

## **Landscape of HEI and Quality Challenges in AEC 2015**

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### **Abstract**

AEC (ASEAN Economic Community) 2015 envisaged the goal of regional economic integration of the 10 ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nation) economies by December 2013, under 4 main pillars of which it claims to have achieved 73.6% of its targets. MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) and ADB (Asian Development Bank) statistics, researches and reports painted a different picture of the awareness, degree of readiness, and its socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural in the ASEAN members. This paper aims to look at the overall AEC 2015 country's readiness; potential socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural factors can affect education and quality in the HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) in the wake of AEC 2015. While recognizing that many international bodies have covered the issues, challenges and made recommendations at the macro levels for national actions and development, this paper also looks at the micro level of the institutional internal and external processes and people that can contribute to laying stronger foundations at the forefronts of 1) for students' values and conscientious reforms; 2) institutional values and conscientious reforms; 3) the institutional balancing of its sustainability through planning and quality management; and 4) Societal Responsibility. These are discussed from the "moral and values" aspects of the mitigations of the socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural issues that each individual HEI can contribute to building the "character and moral foundations future generation of leaders through the HEI processes and people".

**Keywords:** ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) 2015, socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural readiness, education and quality in HEI, character and moral foundations of HEI processes and people,

## **1. Introduction**

ASEAN was established in 1967, and the ASEAN leaders established the ASEAN Economic Blueprint at the 13th ASEAN Summit on 20 November 2007 in Singapore to serve as a coherent master plan guiding the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community 2015 (ASEAN, 2009). The AEC 2015 envisages: (a) a single market and production base, (b) a highly competitive economic region, (c) a region of equitable economic development, and (d) a region fully integrated into the global economy (ASEAN 2009).

Basically, the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint (ASEAN, 2011), an ASEAN single market and production base is built on five pillars:

- (i) free flow of goods,
- (ii) free flow of services,
- (iii) free flow of investment,
- (iv) free flow of capital, and
- (v) free flow of skilled labor.

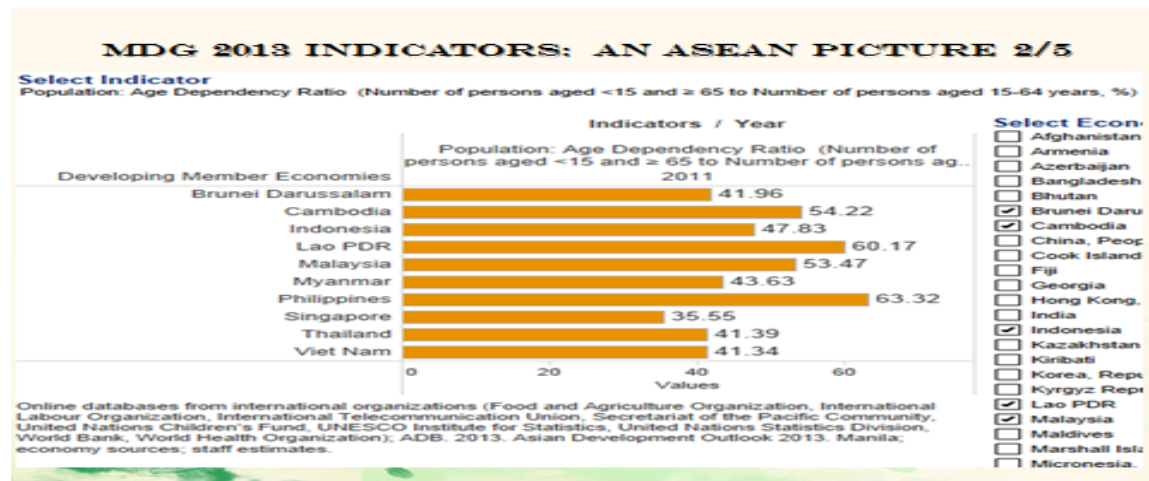
ASEAN's efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were declared by its ASEAN leader in the Joint Declaration on the Attainment of the MDGs in ASEAN in March 2009 at the 14<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit held in Thailand. This resulted in a Roadmap that would serve as a framework for collective action among ASEAN Member States to achieve the MDGs focusing on five key areas, namely advocacy and linkages, knowledge, resources, expertise and regional cooperation and regional public goods. Article 1 (a) specifically stated "to alleviate poverty and narrow the development gap within ASEAN..." and (c) "to develop human resources through closer cooperation in education and life long learning". Specific ASEAN sectorial bodies were set up to deal with Goal 1 (Poverty) by SOMRDPE (Senior Officials Meeting on Development and Poverty Eradication) and SOM-AMAF (Senior Officials Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry) and Goal 2 (Education) by SOM-ED (Senior Officials Meeting on Education). It appears that the ASEAN Roadmap for the attainment of the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) was only finalized as of 5<sup>th</sup> August 2011, which is just touching the tip of the ice-berg in the AEC 2015 in conjunction with the attainment of the MDG and it is just the beginning of many of its challenges in (A) Advocacy and Linkages; (B) Knowledge; (C) Resources; (D) Expertise; and (E) Regional Cooperation and Regional Public Goods.

