%	46.8%	48.3%
	Tend to disagree	7.2%	5.9%	6.7%
	Not sure	43.3%	47.4%	44.9%
<b>Benefits of the ASEAN Community for peace in the region.</b>	Tend to agree	48.8%	47.2%	48.1%
	Tend to disagree	6.4%	5.3%	5.9%
	Not sure	44.8%	47.7%	45.9%
<b>Benefits of ASEAN Community for conserving cultures in the region.</b>	Tend to agree	48.6%	48.0%	48.3%
	Tend to disagree	6.6%	5.9%	6.3%
	Not sure	44.7%	46.1%	45.3%
<b>I have seen benefits of ASEAN Community from the recent economic growth in Malaysia.</b>	Tend to agree	47.7%	45.3%	46.8%
	Tend to disagree	6.6%	5.9%	6.3%
	Not sure	45.6%	48.8%	46.9%

Firstly, the study found that about 37.8% respondents (35.3% in urban and 41.6% in rural areas) agreed that the ASEAN Community could benefit the economic growth in Malaysia. These figures are almost four times higher than those who thought that it would not be beneficial (9.5% in general, 9.8% in urban and 9.1% in rural areas). However, the majority of the respondents were unsure of this benefit (52.7% in general, 54.9% in urban and 49.3% in rural areas).

Secondly, the study also found that about 46.8% respondents (47.7% in urban and 45.3% in rural areas) agreed that the ASEAN Community could strengthen businesses in Malaysia, it. These figures are more than seven times higher than those who disagree with the statement (5.9% in general, 6.6% in urban and 5.9% in rural areas). However, respondents who were unsure of the benefit (46.9% in general, 45.7% in urban and 48.8% in rural areas) outnumbered those who agreed it.

Thirdly, it is found that about 46.5% respondents (46.4% in urban, and 46.3% in rural areas) agreed that about the ASEAN Community provides better security for Malaysia,. These figures are seven times more than those who thought that it would not (6.4% in general, 7.3% in urban and 5.0% in rural areas). However, there are more respondents who were unsure of the benefit (47.2% in general, 46.3% in urban and 48.7% in rural areas).

Fourthly, about 48.3% respondents (49.4% in urban and 46.8% in rural areas) agreed that the ASEAN Community could create a more peaceful region. These figures are seven times more than those who disagree (6.4% in general, 7.3% in urban and 5.0% in rural areas). However, there are more respondents who were unsure (45.0% in general, 47.3% in urban and 43.4% in rural areas).



Fifthly, 48.1% respondents (48.8% in urban and 47.2% in rural areas) agreed that with the ASEAN Community could be an avenue to conserve cultures in the region. These figures superseded significantly with those who disagree (5.9% in general, 6.4% in urban and 5.3% in rural areas). However, numbers of respondents were unsure of this benefit are also quite substantial (46.0% in general, 47.5% in urban, and 44.8% in rural areas).

Finally, about 41.1% respondents (41.9% in urban and 39.8% in rural areas) perceived that they had seen the benefits of the ASEAN Community from the recent economic growth in Malaysia. The study found that those who agreed to this statement were more than four times of those who disagree (10.0% in general, 10.4% in urban and 9.5% in rural areas). However, numbers of respondents were unsure of this benefit outnumbered (48.9% in general, 50.7% in urban, and 47.7% in rural areas) those who agreed of the benefits.

### Support for Establishment of the ASEAN Community

The third variable of attitude –supports for the establishment of the ASEAN Community– is measured by using seven (7) six-scale Likert indicators. In general, respondents showed their supports for the ASEAN Community and its major pillars. However, many of them were not sure whether to support the regional integration initiatives. In many cases, the percentage that was not sure about the statement is quite high.

