

NATIONAL RESILIENCE FOR REGIONAL RESILIENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: LESSONS FOR WEST AFRICA

Saley Idrissa Ibrahim, Zarina Othman & Nor Azizan Idris

ABSTRACT

This article intends to deliberate upon the practical experiences of national resilience among some of the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The regional organization had long ago since the 1950s right into the 1990s, emphasized the importance of national resilience as the foundation for regional resilience. Communist insurgencies and great powers rivalries in the region were among the prime factors that led to the emphasis on national resilience for regional resilience. Its early founders believed that security within the individual states would be strong if they could solidify their national securities, the dimension of which encompasses the economic, social, political, and military realms. By striving successfully towards this objective, they would be capable of cooperating vigorously as a regional bloc within ASEAN and promote their respective region in the international arena. Contrarily, by failing to nationally be strong, regional resilience would undoubtedly be constructed upon shaky scaffoldings. As such, to hypothesize, it can be said that if national resilience of certain individual states within a given region succeeds, then regional resilience can be promoted more easily. That is because weak unstable states cannot make a strong region. This article will highlight some of the experiences of some ASEAN states in national resilience and self reliance so as to extract some positive lessons which could be beneficial to most West African states in their strive for national and regional development. It is rational and feasible for a group of states, or a region, to learn from the constructive experiences of a single state within a given region, and the vice-versa. In reality, since the era of independence in the 1960s right into the 1990s, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had also emphasized the same principles of national resilience and self reliance for the sake of stronger regional resilience. However, the performance of most of the community's individual members has not been comparatively that impressive as some of the states within ASEAN. Therefore, some comparative analysis would be made between the performances of some states within the two groupings with the aim of presenting constructive lessons for West Africa.

Keywords: National resilience, regional resilience, the Malaysian model, urban-rural discrepancies, national unity, civilian-military relation, Asian values, Pan-Africanism.

INTRODUCTION

The performance of some of the states of Southeast Asia, in particular the first 5 members of ASEAN, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and Brunei, was highly impressive in the past. They did their level best to put their words and commitments into action. Right from the 1980s during the tough days of the Cold War, they toiled relentlessly in elevating the level of their national resilience and self reliance. National resilience simply refers to the state's ability to put its house in order and to exercise some of its sovereign rights in political, economic, and social matters without being subordinate to others. In other words, it needs to attain a sustainable level in safeguarding its national unity, political stability, and be capable of laying the foundation necessary for the assurance of a good degree of social welfare and security for its citizens. On the other hand, regional resilience deals with the question of regionalism, whereby a number of states work together as a significant regional bloc for the sake of collective gains. That includes safeguarding their political, economic, social, military, and sovereign leverages.

States like Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand had realized with conviction that the success of state building and strong national resilience were determined to a large extent by the state's ability and responsiveness to popular aspirations, demands and expectations for progress, prosperity and social justice, so as to eradicate the seeds and causes of internal conflicts. This is the underlying idea of the principle of national resilience. It encapsulates nation's strength, cohesion, and capability in all the aspects of its national life, particularly in the ideological, political, socio-cultural, economic and military fields, to ensure its own internal stability and thus security from external interference (Djiwandono 1991).

Contrary to the West African region, before the changes that followed suit after the Asian economic crisis of 1997, the brilliant achievements of ASEAN in the political and socio-economic domains have placed the early members of the regional organization in an influential political and economic position within the international community. Practically, their success was testified by the infatuation of other Southeast Asian states that later on joined the Association with the aspiration to attain similar status of progress. These were namely, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia, making thereby ASEAN a ten-member organization in the 1990s.

The disruption of their impressive vitality came about only in 1997 as a result of the infamous economic crisis that hit the Southeast Asian region. Even so, some of them like Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Brunei were able to largely overcome the crisis despite the fact that it did slow down their pace of economic development.