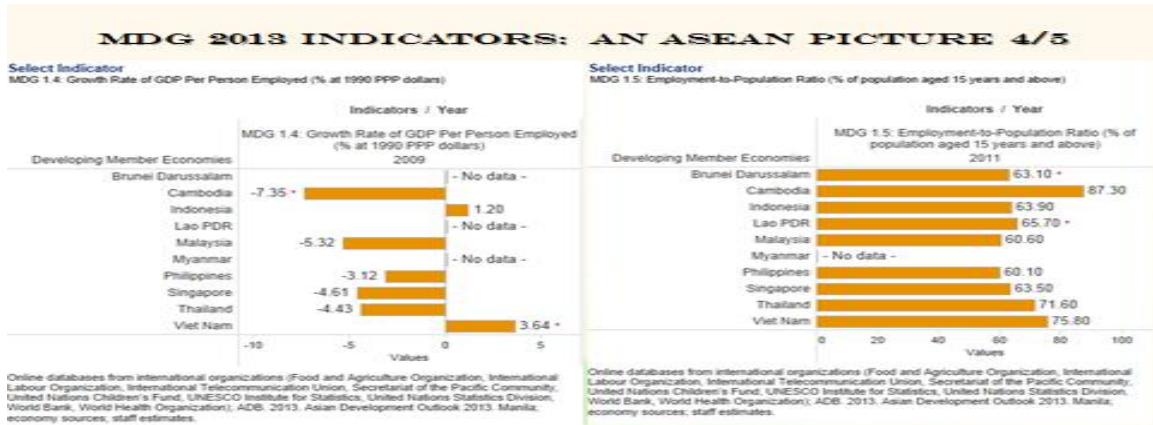
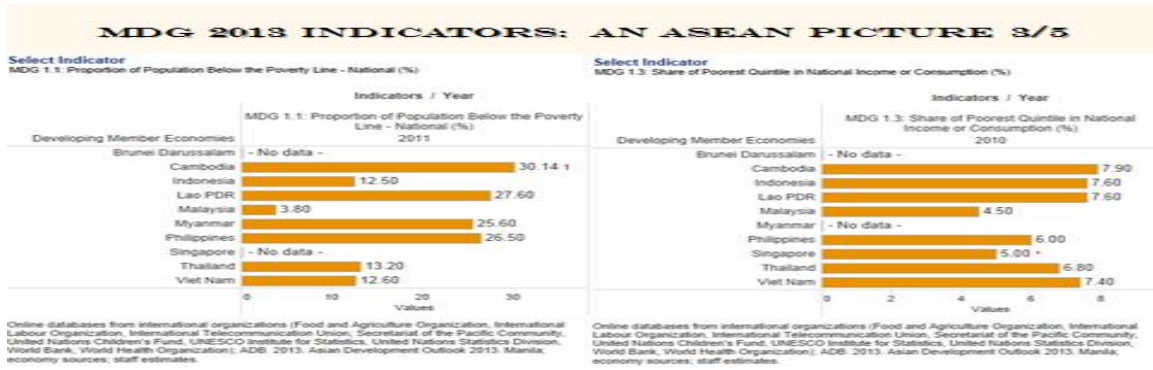
Education is listed as one of the 10 services to be liberated in the AFAS (ASEAN Framework on Agreement of Services) (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009 and 2010). In its 7<sup>th</sup> package of the AFAS emphasizing "Free Flow of Skilled Labor" and the MRA (Mutual Recognition Agreement) on surveying qualifications, these will have a high impact of mutual recognition of education and the free flow of skilled labor and professionals across the ASEAN economies. ASEAN claims in its ASEAN Economic Scorecard (ASEAN Secretariat, 2010) that 73.6% of targets have been achieved (82% in liberations of free flow of goods, services, investment, skilled labor and capital; 50% in foundations for competitiveness; 100% of equitable economic development; and 100% integration with global economy).

**2. Issues and Challenges facing HEIs and Quality of Education in AEC 2015 landscape**  
**2.1 ASEAN family profile**

While the ASEAN Economic Scorecard (ASEAN, 2010) claims good progress, looking at the MDG targets (Table 1) (ADB, 2013), the overall population in all the 10 ASEAN economies is increasing as shown in the total population and annual growth rate of population (ASEAN Picture 1/5). The age dependency ratio of the ASEAN family profile dependency  $\leq 15 \geq 64$  hovers in the region of 40% to 60% could mean that the average ASEAN families are still within the same family of singular or shared breadwinners. This could put a heavy strain on the financial resources and support of the whole family (ASEAN Picture 2/5). This basically means that most of the ASEAN economies other than Singapore and Brunei, majority are still progressing from under developed to new developing, or intermediate developing economies.

**Table 1: MDG 2013 Indicators: An ASEAN Picture 1 to 5**





About 12 % to 30% of the populations of 7 countries are still below poverty line (MDG 1.1) and the poorest share only about 10% of consumption and in the national income (MDG 1.3). This would mean that a large proportion of the ASEAN countries are still in the lower economic and possibly social strata of the country. 5 countries in addition to 2 from the poorest have Negative GDP per employed person (MDG 1.4). Most countries have only about 60% employment rate as shown in the MDG 1.5 of the Employment-to-Population Ratio, which indicates a rather high unemployment rate. This compounded the fact of those below the poverty line (MDG 1.1), the high dependency ratio and low participation in national income and consumption (MDG 1.3) that can put a serious strain on the average family financial resources and standard of living.



## **2.2 Socioeconomic Status (SES) and Education**

The only major inroad that most ASEAN economies can be proud of is that the literacy rate hovers at 83% for 2 economies and  $\geq 95\%$  for most of the 8 economies due to compulsory and “free” education of at least up to Grade 12. In addition, the contributions from own account and contributing family to total employment ranges from 41% to 88% for 6 of the economies. Basically, a family SES (Socioeconomic Status) is measured as a combination of education, income and occupation. Low SES is correlated to lower income and poverty (APA, 2013). From the MDG 1.1, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5 statistics, it appears that a high proportion of ASEAN family are “struggling” and have very low to possibly low to median SES. Coupled with the “escaping the poverty gap” noted earlier, Morgan et al., (2009) indicated that children from low SES households have slower academic skills development. The lower SES and poverty status due to financial constraints affects students’ academic progress leading to inadequate and increased dropouts that affects academic achievements which perpetuates the low SES status (Aikens and Barbarin, 2008). The low SES affects the students’ psychological health and emotional distress that aggravates their academic performance and outcomes (Mistry et. al., 2009) as not belonging to the school and have higher intention to drop out (Langhout, Drake and Rosselli, 2009).