**Table 5: Support for the ASEAN Community**

Demography		Urban Areas (n = 3,009)	Rural Areas (n = 2,023)	Overall (n=5,032)
<b>I support the establishment of ASEAN Community.</b>	Tend to agree	14.4%	12.2%	13.5%
	Tend to disagree	7.4%	13.4%	9.8%
	Not sure	43.2%	42.1%	42.8%
<b>I support the free trade aspect of the ASEAN Economic Community.</b>	Tend to agree	39.3%	36.7%	38.3%
	Tend to disagree	11.2%	16.0%	13.1%
	Not sure	49.5%	47.4%	48.7%
<b>I support the free movement of skilled professional workers in ASEAN</b>	Tend to agree	39.0%	33.7%	36.9%
	Tend to disagree	12.1%	18.8%	14.8%
	Not sure	48.9%	47.6%	48.3%
<b>I support the ASEAN principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states.</b>	Tend to agree	41.0%	37.6%	39.7%
	Tend to disagree	12.8%	16.0%	14.1%
	Not sure	46.3%	46.4%	46.3%
<b>I support that ASEAN should be more active in managing conflicts among member countries.</b>	Tend to agree	46.1%	43.3%	44.9%
	Tend to disagree	7.9%	14.4%	10.5%
	Not sure	46.1%	42.5%	44.6%

<b>I support the conservation of ASEAN cultural heritage</b>	Tend to agree	52.0%	48.7%	50.7%
	Tend to disagree	7.7%	12.4%	9.5%
	Not sure	40.3%	39.1%	39.8%
<b>I support the promotion of ASEAN cultural heritage</b>	Tend to agree	49.9%	47.8%	49.0%
	Tend to disagree	8.2%	12.4%	9.9%
	Not sure	42.0%	39.9%	41.1%

Firstly, the establishment of ASEAN Community was supported by about 47.5% respondents (49.4% in urban and 44.7% in rural areas). However, the numbers of respondents who were not sure about their support are also quite substantial (42.7% in general, 43.2% in urban and 41.9% in rural areas). Those who did not were 9.8% in general; 7.4% in urban and 13.4% in rural areas.

Secondly, the majority of respondents were not sure whether they should support the free trade component of the AEC (48.6% in general, 49.5% in urban and 47.3% in rural areas). Only 38.3% respondents (39.3% in urban and 36.7% in rural areas) showed their support for the free trade. These figures are almost three times higher than those who did not support (13.1% in general, 11.2% in urban and 16.0% in rural areas).

Thirdly, there are a significant percentage of respondents who were unsure about the free movement of skilled professional workers in the AEC (48.3% in general, 47.5% in urban and 48.9% in rural areas). Only 36.9% respondents (39.0% in urban and 33.7% in rural areas) showed their support. These figures are more than twice of those who did not support (14.8% in general, 12.1% in urban and 18.8% in rural areas).

Fourthly, the majority of respondents were not sure about their support on the ASEAN principle of non-interference in internal affairs of member states (46.2% in general, 46.2% in urban and 46.4% in rural areas). The concept was supported by only 39.7% respondents (41.0% in urban and 37.6% in rural areas). Only 14.1% in general, 16.0% in urban, and 12.8% in rural areas, did not support.

Fifthly, there is almost an equal percentage for those who were agreed with those who were with no opinion on the role of ASEAN to be more active in managing conflict between member states. Respondents who agreed with the statement were 44.9% in general (46.1% in urban, and 43.3% in rural areas), while those who did not have an opinion were 44.6% in general (46.0% in urban and 42.3% in rural areas). Only 10.5% in general (7.9% in urban and 14.4% in rural areas) did not support.

Sixthly, the role of ASEAN to conserve of cultural heritage was supported by the majority of respondents (50.7% in general, 52.0% in urban, and 48.7% in rural areas). These figures are more than five times of those who did not support (9.5% in general, 7.7% in urban and 12.4% in rural areas). However, many of respondents were also not sure about their support (39.8% in general, 40.3% in urban and 38.9% in rural areas).

Finally, the majority of respondents supported the promotion of ASEAN cultural heritage (49.0% in general, 49.9% in urban and 47.8% in rural areas). However, the number of respondents who were not sure about their support (41.1% in general, 41.9% in urban and 39.8% in rural areas) are also quite considerable. These figures are almost five times of those who did not support (9.9% in general, 8.2% in urban, and 12.4% in rural areas).