THE ART OF NATIONAL COHESION

National cohesion and unity is a political art that needs strenuous efforts in order to construct a strong heterogeneous nation. In reality, heterogeneity stands out as one of the principal factors for ethnic unrest, rebellion, civil war, and state failure especially within the borders of the third world countries. For example, Nigeria, which is the most populous nation in West Africa, is made up of two major religious affiliations, Islam and Christianity. It is also composed of many tribes and ethnicities, three of which remain hostile to each other since the country's independence. These are namely, the Hausa in the north, the Ibos south east, and the Yoruba in

the south west. The British colonial policies have been highly blamed for the problem of national integration and stability in the Nigerian ethnic crisis... The British usually used the principle of indirect rule where they found existing system of local governing under strong ruler. But in the Iboland of eastern Nigeria, there was no such system. Therefore, there was direct colonial rule over that area. The agreement not to interfere with the Muslim culture, and, for that matter, greatly minimized the presence of British officials. While this seemed to be an African advantage at the time, such a policy had the effect of greatly restricting meaningful relations with the southern provinces of Nigeria where European education, trade, and religion accelerated change and set in motion several developments in social and political life that led to self-governance. The unification of Nigeria in 1914 did not change the situation. As a result, national integration later on proved difficult to achieve as cultural and religious differences between the north, south, and east of the independent country became very sharp and obvious. That was among the strongest factors that led to the civil war of Biafra after independence in the 1960s with the east that lasted for four years (Rodney 1972).

Presently as known, the situation in Nigeria is worst than ever. As long as such kinds of socio-political weaknesses exist within the national borders of the state, national resilience would be but a dream, let alone regional resilience. Likewise, Myanmar, Thailand, and Indonesia illustrate the profound identity-related conflicts in Southeast Asia that are often extremely difficult to de-escalate. They demonstrate the importance of language, religion, and historicity for inter-cultural conflicts in the region (Croissant and Trinn 2009).

The strive for national survival among nations

Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia are made up of mainly three different races. These are Malays, Chinese, and Indians, beside other ethnic entities. In Malaysia for instance, the various ethnic groups have managed an existence of “cohabitation”. It is generally understood that the breakdown according to ethnicity is among the three major groups, namely “Malays”, “Chinese”, and “Indians”... this includes other groups found in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak (Thompson 2005). The three races have distinct religions, languages, and cultures. This is a complex mixture which does not exist in any West African country. The reason is that the populaces of almost all ECOWAS member states, at least, belong to the same African race even though they may differ in religious affiliations. Where seemingly different races exist in the midst of the African race, like the Tuaregs and Arabs in countries like Niger, Mali, and others, they usually tend to share the same religious affiliation and more or less the same culture as the rest of the society, the matter that narrows the gap of cultural cleavages between such biological and religious differences.

Ironically, despite such a strong commonality among the Africans of this region, one of the prime causes of intra-state conflicts, political instability, social crises, civil wars, and secession movements is related to ethnicity or religious factors. This continues to weaken national resilience and in turn always threatens regional security and stability. That is manifested in the displacement of thousands of people as refugees into neighbouring countries, the involvement of ECOWAS in finding solutions to threats that destabilize the region. Worst to mention, it has led to the total collapse of many states in West Africa. The civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Ivory Coast remain the best examples in this issue. Here lies the strong importance and

connection between national and regional resilience. Even though ECOWAS has not had a stellar track-record of addressing the problems which have entrapped its members, any blame for the organization must be directed, however, to the governments it represents because they have persistently misgoverned (Bamfo 2013).

Consequently, the actions of individual states in this manner impinge upon the performance and efficiency of ECOWAS as a regional entity, undermining thereby its regional resilience. For instance, between 1955 and 2005, more than 200 armed groups were involved in about forty armed conflicts on the African continent. These conflicts could be broadly classified in two categories, namely wars of liberation and internal post-independence wars, while the armed non-state actors have included freedom fighters, guerrillas, separatists, secessionists, terrorists and rebels (Churchill 2006).

ASEAN UNITY IN DIVERSITY

The way countries like Malaysia and Singapore succeeded in maintaining a high degree of peaceful coexistence and national resilience with a mixture of societal elements are impressive. Therefore, the strategies they adopt in this respect are worthy of consideration. One lesson from Malaysian experience in nation-building in this respect would serve as a constructive model for West African political leadership that sincerely intends to promote its national resilience, social cohesion, and political stability. Consequently, its experience enabled it to play a vital role in regional resilience and cooperation.

THE MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE IN NATIONAL RESILIENCE

The Malaysian experience has been one of the impressive stories of success in state-building that continues to mesmerize many African countries. West African states in particular have been among the early countries to look to Malaysia as a model for national resilience and development that serve as sources of motivation.