## **2.3 Financing and Cost of HEI**

In the “Massification” of education, statistics of some selected ASEAN economies from 1980-2007 have shown student enrolment increases: Indonesia (691 %), Malaysia (1,299 %), Thailand (683 %) and Vietnam (1,386) and they continue to grow (ADB, 2008). Limited state support after the global financial crisis of the late 1990s and 2008 - 2009 and spiraling enrolments had brought about a rising gap (ADB, 2009). This has led to “mushrooming of HEIs or special programs”. This “gap” is filled with the rise of private HEIs, and, most public HEI (given some autonomy) strategized by creating additional commercialized offerings with high fees that supplement income sources from part-time/executive programs, short courses, repackaging and repackaging similar graduate degrees programs offers with similar context under different context and name and consultancy services (Praphamontripong, 2010a), which are money spinners, though there are questions of dubious quality. Many public universities in Thailand use this strategy to increase their income by 450% with 75% faculties reported (Poapangsakorn, 2008). Private HEIs accounts for 31% of total global HEI enrolment with 56% HEIs being private (PROPHE, 2010). In Asia, 35% of students are in private HEIs, and 60% of HEIs are private (ADB, 2012). The incentives for offering HEIs is to satisfy demand and the bottom-line is “education is lucrative business and an easy path to profits” whereas “quality” plays secondary fiddle. As shown by some latest 2013 US statistics, the average charges (Table 2) and average cost of a public or private HEI education increased by an average of 2.2 % to 3.7 % (Table 3) (College Board, 2013). As most of these private HEIs are small family owned (500 to 700 students), self-funded, this could allude to the same increase in cost of the ASEAN HEIs at the consequence of dubious instructional quality balancing return on investments which is a higher priority.



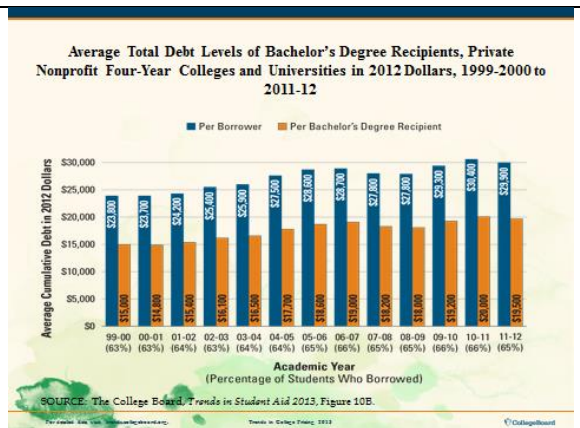
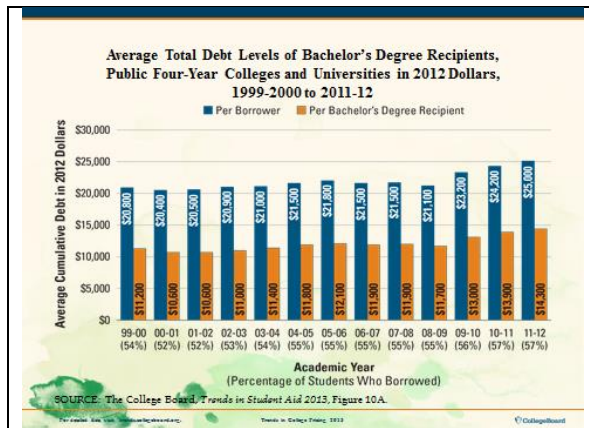
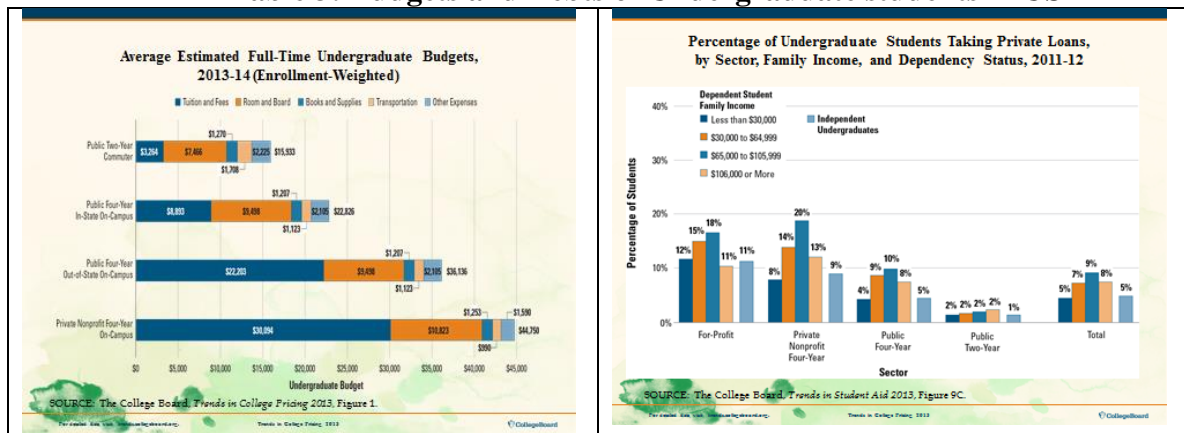
**Table 2: Average published charges of undergraduate education in USA 2013 – 2014**

Average Published Charges for Full-Time Undergraduates by Type and Control of Institution, 2013-14 (Enrollment-Weighted)												
Sector	Tuition and Fees				Room and Board				Total Charges			
	2013-14	2012-13	\$ Change	% Change	2013-14	2012-13	\$ Change	% Change	2013-14	2012-13		
Public Two-Year In-State	\$3,354	\$3,154	\$210	6.5%	\$7,456	\$7,342	\$114	1.7%	\$10,730	\$10,496	\$234	2.2%
Public Four-Year In-State	\$8,893	\$8,646	\$247	2.9%	\$8,498	\$8,171	\$327	3.6%	\$18,361	\$17,817	\$544	3.2%
Public Four-Year Out-of-State	\$22,203	\$21,533	\$670	3.1%	\$8,498	\$8,171	\$327	3.6%	\$31,701	\$30,704	\$997	3.2%
Private Nonprofit Four-Year	\$30,084	\$28,989	\$1,095	3.8%	\$10,823	\$10,458	\$365	3.5%	\$40,917	\$39,447	\$1,470	3.7%
For-Profit	\$15,130	\$15,060	\$70	0.5%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Average Published Charges for Full-Time Four-Year Undergraduates by Carnegie Classification, 2013-14 (Enrollment-Weighted)												
Carnegie Classification	Tuition and Fees				Room and Board				Total Charges			
	2013-14	2012-13	\$ Change	% Change	2013-14	2012-13	\$ Change	% Change	2013-14	2012-13		
Public Doctoral In-State	\$8,804	\$8,553	\$271	2.8%	\$8,902	\$8,580	\$322	3.3%	\$19,706	\$19,123	\$583	3.0%
Public Master's In-State	\$7,750	\$7,529	\$221	2.9%	\$8,834	\$8,477	\$357	4.2%	\$16,584	\$16,006	\$578	3.6%
Public Bachelor's In-State	\$6,818	\$6,729	\$89	1.3%	\$8,050	\$8,713	-\$663	-7.6%	\$15,868	\$15,442	\$426	2.8%
Private Nonprofit Doctoral	\$37,171	\$35,745	\$1,426	4.0%	\$12,630	\$12,236	\$394	3.4%	\$49,821	\$47,981	\$1,840	3.8%
Private Nonprofit Master's	\$26,788	\$25,829	\$959	3.8%	\$10,443	\$10,081	\$362	3.5%	\$37,247	\$35,920	\$1,327	3.7%
Private Nonprofit Bachelor's	\$28,538	\$27,525	\$1,013	3.7%	\$8,790	\$8,452	\$338	3.6%	\$38,328	\$36,977	\$1,351	3.7%

