



ASEM Symposium on “Inter-Regional Partnership for Sustainable Development”



Bangkok, Thailand, 25-26 May 2017

Summary Report
ASEM Symposium on Inter-Regional Partnership for
Sustainable Development
(Bangkok, Thailand, 25-26 May 2017)

1. Thailand hosted the ASEM Symposium on “Inter-Regional Partnership for Sustainable Development” on 25-26 May 2017 in Bangkok, which was an initiative announced by the Prime Minister of Thailand at the 11th ASEM Summit in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on 15-16 July 2016, to promote cooperation between Asia and Europe in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. The Symposium attracted more than 170 participants from 25 ASEM members. Panelists from Thailand, the EU, China, Germany, Viet Nam, Finland, Japan, Switzerland and the Philippines were invited to share their experiences in sustainable development field and explore ways to promote ASEM cooperation in achieving the SDGs.

3. In his opening remarks, **Mr. Songpol Sukchan**, Director-General of the Department of European Affairs and ASEM Senior Official of Thailand, emphasized the strengths between Asia and Europe which could complement each other to promote further ASEM cooperation in sustainable development. Mr. Sukchan cited the **Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP)** as a key guiding principle for Thailand in achieving sustainable development for decades and presented Thailand’s “**SEP for SDGs Partnership**”, which had been undertaken with partners from various parts of the world, such as Lao PDR, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Lesotho, Fiji and Tonga through the “Sustainable Community Development Model based on the Application of SEP”. Beyond that, the “SEP for SDGs Partnership” had also been implemented through triangular cooperation in North-South-South cooperation, reflecting Thailand’s readiness to share its SEP experiences with all partners.

4. The Symposium was divided into two sessions: (1) Inter-Regional Partnership towards Achieving Sustainable Development and (2) Approaches to Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

4.1 Session 1: Inter-Regional Partnership towards Achieving Sustainable Development moderated by **Dr. Darnp Sukontasap**, ASEF governor for Thailand.

- **Ms. Brenda King**, President of the Sustainable Development Observatory, European Economic and Social Committee, explained the organisation’s sustainable development area of work. The EU has developed **overarching strategies** by setting up platforms aimed to gather all stakeholders to find a balanced way to secure a sustained community. As the civil society in the EU attached high attention to environmental issues, the government sector had been striving to transform its economy into a **low-carbon economy** that could also meet the people’s needs. Such transformation might affect some industries and

communities. Therefore, **long-term planning** needed to be put in place to oversee the implementing process.

- **Mr. Jerome Pons**, Head of Cooperation, Delegation of the European Union to Thailand, highlighted the importance of the **global commitments**. The Paris Agreement, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 are examples of international efforts in implementing the SDGs that every country should comply with and study to link with its domestic policies. Mr. Pons reaffirmed the EU's commitment to support the implementation of the SDGs within the EU and with partner countries. As the world's largest donor for ODA, the EU would continue to increase its financial assistance to the rest of the world. Building on regional approach, the EU had implemented regional programmes to support development in the Pacific, Africa and ASEAN by sharing its lessons learnt, believing that it would work in recipient regions as it has been successful with the EU.

- **Dr. Yang Nan**, Senior Engineer, ASEM Water Resources Research and Development Center, elaborated on the ASEM Water Resources Research and Development Center under ASEMWaterNet, a subsidiary organ of ASEM. The organisation was based on the principle of voluntary participation and its main missions were to set up **effective working network**, strengthen information sharing and communication, identify priority areas and themes and promote Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM).

- **Mr. Stefan Helming**, Country Director, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), pointed out 5 principles towards the implementation of SDGs: (1) **Universality of SDGs**. Every country must be aware of the universality of the SDGs and thus set up its own suitable approach to accomplish the SDGs (2) **Integrated approach**. Every country must adopt integrated approach covering economic, social and environmental dimensions as well as as be flexible towards the implementation of the SDGs. (3) **Shared responsibility**. SDGs are not only the government's goals, but every sector in the society must contribute to the process. (4) **Leave no one behind**. To drive a country to sustainability, no one could be excluded and left underdeveloped. Development gap and inequality must be decreased and tackled and (5) **Accountability**. Follow-up reports and assessment must be put in place with transparency.