Inequality for the sake of equality

Malaysian authorities were able to convince the society that the indigenous Malays have the right to economic and political development without annulling the rights of others. Since the Malays were left behind in the wagon of economic and professional domains during the early years of independence, special attention had to be directed towards them with the goal of uplifting their status so that the society could co-exist in a more egalitarian and harmonious relationship. That was the rationale which justified the policy of differential rewards in the distribution of economic, political and administrative powers in favor of the Malays.

For the sake of national resilience and harmony, one of the Malaysian architects of the New Economic Policy (NEP), Ghazali Sahfie once made it clear that: national unity is not attainable without equity and balance between Malaysia's ethnic groups in regard to their participation in the development of the country and sharing the benefits of the national modernization... Malays and other indigenous groups must move into the modern sectors of the economy not merely as workers and not merely as employees. They must have a roughly proportionate stake in ownership and control of urban-type activities (Amin 1994). It was a conviction that the need to promote economic equality for the Malays is consonant with human rights norms, as evinced in "affirmative action" programmes favouring disadvantaged groups (including aborigines) in various parts of the world. But the adverse impact on the rights of other citizens requires that the ambit of such special measures be carefully defined, with an appropriate time-frame (Amin 1994).

So far, this strategy has worked for Malaysia and more precisely for the Malays. However, it has a negative impact as well as expressions of dissatisfaction continue to rise among the other races. This is what has drawn the attention of the government today to make attempts such as the "1 Malaysia concept" to find favourable solutions to help maintain the peaceful coexistence among the Malaysian people.

In the West African context, promoting any ethnic group or tribe by name, or trying to uplift its well-being in the Malaysian way will not be feasible because of the sensitivity of tribal affiliations. This is so because the causes of intra-state conflicts in West Africa arise from a series of interconnected factors. They include the abuse of power, poor governance, corruption and abuse of state resources, ethnicity, religion, poverty, marginalization and social injustice (ACORD Pan African Learning Forum 2010). However, most different ethnic groups are usually identified by particular national regions or provinces where they are considered indigenous. Therefore, to address the secessionist inclinations that mark many West African states, and to solidify national resilience and stability that would strengthen regional resilience and cooperation, the application of the Malaysian experience will rather be directed towards favourable development policies of these disadvantaged regions and provinces, instead of always focusing more on the development of capital cities and other towns at the expense of rural areas. It is an obvious and common fact in Africa that usually one of the ethnic grudges against the central government from certain segments of the society hovers around economic neglect and marginalization as explained. This strategy will be practical if applied by countries like Niger, Mali, and Nigeria where certain regions within each of these states often voice out grievances for marginalization and economic deprivation.

Narrowing down the urban-rural discrepancies

There is another important area where strategic lessons can be drawn from individual ASEAN countries like Malaysia and Thailand. That is the relationship between the urban and rural development which is indispensable for national resilience and stability without which advocated regional resilience would remain on its shaky ground.

In addition to the racial, religious, and cultural disparities, Malaysia was well aware of the possibility of future conflicts resulting from urban-rural development inequality. To this, too,

must be added the prospect of class conflict developing between impoverished rural Malays and the increasingly affluent urban Malays, benefiting from the New Economic Policy (John 1981).

For this reason, the Malaysian and Thai authorities have invested tremendously in the development of rural areas that most villages are provided with at least the basic necessities of life. Electricity, water supply, food, health-care, security, important house items, and others have all become available to remote villages. In addition to this, sufficient schools, teachers, medical services, paved roads have been extended to rural areas. This is the reason why there is sufficient control on people's movement and migration from rural to urban areas. Most common people in the rural areas have no dire need lacking in their hometowns or villages that would compel them to search for better living by migrating to big towns. This no doubt has helped very much in cementing national cohesion and unity. In other words, modernization of rural areas to provide them with the basic needs of life would enhance stability and harmony between the different parts of a particular country.