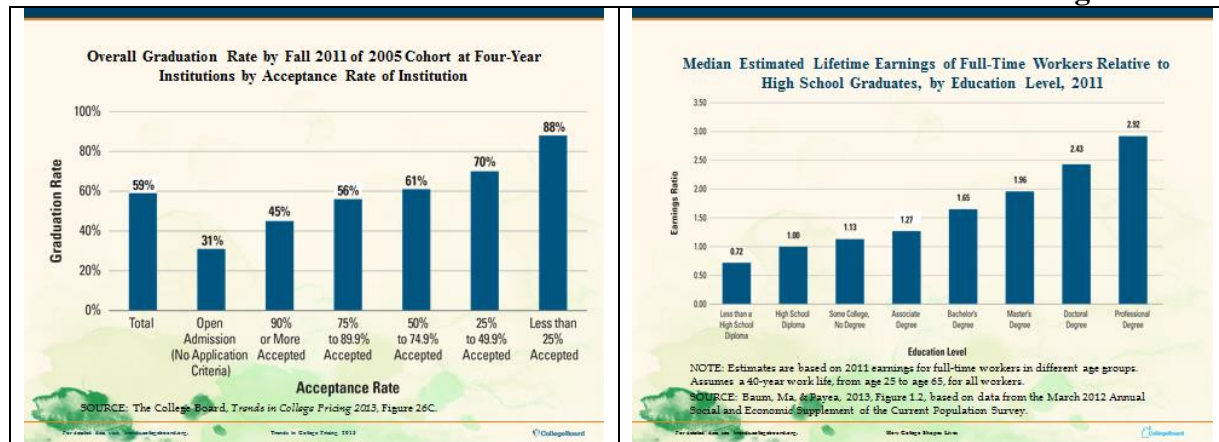
**Table 3: Budgets and Debts of Undergraduate students in US**



Though cost of a university education has increased, it is still the beliefs of ASEAN families to invest in the “future” of their children to improve their family incomes and SES. Many countries have formal “student loan” schemes which can be income contingent or mortgage based. Lacking key 2013 ASEAN statistics of “student loan” which ultimately turns into “student debt”, some US “students’ debt” are used to exemplify the strains and cost of student financing for an education. The biggest portion of a student budget is in tuition and housing, especially for the

private HEIs. It also shows that those in the lower income group and with dependency status, those in the lower SES take out more private loans for private education than for public HEI which are still funded by the State. The stark reality is that the average student debt level has increased from 54% to 57% from 1999 – 2012 for public HEIs while the private HEIs ranged from 63% to 65% for the same period. Another stark reality is that those who are in the public HEIs also rely on some sort of student debt to complete their studies. Public HEIs which normally has greater applications and accept only about 20 – 40 % are still the main choice and dream of an average student or household as the chances for graduation is higher at 88% or 70% as compared to the “open and accept to all” private but pricier option.

**Table 4: Graduation rate of cohort and estimated lifetime earnings**



Within the ASEAN context, and with most households still in the very low and low to median SES, the above statistics could range higher. This is especially true for the typical ASEAN households’ beliefs to get their children out of their low SES and the poverty strata by investing in their children education as a “future guarantee” by all means. As shown above (Table 4), education does increase the median estimated life earning of higher education levels. This makes the typical ASEAN household resort to informal channels of financing, from loan sharks, pawn shops, borrowing from families, or joining “shares tables or money clubs from a friends’ circle”. The other bleaker situation is their inability to get any informal financing and they continue to live in their vicious cycle of poverty. No matter what any ASEAN government says, in ASEAN, HEIs are still for the “moneyed and elite” or those with access to some sort of financial support or access to non-formal financial channels. The bottom-line of most ASEAN households’ demands for HEIs is that HEIs are not for the “marginalized”, the “displaced”, the “disadvantaged”, as they are “reserved for the privileged few” or those willing to go into the vicious cycle of debt.

## 2.4 Corruption and Politics

Corruption and Political issues are two interweaving “Twin of Evil” that is still endemic in ASEAN, not forgetting national and global economies that face the same issues of the twin of evils. The common denominator of this twin apex of evil is “Money” that equates to power as the other interdependent factors that underscores all political policies and corruption practices. Endemic corruption in ASEAN (World bank 2006: 259-290 and ADB, 2010a:213) also

permeates education which affects lower and more dubious quality, less provision of real learning due to “moonshining of faculty” attributed to lower salaries (Welch 2011 b), higher cost for more profits and reduced satisfaction with education provisions. Selected 2009/10 Corruption Transparency International (2009a: 253 – 227; 2010) shows scoring and ranking respectively of Malaysia 4.4 and 56; Indonesia 2.8 and 110; Thailand 3.5 and 78; and Vietnam 2.7 and 117 (Table 5). The Corruption Perceptions Index 2013 does not paint a positive picture as 8 of the 10 ASEAN economies scored a 50 or below lower Score of the 177 countries surveyed, showing a relatively high perceived corruption level that serves as a reminder that the abuse of power, secret dealings and bribery that continue to ravage societies in the ASEAN economies.