- **Ms. Nguyen Le Thuy**, Deputy Director General, Department of Science, Education, Natural Resources and Environment, Viet Nam's Ministry of Planning and Investment underlined the importance of **funding and taxation** in achieving the SDGs. Reducing tax evasion and corruption through strengthened national regulations would improve domestic governance and transparency. Nevertheless, Official Development Assistance (ODA) remained a unique and important driver of development cooperation and would be one of the crucial priorities of the funding towards the SDGs.

4.2 Session 2: Approaches to Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals moderated by **Ms. Grazyna Pulawska**, Project Manager, Political and Economic Department, ASEF

- **Mr. Kitti Wasinondh**, Executive Board Member of Thailand Sustainable Development Foundation, elaborated on the **Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP)** as a means to achieve balanced use of resources, social capital, environmental reserves and cultural wealth for a more sustainable path of economic growth. Apart from building a strong and quality foundation by combining knowledge and virtues, moderation, reasonableness and prudence are key principles of the SEP that could be adopted in every sector in the society. The SEP is not against the open market system, but rather the SEP would help to ensure that the market would be run responsibly and sustainably. Furthermore, as a main guiding principle for development, Thailand has inserted the SEP in its National Economic and Social Development Plan under supervision of relevant agencies to oversee the implementing process. In the discussion that followed, the SEP was cited as a great example to achieve the SDGs by engaging relevant stakeholders, so that development approach fit the needs of different societies, as well as focusing on the involvement of people, balanced use of resources and social responsibility.

- **Ms. Marja Innanen**, Deputy Secretary General, Ministerial Advisor National Commission on Sustainable Development, Prime Minister's Office of Finland, underscored the importance of **involvement of stakeholders** and **awareness raising** in the implementation of the SDGs. As implementing the SDGs inevitably could affect every actor in the society, the government must bring together a whole range of different constituents and make them understand the impacts and benefits of the implementation of the SDGs which would finally lead to greater benefit of the whole community - especially with the private sector whose products will be value-added, increasing the credibility to its customers.

- **Mr. Tetsuro Yoshida**, Senior Policy Researcher, Integrated Policies for Sustainable Societies, Japan's Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, presented Japan's point of views towards sustainable development. Japan strived to be a leader in creating a better future, in which the three dimensions of sustainable development, namely economic, social and environmental, would be improved in **an integrated manner**. Eight priority areas and policies had also been selected to narrow down significant concerns. Nevertheless, implementation gap between policies and action was emphasized as another obstacle to achieve the SDGs.

- **Dr. Pedro Basabe**, Head of the Swiss Regional Disaster Risk Reduction and Rapid Response Office in Bangkok, stressed the importance of **Disaster risk management** as another important aspect of the implementation of the SDGs. Disasters are major setback undermining years of economic growth and social development and hindering the attainment of sustainable development. Therefore, managing disaster risk would greatly contribute to sustainable development and

reduce the impact of disaster. The government should set up a comprehensive policy to reduce the impact of disaster as well as recognize international instruments in a coherent, complementary and holistic approach.

- **Mr. Reynaldo R. Cancio**, Director for National Policy and Planning, the National Economic Development Authority of the Philippines, cited disconnection between **political cycle and development planning cycle** as a key challenge in implementing the SDGs. With short to medium-term planning, reform is difficult to achieve. Furthermore, changing priorities and means of implementation between administrations led to discontinuity of efforts, especially when reform needs a long-term action. Long-term aspirations towards the SDGs was subsequently underscored. Mr. Cancio shared the Philippines' experience in setting up a twenty-five-year vision, aiming for a prosperous, middle-class society where poverty was eradicated, as well as a healthy, smart, innovative, resilient and high-trust society. This vision would be an anchor for development planning across administrations and a guideline for engaging with domestic and international partners. Public consultation and technical studies would also be organized to ensure the involvement of stakeholders and to meet a balanced and moderate ways of development.

5. On 26 May 2017, more than 30 participants joined an excursion to Khao Hin Sorn Royal Development Study Center. After a briefing on the history, objectives and current projects of the Center, participants also gained practical knowledge on the application of SEP at the Learning Center for Sufficiency Economy and the Botanical and Herbal Garden. New Theory agriculture based on the SEP and herbal processing products were demonstrated to the participants as means for the Thai people to wisely manage the land and to earn extra income within the household.

For panelists' presentations, please visit <http://www.europetouch.in.th>