

Executive Summary

Quick Research on the Urgent Issue of ASEAN Community : Sustainable Development

This quick research aims; (1) to understand and analyses the development of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, (2) to study the development of SDGs concept within ASEAN communities and to explore roles that Thailand can play to take the lead in promoting the SDGs within ASEAN by using the sufficiency economy philosophy as a tool, and (3) to offer recommendations at practical level regarding the application of SDGs within ASAEN and Thailand.

Researchers underwent five steps to achieve these aims;

Step 1: Literature review of relevant information regarding UN’s SDGs. This initial step was to understand in depth the concept of SDGs; its history as well as reactions from countries and actors globally. Researchers come across different sources of information including relevant UN resolutions, guidelines, text books and news articles.

Step 2 : Analyzing ASEAN’s existing strategies on sustainable development. Within this step, the research tried to establish the linkage between existing ASEAN development policy and UN’s SDGs. Likewise, Policies of each member state were subject to examination.

Step 3: Exploring possible roles that Thailand can play to take the lead of promoting SDGs by using the sufficiency economy philosophy as a tool. Researchers tried to examine practices of Thai government and relevant actors in promoting the concept of sufficiency economy in different international forums in the past. Along side with the sufficiency economy philosophy, the researchers also tried to explore other relevant policies and concepts emerged within Thai community that may contribute to the sustainable development. Main idea of this chapter was to explore utilization of Thai concepts to fill in existing gaps of ASEAN community in addressing SDGs.

Steps 4: “ Case study” of application of sufficiency economy in ASEAN. The research focused particularly on the case of Lao PDR in the area of *Huai Son - Huai Sua Agricultural Development and Service Center* (in Vientien Capital) where local authorities and population have applied Thailand’s sufficiency economy philosophy to improve their living standard.

Step 5: Focus group consultation was organized and participated by fifteen experts from government authorities and academic. The aim of this consultation was to together explore ideas in addressing research core question: utilization of sufficient economy as a tool to promote SDGs within Thailand and in ASEAN. Ideas obtained through this process contribute to form recommendations contained in the final part of the research.

Research findings:

- UN's SDGs reflect balance between social, economic and environmental development. The goals are covered by 5 P's principles namely: People (social), Prosperity (economic), Planet (environment), Peace, and Partnership. Additionally, application of these goals require inclusive approach with no one in the society should be left behind.

- Human development is at the heart of ASEAN's development strategy. The words "people-oriented" and "people-centred" have been repeatedly deployed in a number of ASEAN's instruments. The real practical application of this concept is however yet to be examined. Some gaps can be still identified in terms of treatment of individuals in the community. The question of effective human rights mechanism, addressing marginal groups and the issue of participation of individuals at the regional policy level remain challenges of ASEAN.

- Thailand has applied a set of seven strategies in moving forward with sufficiency economy including; (1) supporting agricultural activities and development in rural areas, (2) promoting education, (3) promoting the sufficiency economy philosophy in international level, (4) supporting application of the concept in services, tourism, and small industries, (5) engaging in active PR strategy of the concept, (6) application of the concept in activities related to national security, and (7) exploring greater opportunities in applying the concept in practical level. This set of strategies form a constructive tool in order to apply SDGs, thus can serve in filling in gaps within ASEAN.

- The research looked into different models implementing the sufficiency economy philosophy. Lao PDR model, Huai Son - Huai Sua Agricultural Development and Service Center, is one of the projects demonstrating the success of the implementation of sufficiency economy philosophy. This project contributed to poverty reduction of local people in the area.

Recommendations:

1. Member states of ASEAN should look into possibility to implement the sufficiency economy philosophy. The Lao PDR project can serve as a model. Additionally, People oriented approach already recognized within ASEAN can be used as a tool to implement the principle.

2. A knowledge management program should be put in place in order to gather experiences obtained from the implementation of relevant projects. Stakeholders in Thailand and in the region could also benefit from trainings under this knowledge management program.

3. A number of research topics in relation with the term people-oriented, people-centred, and sufficiency economy philosophy could be further explored. This can be in the form of action research, such as “participation action research: PAR”, and “research and development: R&D”.

4. Legal infrastructure is in place in Thailand to promote sufficiency economy philosophy and people oriented / people centred approach. Relevant laws of Thailand such as the gender equality act recently enacted could be identified as model for other countries.

5. Civil society has been recognized and has participated in certain decision making processes in Thailand. This model can be beneficially to other ASEAN member states.

6. A number of UN regional offices are located in Bangkok. Thailand should explore on how to best use the presence of international experts to expand and to promote the sufficiency economy philosophy.