**Table 5: Corruption Perceptions Index 2013 of ASEAN economies**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Surveys used</b>	<b>CI: Lower</b>	<b>CI: Upper</b>	<b>2012 Survey</b>
<b>5</b>	Singapore	86	9	82	90	87
<b>38</b>	Brunei	60	3	43	77	55
<b>53</b>	Malaysia	50	9	44	56	49
<b>94</b>	Philippines	36	9	32	40	34
<b>102</b>	Thailand	35	8	33	37	37
<b>114</b>	Indonesia	32	9	26	38	32
<b>116</b>	Vietnam	31	8	27	35	31
<b>140</b>	Laos	26	4	18	34	21
<b>157</b>	Myanmar	21	6	15	27	15
<b>160</b>	Cambodia	2	7	15	25	22

Source: Transparency International, (2013), Corruption Perceptions Index 2013, <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2013/results>

Wescott’s (2003) estimated that up to 30% of government procurement budgets in Thailand and 1/3 of GDP of Vietnam’s public investment were lost due to corrupt practices or political interventions for self-enrichment in the name of “developmental projects”. Specific to the education sector, practices like borrowing equipment for engineering accreditation by a private HEI in Indonesia, and returning it back to the private companies (Buchori and Malik 2004) and over enrolment in Vietnam private HEI due to nonpublic funding support and entry standards by accepting “bribes” or “tea money” (Welch 2011b:144; Chronicle of Higher Education, 2006), unqualified markers of exam papers to “pass” students, bogus university, or doctoral degree awards in exchange for money, proliferates. Most of these corruptions are linked to poor funding, poor salaries or simply, “easy path to richness” due to questionable values and ethics of the individual, or group of individuals or institutional based.

On the other side of the “twin evils” is the political scenarios, whereby “political clout, is power, money is power”. While spending their political war chest in “paying for votes”, the elected politicians need to recoup and rebuild their political war chest of treasuries. In January 2014, Thailand is in a “showdown and standoff” between the call for political reforms to eradicate corruption and existing government that is forced to call for early election to pacify the oppositions and avoid a blood bath. This is only after a change of 4 Education Ministers in 2 years. This led to frequent changes of Education policies to favor “populist” agenda of the



Minister and Government of “lucrative multimillion/billion projects” paid for by the taxpayers. In Malaysia, there is a polarization of education with political agenda in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 and the new Bumiputra Economic Agenda. The plans are to increase the skills of youth with low academic qualification and competency levels, increase retraining programs to make graduates employable and increase the number of post-graduates. (Nadaraj, 17 Sep 2013).

### **3. Analysis of Readiness of ASEAN Economies for AEC 2015**

As of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013, a common issue across all the ASEAN economies is that the majority of all walks of life lacks awareness and knows little about AEC 2015 and its implications. As of July 2013, at least 32 of the 143 action plans have not been implemented, especially in the political/security and socio-cultural pillars (AEC: Huge Challenges ahead, ANN 2013). These must be balanced with the regional maritime security cooperation and air defense zone requested by the East Asian economic giants of China, Japan and South Korea.

**Philippines** – In the Philippines, other than industries that are affected (Philippines: AEC What’s that?, ANN 30/12/2013), there is a cry for: 1) direct consultations with the affected industries as opposed to government “huddling together like an old boys club to decide on policies that affect their direct livelihoods, 2) enabling government policies that are industry specific, 3) credit availability and facilities afforded by banks, 4) national tax environment unfavorable to the “mechanization” which are taxed but adds value to the whole agricultural base, 4) government calling for liberation without doing their homework, as integration in the agricultural sector will make people lose employment, job displacement and sources of income, 5) not beneficial of SME as they do not have financial, commercial and political clouts of the big companies in a tougher competition environment. All these points to the AEC 2015 “participation is a must” but the “preparedness and readiness is questionable”. On the education front, the Philippines highlighted the need to increase the “Filipino Competitiveness” (Drake-Brockman, 2012) in terms of:

- Curricular reform responsive to global competitiveness assessment that is data-driven and evidence-based assessment of the global competitiveness of Filipino professionals
- Looking at ASEAN as a market (e.g., international student enrollment, employment opportunities for graduates)
- Parallel assessment of quality of graduates vis-a-vis (local, national, regional, international) competitors
- Implement CHED guidelines :
  - ✓ Developing the global mindset among graduates
  - ✓ Curricular programs responsive to both local and international demands
  - ✓ Focusing on developing core competencies (talents, skills, ideas)
  - ✓ Emphasizing innovation
- Action agenda can be taken in relation to:
  - Assessment of competitiveness of graduates
  - Professional education
  - Advocacy for quality assurance

- Promotion of innovation
- Addressing the challenges of global competitiveness?

**Malaysia** – Malaysian business and industrial sectors (Malaysia: Doubts and Caution, ANN 30/12/2013) signaled their skeptic and cynicism of achievements by 2015 due to lack of “regionalism”, as ASEAN plays more rhetoric than realities. There is a lack of urgency with no clear plans and policies that have little relations to plans, programs and projects in the public sphere. AEC promise and bodes well for economies like Malaysia and Singapore that have well-developed SMEs as they account for 97% of Malaysian output. Common standards and agreements like the ASEAN CIS (Collective Investment Schemes) need to be streamlined and thrashed out for all sectors. Better people-to-people exchanges, cross-border bonding, people centered “ASEAN ownership” with a distinct ASEAN identity, rather than just an inter-state body is a supra imperative.

**Myanmar** – Myanmar is working hard to increase its GDP (Gross domestic Product) as it has the lowest amongst the 10 member ASEAN bloc at \$875, while Singapore tops at \$50,130, with Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines in the median rank with GDPs of \$9,941, USD 5,116, \$3,563 and \$2,341 respectively. At the lower end is Vietnam (\$1,403) and Laos (\$ 1,279) which are higher than both Cambodia and Myanmar (Myanmar: Getting ready for the major league, ANN 30/12/2013). Basic sectors like health, education, social services and the economy still continue to struggle, questioning its basic “readiness” to join the AEC 2015. They are just targeting the basic economic necessities: new and more flexible Investment Law (November 2013), flotation of currency (April 2013), Special Economic Zones to attract China, India and the South East Asian countries like Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Changing the national mindset is a priority with the country’s businesses still run by cronies, lack of transparencies in financial tractions, taxation and revenues and lack of collaboration is the biggest issue. A high ranking government official sums it all as “we are pretending to be ready” coupled with mismanagement and brain drain issues of the past, boosting of skills training and technological know-how for the future and increasing its export trading and depend on exports earnings and tourism promotion.