The fact is that, in most West African countries, this is one of the acute problems that the region faces. Almost all investments in domestic development are invested in towns, and more particularly in the capital cities. This is even more obvious in French West Africa where almost all villages as well as many towns are left rather isolated from the rest of the society, despite the fact that the majority of the populations are normally farmers dwelling in rural areas. These remote villages are in total lack of electricity, water supply, medical facilities, even the means of transportation that is expected to connect them to other neighbouring villages and towns remain a major dilemma. Participatory analysis in Nigeria classified several rural poverty symptoms as follows:

- The poor tend to be located in isolated villages with inadequate road and communications linkages. Most transportation of goods and produce is done through head-loading.
- Poor households lack linkages to influential persons or urban opportunities. They depend largely on income-generating activities with low productivity. They have little access to savings and credit, and own few or no valuable assets (International Fund for Agricultural Development 2001).

This is a common feature in large countries like Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso among others. Therefore, government spending in agriculture should not only be on direct inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, or on extension services and technical assistance to farmers and farmers cooperatives, but also on improvement of rural infrastructures like roads and storage facilities. Creating more jobs in the countryside and making rural areas attractive to live in will reduce the exodus of rural people to cities and provide a larger domestic market for national industries (William 2002).

State-mass relation in Singapore

Singapore also succeeded in fostering the deep feeling of strong loyalty of its citizens towards the political authorities based on its ability to look into their daily demands and needs... The Singapore state has gone beyond the mere provision of the basic necessities of life to its citizens. It has gone to the stage of providing higher welfare to them, such as the availability of luxury goods and means of entertainment that strengthens their attachment to the state and the nation... However, this development has negative ramifications as well, as it has caused rising expectations among the populace... This could exacerbate class fragmentation in society, with

some segments of the younger generation becoming an underclass... Fortunately, this feeling does not develop along racial lines because the government has paid direct attention to the needs and aspirations of the minorities, namely the Malays and Indians (William 2002).

Although Singapore's population is small as well as its land space, yet still it has strengthened national unity simply by working earnestly for the well-being of every racial, religious and cultural entity in the society. In West Africa, Several states like Benin, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Togo are geographically small and have smaller population than Singapore. But yet they failed to meet any of their basic needs, the matter that continues to weaken their national resilience. Consequently, they remain internally fragile, and incapable of contributing constructively to the issue of regional stability and resilience on the macro level. Some of them had even failed as states in the course of their infamous civil wars.

The role of the military in national resilience & stability

Beside the political, economic, and social measures adopted by certain individual ASEAN states to ensure a good degree of national resilience and sustainable stability, there is another measure that has been making considerable contribution in this domain. That is the existence of well-organized military and police forces. National resilience has been much supported by the presence of these two important institutions. In turn, that also led to better prospects in regional resilience and cooperation due to the stability attained in each of these ASEAN countries. This is not denying the fact that there have always been national challenges facing countries like Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. Nonetheless, not one single of these states has ever collapsed like has been the case with some ECOWAS members. Evidence shows that recruitment to African armies is so skewed that it becomes difficult to see the military as diminishing ethnic rivalry (Olatunde 1982). Learning from the discipline in the military forces of these Southeast Asian countries, would serve as a good lesson for most West African countries to rethink about the performances of their military in the past and the present. Their past weak performances in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and even in the present new millennium in Mali and Nigeria in the face of the rise of political militant Islamic movements, call their preparedness and discipline into question. Southeast Asian military do not play any significant role in intra-state conflict due to ASEAN policy on non-interference. However, they have always been successful in safeguarding their national integrity, which is not the case in almost all West African states that have undergone some of form of intra-state armed conflicts.

The military and national instability in West Africa

Moreover, in addition to the discussion above on the role of the military, in West Africa, the police and military institutions have been proven over time to be inefficient in terms of ensuring national stability in most of the countries of this region, and that has its negative impact on regional stability as well. As most West African political authorities continue to be corrupt, the army and the police is equally the same if not worse. They all failed in their most sacred duties of maintaining law and order in the society. Rather, they literally succumbed to political manipulation, high-degree of corruption, clientalism, favoritism, and assassinations. The worst of

all this is the inability of such governments to provide domestic security, curb violent armed movements, and prevent them from growing into rebellions that threaten national integrity. The region is the most coup-prone sub-region in Africa. Antidemocratic behaviour, militarization, corruption, domination of elites, child soldiers and different forms of oppression are all prominent phenomena (Ann-Sofi 2008). Poor political and resource governance have often led to explosions of violence by disgruntled segments of society, and a number of studies have linked bad governance to insecurity in West Africa (Africa – News and Analysis 2013).