## MALAYSIAN YOUTH PREPAREDNESS

The preparedness of the Malaysian Youths on the challenges posed by the establishment of the ASEAN Community was assessed using five (5) six-scale Likert indicators. The analysis of their answers is displayed in Figure 7. In general, it is found that the respondents were not optimistic regarding their preparedness. Approximately only one-third of respondents claimed that they are prepared or have made sufficient preparation. The largest group of respondents in fact were not sure of their preparedness.

**Table 6: Preparedness for the ASEAN Community**

Demography		Urban Areas (n = 3,009)	Rural Areas (n = 2,023)	Overall (n=5,032)
<b>I am prepared to face the ASEAN Community.</b>	Tend to agree	14.4%	12.2%	13.5%
	Tend to disagree	7.4%	13.4%	9.8%
	Not sure	43.2%	42.1%	42.8%
<b>I am prepared to compete with other ASEAN citizens for professional jobs.</b>	Tend to agree	39.3%	36.7%	38.3%
	Tend to disagree	11.2%	16.0%	13.1%
	Not sure	49.5%	47.4%	48.7%
<b>I have sufficient skills to work / do business in other ASEAN member states.</b>	Tend to agree	39.0%	33.7%	36.9%
	Tend to disagree	12.1%	18.8%	14.8%
	Not sure	48.9%	47.6%	48.3%
<b>I have made sufficient preparation to face challenges from ASEAN Economic Community.</b>	Tend to agree	41.0%	37.6%	39.7%
	Tend to disagree	12.8%	16.0%	14.1%
	Not sure	46.3%	46.4%	46.3%
<b>I have the advantage communicating in English.</b>	Tend to agree	46.1%	43.3%	44.9%
	Tend to disagree	7.9%	14.4%	10.5%
	Not sure	46.1%	42.5%	44.6%

Firstly, the majority of respondents were not sure whether they were prepared for the challenges posed by the formation of the ASEAN Community (52.2% in general, 53.7% in urban and 49.9% in rural areas). The study found that there were only less than one-third of respondents confirmed that they had already prepared for the ASEAN Community, while about 15.3% respondents (13.8% in urban, and 17.6% in rural areas) contended that they were not prepared for it.

Secondly, majority of respondents were also not sure whether they were prepared to compete with other ASEAN citizens for professional jobs, (54.6% in general; 56.7% in urban and 51.3% in rural areas). The study found that there were only 26.7% respondents (16.9% in urban, and 21.2% in rural areas) confirmed that they had already prepared to compete, while the remaining 18.7% respondents (16.9% in urban, and 21.2% in rural areas) contended that they were not prepared.

Thirdly, the majority of respondents were not sure whether they have sufficient skills to work or do business in other ASEAN countries, (52.4% in general, 54.6% in urban, and 49.4% in rural areas). There were only 27.8% respondents (27.3% in urban, and 28.4% in rural areas) confirmed that they had already prepared to compete, while about 19.8% respondents (18.1% in urban, and 22.2% in rural areas) contended that they were not prepared for it.

Fourthly, the study found that majority of respondents was not sure whether they had made sufficient preparation to face challenges with ASEAN Economic Community (51.6% in general, 53.4% in urban and 49.0% in rural areas). Nearly only one-quarter of respondents (33.9% in general, 33.5% in urban, and 34.3% in rural areas) confirmed that they had already made sufficient preparation to compete, while about 14.5% respondents (13.1% in urban, and 16.7% in rural areas) contended that they did not.

Finally, the study has found that most Malaysian youths were not confident enough with their English communicating skill. Almost half the respondents were not sure whether they have the advantage in English communicate compared to those in the region (48.5% in general, 49.4% in urban and 47.3% in rural areas). It also found that nearly one-quarter of respondents (35.2% in general, 36.2% in urban and 33.6% in rural areas) agreed of this communication advantages, while 16.3% respondents (14.4% in urban, and 19.1% in rural areas) disagreed to it.