**Indonesia** – Indonesia needs to get its act together as only 15 per cent of Indonesian economic communities are aware of AEC 2015 (Asian International Economists Network 18/06/2013). In an attempt to boost the country’s preparedness for AEC 2015, Indonesian Foreign Affairs Ministry together with International Relations Department at the University of Indonesia launched an ASEAN Study Center in 22/03/2013. Measures needed include corruption and legal uncertainty, upgrading of existing physical infrastructure and support regulations to ensure “fair play” among member states. Though Indonesia is the largest economy and market of 250 million, the sentiment is it is still the least able to compete in its most lucrative sectors of textiles, garments, electronics and automotive which is a key employer. It is ill prepared as its business have the highest logistics cost and credit interest rates, with quality standards and custom clearance procedures still “under construction” compounded with bureaucratic red tapes. Other areas in education, language skills and enforcement are found wanting (Indonesia: Handicaps to overcome, ANN 30/12/2013).

**Vietnam** – Vietnam has accomplished 84.8% of the 17 core elements from 2008 to July 2013 with prioritization to eliminate non-tariff barriers and enhance trade barriers to raise Vietnam's real income by \$2.4 billion or a 2.8% increase over the 2004 baseline. Issues like reduction of oil and petroleum from the General Exclusion List, lack of utilization of AFTA (ASEAN Free Trade Area, Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT), Vietnamese-made products not meeting domestic standards, weak logistics, limited labor force, low preparation in the education sector of its labor force in English, soft skills and critical thinking persists. It calls for the review of critical shortage of financial resources and the need of a new national growth model driven by domestic input and not by imports, in short, restructuring and more independent power to manage (Vietnam: Bold reforms needed, ANN 30/12/2013). Specifically, it is labor market restructure, job quality and human resource and engagement in multicultural mechanisms to strengthen certification and mutual recognition of skills and professions and by investing in education and training system.

**Laos** – Laos with its “Shangri-La locked beauty” aims to be a land bridge between Thailand, Vietnam and China by investing in major transport routes with the \$7 billion rail link from Vientiane to China and to Savannakhet on the Vietnam border with a \$5 billion, 220 km link, connecting the ASEAN power grid, building big dam projects, all concentrated in increasing trade and building domestic industry base (Laos: Little and Big Fish, ANN 30/12/2013). This is a balancing of “big fish consuming the small fish” which are big conglomerates which fares better and upping the small family business. The drastic reduction in tariffs and opening will hit government revenue in a large portion of the already impoverished population as those faced by Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam. The opening has stiff barriers in long delays for custom processing, high cost of domestic electricity, low labor productivity, overhaul of education system, and rising inequality.

**Thailand** – Thailand looks at the bright side of economies of scale due to a combined 600 million ASEAN population as opposed to Thailand's 65 million local populations (Thailand: Community “is a process, not an event”, ANN 30/12/2013). Like Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore, Thailand has eliminated tariff down to zero for 99.5% of their import items since 2010 which has also forced their key Chinese and Japanese trading partners to do likewise. ASEAN's major task is the elimination of non-tariff barriers like complex trade and custom regulations, sanitary, hygiene, environmental and education measures and essentially, lack of information. An issue is the low intra-ASEAN trade that accounts for only ¼ of total trade of a total \$2.3 trillion ASEAN trade volume, which can act as a cushion when trade with external partners falls due to crisis or crunch in other key trade areas. This underscores a low commitment with readiness, development gaps, protectionism and low economic transaction within ASEAN. 60% of Thai SME have little understanding of AEC and have no interest in investing abroad or capacity to do so, while border trade has an annual growth of 20%. On the education front, the Education Ministry of Thailand has worked out the following measures:

- Dissemination of knowledge and good attitudes about ASEAN among members of the public, especially ministry personnel, teachers and students.
- Increase the capabilities of Thai students, especially their English or skills in the languages of neighboring countries. Once the AEC materializes, job opportunities in the region will be very much open to all qualified ASEAN citizens.
- Education-standard improvement and efforts to set one same standard to facilitate student mobility and credit transfer across the region.
- Adjust education regulations to support the liberalization of educational services.
- Youth development, particularly their leadership, because the future of ASEAN is in their hands.

**Cambodia** – In Cambodia, the number of students in HEIs doubled from 117,420 in academic year 2006/7 to 245,329 in 2011/12 (You, 2012) with HEIs increased drastically from 10 in the 1990s (Pak 2011) to 97 (38 public HIEs) in the first quarter of 2012 (You 2012). 10 government agencies supervise close to 100 HEIs and their many provincial branches leading to the challenge of coordination and resource use, education policy implementation and monitoring (Sen, 2013). Prior to 1997, private HEIs were not allowed, and the first legalized private HEI was Norton University in 1997 (Chealy, 2009). Privatization was introduced through fees payment in public HEIs that led to transformation of public HEIs being “half public, half private” (Chen et.al, 2007 and Virak, 2009).

In summary, higher education systems across ASEAN face a similar set of 7 overarching global challenges (ADB, 2011, and Deanne, 2013) as follows:

- (a) Maintaining and improving education *quality*, even in the face of serious financial, income inequalities, cultural and demographics constraints;
- (b) Improving the *relevance* of curriculum and instruction at a time of rapid change in labor market needs due to shifting production and consumption, globalization and global system disruptions;
- (c) Increasing and better utilizing the *financial resources* available to higher education; and
- (d) Increasing of private HEI and balancing the continued expansion of access to higher education with greater attention to *equity* and to the need to raise quality through regulations.
- (e) Catering to the knowledge and skills development of marginalized and displaced through *informal learning*
- (f) Minimizing *Corruption and Politicization* of Education
- (g) Interdependent of dynamics overwhelming national policy capabilities, in finance, migration, government revenues, and education.