The main reason behind the weakness of West African governments to provide domestic security and ensure regional stability is the weakness in their armed forces. At the break out of any important armed resistance, most governments fail to solve the problem on their own.

These kinds of problems have so far been contained respectively by Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and even Indonesia since the time of their military and political victories over communist insurgents. In Malaysia this success is widely accredited to the Malaysian police force. The force has been successful in providing maximum security against threats of national magnitude. Apart from what can be called normal daily crimes, organized crimes are well handled by the police in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. Thailand also is better in this field if compared with West African states. Its approach towards the Muslims in the south remains tragic. However, its national security capability is well-footed. Here lies another important strategic lesson for most West African countries to learn from. In a nut shell, studies on the role, logistics, intelligence, military values, and discipline of these countries is worthy of profound studies. The following elaboration will help in this endeavour.

Modernization of military capability

Southeast Asian states have, in recent years, engaged in military modernization programs to varying degrees. Although the situation does not comply with a strict definition of an arms race, it is also obvious that what Southeast Asian armed forces are doing is not maintaining the military status quo, as they are enhancing existing capabilities as well as acquiring new capabilities (Tan 2004).

They keep pace with the continuous changes needed for enhancing and modernizing military capabilities in the rapidly changing world of today. Means of rapid deployment by land, sea, and air, advanced means of communication, advanced modern weapons, and training continue to be upgraded by their governments to enable the armed forces to deal with challenges to national security and stability in an effective way at any given time.

In contrast, because of corruption and lack of good will, most West African armies remained poorly equipped with obsolete weapons. Little wonder in the armed crisis in Mali in 2013 until the French intervention in 2014, the Malian army was humiliated by Tuareg rebels within the scope of few days, occupying as a result of that two thirds of the country. The crisis was a test for regional resilience that revealed significant decline in ECOWAS ability to handle regional problems on its own.

It is about time for these states to realize the importance of modernizing their military as much as possible as is being done by ASEAN countries. It is true that military modernization and armament might lead to arms race and suspicion among states. However, ill military

preparedness also definitely leads to weakness in national and regional resilience. It is enough, in the case of ECOWAS member states, that this fact has led to state failure on several occasions as stated earlier. They do not, however, need to resort to armament in the same magnitude of ASEAN countries that have their own reasons to do so. But at least, adequate armament and modernization according to their capacities is inevitable for national and regional resilience.

For example, during the Liberian and Sierra Leone civil wars, and the involvement of ECOWAS's military wing known as ECOMOG, as one Nigerian official admitted, one of the reasons for ECOMOG's failure to protect Freetown was the lack of military equipment like helicopter gunships and M1245 (Bangura 2008). Without the financial and logistic support extended by US and UN to the peace initiatives in the two West African states, ECOMOG would not have been able to carry on for several years. For in January 1991, Marlin Fitzwater, the White House spokesman, announced that Bush had authorized the delivery of nearly \$2.8 million worth of 'non-lethal' military equipment to ECOWAS peacekeeping force, as well as \$6 million of emergency funds to assist humanitarian relief operations in Liberia (Volman 1993).

Many economic constraints could be cited as reasons for the ill-preparedness in West Africa. But many ASEAN states have their own share of economic burden as well. Despite all this, even long before their economies were strong, the military build-ups...picked up momentum in the 1980s and 1990s. However, they have since slowed but not halted due to the financial crisis that afflicted the region since 1997 (Tan 2004).

Civilian-military relations

Malaysian, Singapore, and Brunei's political strategies are very constructive in curbing military ambitions. Their good economic performance and mature political behaviour leave no vacuum for the army to step in. Singapore's strategy of compulsory national military service and the continuous presence of military reserves contribute in weakening the army as the only trained institution to monopolize the use of fire arms. The threat to the civilians, or what has been termed the "civil-military problematique", is the risk of the military directing coercion towards the former: that the institution created to protect the civilian polity becomes the threat instead (Kwok 2010). Moreover, universal conscription represented a way in which a low-cost military could be built by avoiding the expense of maintaining a large standing army, allowing resources to be diverted to economic development (Kwok 2010). In fact from the beginning, the senior leaders of the Singaporean Army were told explicitly that their task was not to create a professional army but rather a 'civil service in uniform (Walsh 2007).