## ANALYSIS

Based on the data presented earlier, it can be argued that Malaysian youths exhibit weak awareness on the ASEAN Community and understanding on its three pillars. The majority of them did not have clear picture of the ASEAN regionalism initiatives. To test further whether the hypothesis is correct or not, the study analysed the data using Pearson correlation study by asserting the relations between the awareness, attitude and preparedness (refer to Table 8). The tests show the existence of a significant positive but rather weak relationship existed between the awareness of the ASEAN Community and perceived relevancy, perceived benefits, support, and preparedness. Thus, the study implies:

- The more Malaysian youths aware about the ASEAN Community, the more they perceive the relevancy of the regionalism.
- The more Malaysian youths aware about ASEAN Community, the more they see benefits from the regionalism.
- The more Malaysian youths aware about ASEAN Community, the more they show their support for the regionalism.
- The more Malaysian youths aware about the ASEAN Community, the more they prepare for the regionalism initiative and its three pillars.

**Table 1: Pearson's Correlation Test Result of Awareness and Attitude and Preparedness**

Dependent variables:		Correlation with Awareness of the ASEAN Community		
		Sig.(2 tailed)	Pearson Correlation	Conclusion
<b>(1) Perceived Relevancy</b>				
i.	The relevance of the establishment of ASEAN Community for Malaysia.	0.000	0.325	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
ii.	The relevance of the ASEAN Community for ensuring security in Malaysia.	0.000	0.330	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
iii.	The relevance of the ASEAN Community for supporting sustainable economic growth in Malaysia.	0.000	0.324	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.

iv.	The relevance of the ASEAN Community for social and cultural development in Malaysia.	0.000	0.299	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
<b>(2) Perceived Benefits</b>				
i.	The benefits of ASEAN Community for Malaysia's economic growth.	0.000	0.346	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
ii.	The benefits of the ASEAN Community in strengthening Malaysian businesses.	0.000	0.292	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
iii.	The benefits of the ASEAN Community for a better security in Malaysia.	0.000	0.306	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
iv.	The benefits of the ASEAN Community for peace in the region.	0.000	0.332	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
v.	The benefits of the ASEAN Community for conserving cultures in the region.	0.000	0.344	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
vi.	I have seen the benefit of ASEAN Community from the recent economic growth in Malaysia.	0.000	0.271	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
<b>(3) Support</b>				
i.	I support the establishment of ASEAN Community.	0.000	0.355	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
ii.	I support the free trade aspect of the ASEAN Economic Community.	0.000	0.368	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
iii.	I support the free movement of skilled professional workers in ASEAN.	0.000	0.327	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
iv.	I support the ASEAN principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states.	0.000	0.276	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
v.	I support that ASEAN should be more active in managing conflicts among member countries.	0.000	0.325	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
vi.	I support the conservation of ASEAN cultural heritage	0.000	0.334	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
vii.	I support the promotion of ASEAN cultural heritage	0.000	0.340	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.

<b>(4) Preparedness</b>				
i.	I am prepared to face the ASEAN Community.	0.000	0.340	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
ii.	I am prepared to compete with other ASEAN citizens in professional jobs.	0.000	0.298	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
iii.	I have sufficient skills to work / do business in other ASEAN member states.	0.000	0.289	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
iv.	I have made sufficient preparation to face challenges from ASEAN Economic Community.	0.000	0.302	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
v.	I have the ability communicating in English.	0.000	0.302	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.

The study also found that the awareness, attitude, and preparedness are generally higher in urban compared to that of rural areas. Having found that the level of objective awareness of respondents in urban is higher than that in rural areas, we conclude that the differences in perceived relevance, support, and preparedness may be attributable to the difference level of awareness between the Malaysian youths in urban and rural areas.

## CONCLUSION

The Malaysian youths generally had a good impression of and thought on the ASEAN Community. They perceived that the regional community concept is highly relevant, beneficial, and thus support for further integration. However, there were a high percentage of those who did have any opinions on the subject. The analysis also shows that there is significant relationship between awareness and perceived relevancy, benefits, and supports. Henceforth, the study concludes that the Malaysian youths are not ready to face with the challenges posed by the formation of the ASEAN Community. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the government especially for the responsible ministry to undertake all necessary strategies to ensure Malaysian youths' readiness and preparedness to the regional community building. More inclusive programs for the youth need to be planned to expose them with the challenges and opportunities of the ASEAN Community. Information should be continuously relayed through various means of information services, such as electronic and social media, as part of socializing process of the ASEAN Community among the Malaysian youths.



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