#### **4. Recommendations for HEI and Quality of Education of the AEC 2015**

Though all these macro and micro issues and challenges which are very diverse across all the ASEAN economies, the ASEAN Secretariat's five-year Work Plan on Education (WPE - 2011 and 2015) tries to focus on ASEAN awareness, access to quality education, cross-border mobility and internationalization of education, plus support for other sectorial bodies whose programs require education inputs. Succinctly, it “*clarifies ASEAN’s role as a regional partner*”

*in the education sector and supports ASEAN programs that raise awareness of regional identity; promote access to and improve the quality of primary, secondary and tertiary education; support regional mobility programs for students, teachers, and faculty and strategies for internationalization of education; and support for other ASEAN sectorial bodies with an interest in education.”*

While recognizing the twin evils of “corruption and politics”, the SES and poverty gap and its achievement on the MDGs indicators, and the implications of the AEC 2015 specific to each of the ASEAN profile and its diverse economies readiness and pragmatic approaches, all of these are macro level policies, processes and procedures that cannot be absolved in this generation. A key question is the governmental governance and time frame to resolve and absolve its social-political, socio-cultural and socio-economics challenges. It does not mean that individual HEIs cannot change or contribute. Specific to the education agenda and immediate to all HEIs are common challenges at both levels of:

- **Macro Level –**
  - (i) Pressure for the government to minimize the extent and “open display and demonstration” of political and corrupted practices abuses through corrupted “populists projects under the name of development”. It calls for pure guts and clear conscience of the elites and politicians to search their “souls” to serve the society by reforming the whole socio-political, socio-cultural, socio-economic systems that affects the higher education system so that it can produce a skilled labor force by the AEC 2015.
  - (ii) Drive internal reforms in higher education system, a “real reform that benefits its society” so as to not fall behind other countries in supplying a skilled workforce to the free flow of skilled labor.
  - (iii) Focus on the quality aspects of the education through mandatory “quality education” that needs to weed out bad quality governance and practices of individual HEIs. The national accreditation agencies need to walk “hand-in-hand” with the Ministries of Education and its Commissions to “talk and walk” the same quality requirements, policies and within the same mindset and mental frequencies to provide education value for its society.
- **Micro Level –**
  - (i) Wake-up call for all HEIs to not just focus on quantitative expansion but also improve the quality and relevance of the education provided.
  - (ii) Pressure for HEIs to reform themselves and perform well if they intend to remain in the competitive market of higher education provision, as the AEC will open the door for cross-border education, allowing top universities in the region to open branch campuses.

The AEC 2015 will be an opportunity for local HEIs to improve the quality of their education provision in order to compete with local, regional and international entry. Each ASEAN economies can bring about education reforms at the Macro level through:

- Higher levels of institutional quality, efficiency and effectiveness in a more competitive and open regional education arena through proactive and mandatory quality and accreditation practices and enforcement.



- Appropriate targeted student aid at all levels of income and student aids reform supported by balancing tax incentives, proper guidelines on profits and returns on investment and adequate public funding and infrastructure for education reforms.
- Overhauling their education system through bold and appropriate policies direction and targeted education reforms in both formal and informal education access, availability and relevance to needs that caters to all strata of the society irrespective of their SES or income levels and better guidance for students' access and mobility.
- Minimization and reduction of corruption and politicization of educational reforms, while a must, should be a "beginning" to start a new life and chapter for each of the ASEAN economy for the betterment of its society and social responsibilities.

At the micro level, challenges facing each HEI are globalization increases through outbound students, students and faculty exchanges, twinning or joint academic programs, establishment of foreign campuses in ASEAN / ASIA, and English based programs or colleges. Ranking is the name of the "hated" game but accepted though not meeting certain criteria of Asian culture of ethics and societal responsibilities. Most HEIs have a balanced approach through "we seek international criteria but we also cater to local needs" especially in ethics and societal responsibilities which is very prevalent in ASEAN universities. This is also supported by research which is a growing agenda.

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century millennium, countries have set ambitious goals called the MDGs, of which there are progress but there are still a lot to be done especially in the socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic area which are interlinked. When ASEAN embarked on its lofty AEC 2015, all the ASEAN economies are in a limbo of "real progress" and achievements by this time frame. Regional and national implementation frameworks and plans are lacking due to diversity in preparedness and readiness in infrastructures, financial resources due to different levels of national GDP and per capital income undermining the realization of AEC 2015. While all the international bodies like UN, UNESCO, RIHED-SEAMEO, ADB, IMF, ASEAN etc., have revisited all these with great visions, ambitions and identified challenges and strategies and actions, it seems that the underlying issue that needs to be eradicated is still prevalent and endemic and continues to gnaw at the very fabric of society as an institution. While recognizing that "corruption and politics → monetized power" is a fundamental issue, it is still elusive and pervasive. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014, garment workers in Cambodia are combating government units for better pay, while in Thailand, the "social divide" still persists with the stand-offs calling for real reforms before elections, and a poll in the US shows that its people have lost trust in the government.

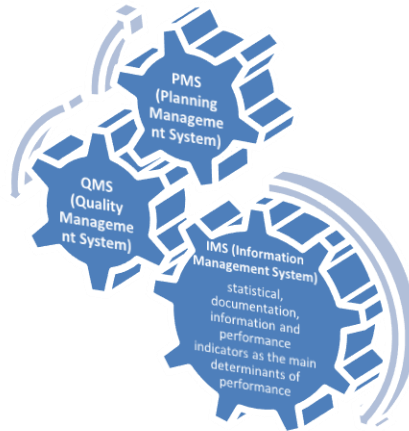
In the name of progress and development by the governing parties or implementation by the bureaucratic machineries and mechanisms, the basic fabric of human values and conscience has been conveniently sidelined and downplayed. It is the human factors and its values and conscience that create and deliver on the socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic aspects that create these "social divides" and in escaping these vicious cycles that the poor, the displaced; the marginalized and the downtrodden are crying out loud in the futile hope for some equality and equity in society and improve their SES.