In contrast, In West Africa, the military always comes to power under the pretext of saving the nation from corrupt politicians and restoring law and order. In certain context this claim is true, as many civilian governments proved incapable of guaranteeing sustained economic growth, national security, and political stability. But the army itself is a real cause of national instability and lack of domestic security. In a few instances, military personnel apparently perceive that civilian authorities threatened to remove their favoured status and prerogatives in the new society. Military leaders would, in turn, use a coup as a means of exercising their power and influence over civilian authorities. As the number of coups began to rise, the specter of

coups gave other military officers similar ideas, while civilian rulers became more suspicious of military motives (Seitz 1991).

All these phenomena contribute to grave weakness in national resilience. Consequently, regional resilience in many aspects becomes really unrealistic.

The Singaporean strategy could be adopted as a model by West African states only when they have achieved similar economic and political maturity. Because since West Africa is still incohesive in terms of ethnic, tribal, and regional perspectives, training every citizen as a reserve soldier will provide a golden opportunity for secessionists and dissidents to exploit for their narrow interests. But the strategy is important in the future to limit the influence of the army. In fact, there are countries in the region where this experience can be applied in the present time. For instance, Ghana, Gambia, Burkina Faso, and Senegal. However, time and scope limitation do not permit going into details.

The Asian values & national resilience

In many contexts, with some exceptions to the Philippines, all ASEAN states regard their values as different from Western values. That in turn safeguards their interests in various spheres because they are of the conviction that western or European politico-cultural values are unable to deal well with different cultures. European countries within the EU, in addition to the US, emphasize and insist on others to adopt their own model of development based on their own values as a channel for cooperation. This speaks to the important role of common histories in shaping shared values and protocols for action across regions. ASEAN's high regard for its autonomy and the independence of its member states contrasts with the EU's expectation that exerting political and international pressure will result in change (The ASEAN Way 2014). That is why despite objection from the EU and the US, ASEAN went on to admit Myanmar as its member states in the 1997.

Therefore, ASEAN states uphold to these "Asian values" and believe in relatively different models of democracy. But of course, they believe in the preservation of human rights and their political authorities work for guaranteeing honorable life for their citizens. Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, and even others in the mainland Indochina, all believe particularly in the past in what can be described as "soft authoritarianism or paternalistic democracy". The prominent feature of this political "Asian value" is the exchange of respect and good expectations between the rulers and the ruled. Asian values generally refer to ideals stemming from Confucianism that form the basic ethical foundation of Asia, such as the principle of benevolence, familism (with patriarchal authority), nepotism, authoritarianism, national consciousness, community spirit, fervor for education, hard work, and frugality. These values should be seen as fundamentally different from the Western values of individualism, rationalism, human rights, and legalism (Lee 2003).

The emphasis on these values has so far worked in assisting both national and regional resilience as it had provided the region with a kind of identity and sovereignty worthy of recognition. The best positive outcome of this identity is the noticeable pride and dignity that Southeast Asian leaders and educated elite generally display. Again with some exceptions to the Philippines, it is rather not easy to point a finger at any particular Southeast Asian leader who was or who is a real puppet dictated and orchestrated around by an outside power. For example,

in the end of 1990s, the regard for social considerateness and etiquette which the elite hold can be seen for example in ASEAN's response to (then) US Vice President Al Gore's criticism of Malaysia's policies surrounding the dismissal and subsequent incarceration of that country's Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim. Gore's remarks were considered remarkably callous, not only by the Malaysian government, but also by other ASEAN states. ASEAN's member states objected to this as an aggressive imposition of American "democratic values" on the politics of an ASEAN state. ASEAN diplomats rallied together and affirmed a return to the "ASEAN way" as fundamental to their political identity (The ASEAN Way 1998).

Eventually, due to the successful experiences of the early ASEAN states in providing good welfare to their respective societies, the West had to ease its criticism against their socio-political systems and accord due respect to their national and regional sovereignty. In essence, the Asian value system was once considered a powerful engine behind rapid economic growth in Asia (Lee 2003).

DISCUSSION

When the glance is shifted towards the West African arena, the picture is rather pitiful. Putting aside the five Anglophone ECOWAS members, and excluding only two Francophone presidents, namely; Ahmad Sékou Touré who ruled Guinea from independence in 1958 to 1984, and Thomas Sankara who ruled Burkina Faso from 1983 to 1987, all the others from independence until today rule under the blessings and supervision of France. They lack the sense of national patriotism that would motivate them to work hard towards regional resilience.

