

## Editorial

### Entering 2024 With Consolidation

The last weeks of 2023 are special. As always, the closing of the year compels a brief reflection. For many of us this is a moment of celebration and reward for all the accomplishments achieved. For others, the year ends with disappointment and plenty of for improvement notes. But we know down inside, even the ultimate happiness and comfort we feel is not pure. Our comfort seems temporary and contains elements of anxiety. The uncertainty of tomorrow lingers strongly. We may want to believe that the covid pandemic threat has gone, but we know that greater challenges lie ahead. We notice that around us, more people are experiencing consequences of natural disasters, which relates to the dangers of climate change or global warming. Also, no one can help feeling anxiety caused by the world volatility brought by the armed conflict in the Middle East and Ukraine. The terrible consequences of war are broadcasted so massively in the media. Those uncompromising conflicts, although accruing in the other part of the globe, certainly have gradual and multi-dimensional repercussions that affect all in the ASEAN countries. Closer to home and within ASEAN countries, different forms of domestic tensions and other international sub agendas queue for bigger attention. Overall, can we expect a calmer situation next year? It is still difficult to predict. It seems certain that 2024 will be another challenging year. Are we ready for the challenges of 2024?

When we know things will be tough, then we need to prepare. Challenging times need strengths and perseverance. Indeed, maintaining stability needs greater efforts to consolidate. We all need to further consolidate common agendas about our responsibility as part of a caring society. Yes, for the achievement of caring society. The terms and conditions that may refer to differently in our diverse living background. But we all believe that social pillars are critical or even be considered the ultimate achievement, may we call them social ideals, social safety net, social capital, or social development. What priority questions should we ask ourselves? What question should we address regarding our mission as social workers and the general social service workforce? We represent the cause for a caring society. We want social investment and care for the underprivileged to flourish. We want people to believe that democracy, economy, and social solidarity goes hand in hand and binds together. There is a need to continue consolidation of our value commitments.

Let us continue to plant the seed and gain ground. There are several factors that are commonly associated with constructing and maintaining a caring society. **First** is the unwavering commitment to social goals. This may be the least understood, as we often forget how to create balance between all pillars of society. The economy assumes that benefit will eventually benefit all, by its invisible hands. Well, that is not true. All relevant actors in the economy should realize the importance of inclusivity and make efforts to make sure that all segments of the society, without discrimination, participate productively. This is why we must acknowledge the ideals of ASEAN Socio-cultural Community (the ASCC) vision to develop communities that are inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic. We must also take note of the points within the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025 that had underscore firm principles regarding rights-based action and mainstreaming for the implementation of mobilization framework of the ASEAN Decade of Persons with Disabilities 2011-2020. All these ideals should be aired continuously, evaluated and upheld by new upcoming ASEAN Leaders. Commitment and continuation are very important. **Second**, we must give attention to the government capacity to implement. The technocratic dimensions relate directly to the achievement of these goals. We know that social spending will play an important role in this. Acknowledging the various funding strategies adopted by ASEAN countries, we may only underline that social expenditure will only be effective when given clear directions for all its programs and activities. It is therefore important that we study documents such as the ASCC Blueprint 2025, which outlines the strategic directions and key actions for the next decade. **Third**, accountability management or the institutional dimension to social service. More and more people nowadays are critical about the proper use of public funds. Social welfare activities, either run by the government, the private sector or community chests, all demands responsibility. The public expect transparency, an open management of the use of resources. Some countries have managed to secure national standards for social service. An accreditation of institutions for the assurance of quality of decision making, delivery and provisions of services.

The three dimensions mentioned above; namely the value or ideology, technocratic and institutional accountability system are crucial in the era of open society. Democracy has brought about open voices and improvement in the quality of people's representation. The era of openness has also brought the demand for professionalism. Accountability, auditability, and transparency have become keywords that people use to judge all forms of public activities, now includes social work and the whole running of the social welfare system. We then must better prepare our management systems, equipped with modern management technology. The year ahead will also be characterized by the popular use of artificial intelligence. The world still wait in anticipation of what technology will have to offer to public affairs and to the domain of social services. These new and innovative means have already been discussed intensively in the business sector and the government of many countries. It is important too for us to explore and be open minded towards any innovative offers that can improve the working of each of our social welfare systems.

Thank you

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