HEIs or “universities – past, present and future” have and will always be the bastion for “knowledge seeking and creating” and fundamental “values” or core values development which are enshrined in all the universities and their missions. While each HEI cannot solve the monumental national issues, they can, act individually or collectively to preserve human values. Human values and their inculcation and development are vested in the family who invest in their children’s education. Each HEI can contribute to the re-building of the fragile social fabric that holds the human existence “hostage”. Each HEI can contribute by staying true to their institutionalization of its core values, practicing it, and building it within their institutionalized instruction, institution processes and values foundations through its human factors of the faculty, staff and students. Such contribution in developing and building a stronger foundation and fabric of “human values” that are at the core of the socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural issues is a key responsibility of the HEIs’ contribute to the institution as a whole or for each individual student to be at the:

1. **Forefront for students’ values and conscientious reforms** – As they educate and enable the knowledge and skills of future leaders and citizen of tomorrow, they need to be role models of the “builder of the values and conscience” of the students in their care. Teay, (2007) uses the “sufficiency and sustainable” HE model in redefining the HEI’s sufficiency through a middle path philosophy of HM King Bhumiphol of Thailand that is moderating, reasonable and self-resilient moderated by a set knowledge and virtuous conditions. The underlying principle is *“This sufficiency means to have enough to live on; Sufficiency means to lead a reasonably comfortable life, without excess, or overindulgence in luxury, but enough .... The word to have enough is sufficient; sufficiency is moderation. If one is moderate in one’s desire, one will have less craving. If one has less craving, one will take less advantage of others. If all nations hold this concept – I don’t mean sufficiency economy – this concept of moderation, without being extreme or insatiable in one’s desire, the world will be a happier place”* (His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej at the annual birthday address on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1998). This was operationalized by the individual transformation of both the “teaching and learning dimensions” (Teay, 2008) affecting the transformation of the student’s individual capacity, the nuts and bolts of skills, knowledge, experience and personality interacting within the context of values, beliefs and ideals that influence the mind sets. The reconstructed TCEI (Teaching Competency and Effectiveness Index,) and SCEI (Student Competency and Effectiveness Index) (Teay, 2006) were operationalized to reflect this individual sufficiency and sustainability philosophy. This included the Knowledge Conditioning (Prudence and care in interpretation, integration and application of knowledge) and Morality Conditioning (Honesty, Integrity, Sincerity, Perseverance, Diligence, and Sharing). Knowledge must be underpinned by values and this is recognized by Singapore in its inclusion of core values of “self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management and responsible decision making” (MoE, 2011). The Institute for the Future (IFTF, 2011) identified 10 skills

needed by the workforce of the future as: sense making, novel and adaptive thinking, social intelligence, trans-disciplinary, new media literacy, design mindset, cognitive load management, cross cultural competency, virtual collaborations and computational thinking.

2. **Forefront of institutional values and conscientious reforms** – At the institutional level, operationalizing the institution capability and capacity, through the development of an integrated framework based on the sufficiency principles and the existing institutional capacity assessment factors, results in an integrated sufficiency and sustainability based institutional capability and capacity framework. The institutional strengthening and capacity enhancement of the institution strategy, systems, style, shared values, leadership, management, and work processes improvement framework and mechanisms (de Jager and Clarke, 2001) is based on a foundation of rationality, moderation and self-resilience as they represent the core competency of the HEI to create education value. This would form the basis of creating a total individual and institutional sufficiency and sustainability framework of the future HEI. The 2 spheres of knowledge and moral conditioning in the “sufficiency philosophy” is the interpretation and integration of the knowledge into wisdom must be defined from a “moralistic” dimension that not only serves the institution’s self-interest but must benefit others. The sufficiency philosophy as defined above, can act as a framework for development governing everything from motivation (utility, drives, needs etc.) to criteria (goals, objectives, outcomes, etc.) to behavior (production, consumption, investment, etc.) to system (collectivity, connectivity, etc.) that implicitly addresses key issues within a dynamic HE setting (SEWG, 2008).
3. **Forefront of the institutional balancing of its sustainability through planning and quality management** – Having laid a strong foundation of values based on moral conditioning, the HEI would need to “walk the talk” by practicing what it intends to instill in the individual student and as a conscientious institution that contributes to the development of society through quality education. It must lay a strong foundation of Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) management system that goes beyond accreditation requirements, that is linked to strategic planning and informed decision making via the information management of performance metrics through knowledge conditioning in a Strategic Performance Management System (Teay, 2012) as shown below:



4. **Forefront of Societal Responsibility** – HEIs have always maintained a key mission as “contribution to community and society” of which Teay (2011 and 2013) has proposed that the strategic approach of managing USR (University Societal Responsibility) from the following perspectives of:
- a. **Internal people process** which is the students in using the knowledge and skills or its competencies sets that interpret and utilize knowledge within their ethical and moral domain to bring about actions. This leads to the external people dimension of graduates and alumni who had undergone the internal institutional societal focused processes to be “ethically and morally sound graduates and alumni” who can contribute positively and proactively to the societal development and its well-being.
  - b. **Internal governance processes** broadly covers the management and administration of its societal responsibilities, its appending systems and mechanisms developed to ensure societal responsibilities and that is assured through quality systems and mechanisms of managing societal responsibilities.
  - c. **Primary educational process** enshrines the societal responsibilities within the teaching and learning, the research and the external engagement educational processes, systems and mechanisms. These educational components are the ultimate mechanisms that should instill and imbues societal responsibilities of “morally and ethically sound mind in a healthy body” in the students’ development processes.
  - d. **Support educational processes** that cover the supporting processes, systems and mechanisms aimed at valuing people and building a strong conducive societally responsible environment in support of the primary education processes.
  - e. **Primary external processes responsibilities** that comprehensively covers the systems and mechanisms of the “what and how” that the institution sets up to relate and to engage their immediate communities and society at large.
  - f. **Secondary external processes responsibilities** that cover the moral well-being of the individual’s contributions for the benefit of society through its environmental and societal conscience that had been instilled and imbued in the “responsible citizen of society”.

## **5. Conclusion**

While ASEAN has made progress towards its AEC 2015, many of its members still progress at different degrees of readiness especially in its education sectors. While there are macro issues of the socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic and the social divide brought about by politics and corruption practices that need to be dealt with, the HEIs have to determine its own future. This future is built on a moral and ethical approach that underlies the individual and institutional values of which each individual HEI can institutionalize and live its core values as enshrined in its mission. Working in tandem by all HEIs in ASEAN, this would have a strong and powerful force to mitigate the socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural issues.

This paper has recommended for each HEI to be at the forefront of: 1) for students' values and conscientious reforms; 2) institutional values and conscientious reforms; 3) the institutional balancing of its sustainability through planning and quality management; and 4) societal responsibility. While these are bitter medicine and drastic actions, a strong foundation in these can lead to a better future for the future generations as the present MDGs need overhaul through the strengthened foundations of morals and ethics.



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