Asian values: revivalism for Pan-Africanism

The ASEAN values system is a commendable lesson that merits consideration by West African social and political elite. It is about time that real African values compatible with African historical socio-cultural background and development be re-expounded and re-stressed upon one more time. That is because African values had been the strong foundation on which pan-Africanism was based and as a consequence, led to the birth of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). It laid the foundation for the development of a unified ideological movement in the interest of African people (Joseph 1972).

Today, the social and political values that are advocated across the West African region is directed towards the responsibility of the "ruled" to respect, obey, and comply with the law and order of the society as good citizens. The responsibility of the "rulers" has nothing much to do with the "ruled". Rather, the accountability of the rulers' behavior is under the jurisdiction of the "law" and "politicians" to define based on their own whims and desires dictated by their political affiliations. This is what has bestowed the privileges upon many of the political elite of ECOWAS member nations to become international celebrities in the art of political, bureaucratic, and administrative corruption of all kinds without being called into account most of the time. No matter what the verbal criticism and charges of corruption against some Southeast Asian political leaders might entail, they have comparatively performed much better than West African leaders in terms sovereign nationalists working for their people.

Regional resilience and sovereignty

The emphasis on sovereignty and different values compatible with a certain region does not mean a denial of the existence of certain absolute values believed to be universal. But the assertion on factual different values is to be based on carefully-examined principles that are likely to lead to a change in the present African situation. If this comes to pass, then definitely West African states will have a firm ground on which to build national and regional resilience that will lead to the meaningful exercise of national and regional sovereignty.

It is a well-known truth that ASEAN sovereignty has been safeguarded from external interferences. The expansion of ASEAN to ten-member organization is just one example that substantiates this fact. It was successful of forcing the external powers, such as the EU, to deal with ASEAN idea of gathering all ten Southeast Asian countries under one institution. Therefore, unity works as both a principle and an aim (Eero 1997). That was majorly the result of the regional resilience and unity among the nations within the regional institution. On the West African context, the visible weakness in national resilience has led to a wide decay in regional firmness against external dictates and interferences.

The Southeast Asian national resilience and commitment to it can be a good source of inspiration to many West African states. It suffices that with the exception of Thailand, all the states of ASEAN were once under Western colonial yoke for a long duration of time. They also gained independence during the same time as ECOWAS member nations. They existed in once one of the most violent regions of the world where ferocious war of ideologies reigned. Yet they were soon able to emerge as one of the most active regions of great achievement that transformed the conditions of their societies. They adopted many difficult measures in order to be strong individually and cooperate together as a vital region with respect and commitment for its own identity and sovereignty. They were able to define the basis for civil-military relations, as well as the kind of responsibilities expected from the ruled and the rulers.

In reality, their success attracted the attention of many West African states, many of which established active official diplomatic relations with important countries like Malaysia and others with the intention of learning from their experiences in national resilience. Today the majority of African students in Malaysia for example, are from West Africa.

The lesson learned from ASEAN states' good armies, should serve as an eye opener for West African governments in order to overcome the current problem of state failure and its inability to safeguard the national integrity of its own territory. Developing a well-organized and a well-equipped military by ECOWAS member states will definitely strengthen national resilience. That in turn will strengthen regional resilience. In this sense, it will be possible for ECOWAS to have a better standing force since it already has the institution and the framework to do so.

It is irrational that the 32% of African population is in West Africa, yet ECOWAS Standing Force has less than 3000 soldiers. And whenever a regional problem arises that requires the deployment of these forces, the community finds it very strenuous to raise and deploy its force in due time. On many occasions, it fails completely to raise the needed number of troops for a particular mission. It is this kind of national weakness that impacts upon West African regional resilience that opens the door to the unsanctioned unilateral interventions of extra territorial powers like France into the region. Today, the economic and security situations of

most of the West African countries have become more fragile. Poverty plagues the region and of the sixteen states in West Africa, the United Nations Development Program ranks fourteen as low in human development (Natalie 1999).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the experiences of ASEAN in national and regional resilience is worthy of careful consideration by ECOWAS states. The West African countries and region in general are in the dire need of total reformation if they are to meaningfully survive independently, prosper, progress in a respected and descent environment. The bulk of the common masses has been suffering in the mire of unimaginable tribulation and deprivation. Most of the lessons deliberated upon from the successful experiments of ASEAN national resilience can be applied successfully in the West African context if dedicated and sincere leaders are given the opportunity to do so.

Many events from the last few years in West Africa have led to the increasing erosion of national and regional resilience. This is more emphatic in the reemergence of French political and military neo-imperialism in Francophone West Africa. Amazingly, such humiliating reality has been neutralized in South East Asia, where the nations therein and the region as a whole remains independent from neo-realist exploitation and unsanctioned unilateral intervention by any extra-regional power.

REFERENCES

- Ann-Sofi, Ronnback. 2008. *ECOWAS and West Africa's Future: Problems or Possibilities?* Sweden: Umea University.
- Amyr, B. Sajoo. 1994. *Pluralism in "Old Societies and New States*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Africa – News and Analysis. 013. *Understanding extremism and insurgency in West Africa and Sahel*. (online) <http://africajournalismtheworld.com/tag/w-african-government-corruption/> (22 August 2013).
- ACORD Pan African Learning Forum.
- Aurel Croissant, Christoph Trinn. 2009. Culture, Identity and Conflict in Asia and Southeast Asia. *ASIEN*, 13-43.
- Bamfo, Napoleon. 2013. The Political and Security Challenges Facing 'ECOWAS' in the Twenty-first Century, USA, Center for Promoting Ideas, 2013. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 3, February.
- Bangura, Yusuf. 2000. Strategic Policy Failure and Governance in Sierra Leone. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 38, 4.
- Churchill, Ewumbue-Monono. 2006. Respect for international humanitarian law by armed non- state actors in Africa. *International Review of the Red Cross*. Vol. 88. No. 864.
- Eero Palmujoki, Eero. 1997. EU-ASEAN Relations: Reconciling Two Different Agendas. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. Vol.19. No.3.
- International Fund for Agricultural Development. 2001. *Assessment of Rural Poverty: Western and Central Africa*. Italy: Palomby.

- John, L. S. Girling. 1981. *The Bureaucratic Polity in Modernizing Societies*. Singapore: Singapore National Printers Ltd.
- Djiwandono. J. Soedjat. 1991. ZOPFAN: Its Continued Relevance. In *Southeast Asia & Regional Peace*. Kuala Lumpur: ISIS.
- Gillian, Goh. 1998. The 'ASEAN Way' Non-Intervention and ASEAN's Role in Conflict Management. *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*.
- Joseph, E. Harris. 1972. *Africans and Their History*. New York: New American Library.
- Kwok, Jia Chuan. 2010. *Explaining Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia*. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Lee, Hong-Jong. 2003. Development, Crisis, and Asian Values. *East Asian Review*. Vol. 15. No. 2. Pp. 27-42.
- Natalie, E. Brown. 1999. *ECOWAS and the Liberia Experience. Peacekeeping and Self Preservation*. US: US Department of State.
- Olatunde, Odetola. 1982. *Military Regimes and Development*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Seitz, Steven Thomas. 1991. The Military in Black African Politics. *The Journal of Asian and African Studies*. Vol. 25, 1-2.
- Rodney, Walter. 1972. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle-L'Overture Publications.
- Tan, Andrew. 2004. *Force Modernisation Trends in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies.
- Thompson, Willard Scott. 2005. *Ethnic Conflicts in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Volman, Daniel. 1993. Africa & the New World Order. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 31, 1.
- Walsh, Sean P. 2007. The Roar of the Lion City: Ethnicity, Gender, and Culture in the Singapore Armed Forces. In *Armed Forces and Society*. 33 (2).
- William, Minter. 2002. *Africa's Problems African Initiatives*. Washington: Africa Policy Information Center.
- The ASEAN Way, the EU, and Human Rights Governance. (online)
<http://www.democraticunion.eu/2014/10/asean-way-eu-human-rights-governance/> (16 October 2014).

Saley Idrissa Ibrahim mutabaruka33@yahoo.com

Zarina Othman (PhD) zo@ukm.edu.my

Nor Azizan Idris (PhD) nai@ukm.edu.my

Program of Strategic Studies and International Relations
School of History, Politics and Strategic Studies
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Bangi 43600, Selangor
MALAYSIA