

Concept Note – Terms of Reference for the ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue

1. Background and Rationale

In 2015, ASEAN Leaders adopted the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 with the aim of building a people-centred ASEAN Community that leaves no one behind and uplifts the standards of living of ASEAN peoples. Also in the same year, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 70/1 “*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*” that sets 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 associated targets to the pursuit of global development and of “win-win” cooperation.

Since then, recognising the potential to achieve the goals of enhancing regional integration while helping ASEAN Member States attaining SDGs at the same time, ASEAN has been promoting complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, otherwise known as the “Complementarities Initiative.” To this end, ASEAN mandated Thailand to serve as the ASEAN Coordinator on this issue since 2016. The essence of the Complementarities Initiative is to develop key regional catalysts that cut across the various SDGs and enable the region as a whole to advance towards the twin goals of implementing the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It envisages a cross-cutting approach, recognising that sustainable development cuts across all three pillars of the ASEAN Community.

As part of this endeavour, Thailand and UNESCAP organised the High-Level Brainstorming Dialogue on Enhancing Complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLBD) in Bangkok in 2017 and 2018. As one of the outcomes of the first HLBD, Thailand, UNESCAP and the ASEAN Secretariat undertook the Complementarities Report¹ to develop strategies and policy recommendations that will help leverage the Complementarities Initiative. The Report identifies five priority areas of regional cross-cutting development catalysts namely (1) Poverty Eradication (2) Infrastructure and Connectivity (3) Sustainable Consumption and Production (4) Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and (5) Resilience.

Promotion of cooperation in these priority areas will help achieve both the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Report was submitted to the 9th ASEAN-UN Summit in Manila in 2017 for notation and was subsequently launched at the 2nd HLBD on

¹ <http://www.mfa.go.th/asean/contents/files/asean-media-center-20180213-164208-619213.pdf>

30 March 2018 in Bangkok. It also recommends seven flagship projects,² including the establishment of an **ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue**.

Most recently, the ASEAN Leaders' Vision for a Resilient and Innovative ASEAN adopted at the 32nd ASEAN Summit in Singapore on 27 April 2018 reiterated that one of ASEAN's key principles is that "ASEAN shall become a sustainable community that promotes economic and social development alongside environmental protection through effective mechanisms to meet the current and future challenges of its people, while leaving no one behind" and "reaffirms its commitment towards the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as its related goals and targets, as well as the Paris Agreement."

2. Objectives

While there are already a number of programmes and institutions that deal with promoting sustainable development in ASEAN Member States, what is still lacking is support facilities that would focus on promoting sustainable development cooperation at the regional level for ASEAN as a whole. Such regional support facilities would aim to help facilitate, promote and coordinate ASEAN efforts on sustainable development cooperation, cutting across all three pillars. Such efforts would be anchored on the "Complementarities Initiative" that seeks to find synergies between ASEAN Community-building and the attainment of the SDGs. They would focus on reinforcing regional catalysts that enable States to better achieve multiple SDGs simultaneously. They would advance cooperation through specific sustainable development projects with external parties of ASEAN including, for example, the ASEAN-EU dialogue on sustainable development.

The ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue is envisaged for this purpose. Such a Centre would act as a regional catalyst to (1) promote research on specific issues on sustainable development of mutual interest and (2) support dialogue within ASEAN, and between ASEAN and external parties on sustainable development cooperation. The Centre would seek to promote sustainable development cooperation using a cross-cutting approach and complement the work of existing centres within ASEAN that deal with sustainable development, and develop networks of cooperation amongst these centres.

² (1) Improving Nutrition and Reducing Stunting in ASEAN (2) ASEAN Council for Sustainable Infrastructure (3) ASEAN Resources Panel (4) Greening Small and Medium Enterprises in ASEAN (5) ASEAN Risk Transfer Mechanism (6) **ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue** and (7) ASEAN Programme for Knowledge and Outreach on Complementarities

3. Scope of Work, Role and Functions

(A) Sustainable development studies

3.1. To promote and support research on sustainable development, particularly those that promote cooperation at the ASEAN or regional level.

3.2. To enhance capacity-building of practitioners and institutions on sustainable development issues such as, *inter alia*, on data collection and development of indicators for SDGs monitoring and implementation, through training and workshops.

3.3. To promote awareness of sustainable development in ASEAN.

(B) Dialogue on sustainable development

3.4. To facilitate consultations and dialogue among stakeholders through the annual High-Level Brainstorming Dialogue (HLBD) and other appropriate frameworks. The Centre will serve as the secretariat of the HLBD.

3.5. To strengthen and promote dialogue among relevant institutions including academic institutions involved in sustainable development work.

3.6. To initiate and facilitate ASEAN Member States in implementing concrete projects especially in the five priority areas of the Complementarities Initiative.

3.7. To develop networks of cooperation with other centres in the region that deal with sustainable development cooperation such as, *inter alia*, the ASEAN Institute for Green Economy (AIGE) in Myanmar, and Sustainable Development Solutions Network in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

3.8. To enhance cooperation between ASEAN and external partners such as, *inter alia*, the United Nations including UNESCAP and UNDP and other related agencies, the World Bank and other international financial institutions, the EU, Germany as ASEAN's Development Partner and other partners.

4. Potential areas of work

The work on sustainable development cooperation of the Centre will focus on, but not necessarily be limited to, the following areas:

4.1. the five priority areas of regional development catalysts of the Complementarities Initiative, as identified in the Complementarities Report;

4.2. other related areas that can promote sustainable development in ASEAN, such as climate change, disaster risk reduction, marine pollution, marine economy, sustainable urbanization, and malnutrition and stunting, and support for the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) initiative, as agreed to by ASEAN and between ASEAN and its external partners.

The approach will emphasise development and implementation of concrete projects with clear timelines that will generate concrete results in the area of

sustainable development cooperation that will benefit primarily the peoples of ASEAN. The ultimate objective is to enable ASEAN to simultaneously meet the twin goals of promoting a people-centred ASEAN Community that leaves no one behind and the attainment of the SDGs.

5. Budget and Organisational Setup

5.1. **Budget** The Centre will operate within the existing Center for Research on Sustainable Leadership, College of Management of Mahidol University (CMMU) in Bangkok, Thailand. The costs for the establishment, launching and operation of the Centre will be borne by the Royal Thai Government. Specific projects on sustainable development cooperation to be pursued by the Centre will be financed by contributions, on a case-by-case and on a voluntary basis by Thailand, interested ASEAN Member States and interested external partners. To date, external partners such as the UN and related agencies, the World Bank, the EU, Germany, Norway and Switzerland have indicated interest to participate in specific projects to be agreed to by ASEAN and the relevant external partner. There will be no mandatory financial contributions from ASEAN Member States.

5.2. **Executive Director** Thailand will appoint an Executive Director of the Centre, in close consultations with ASEAN Member States, to be responsible for management and work of the Centre under the guidance from a Governing Council.

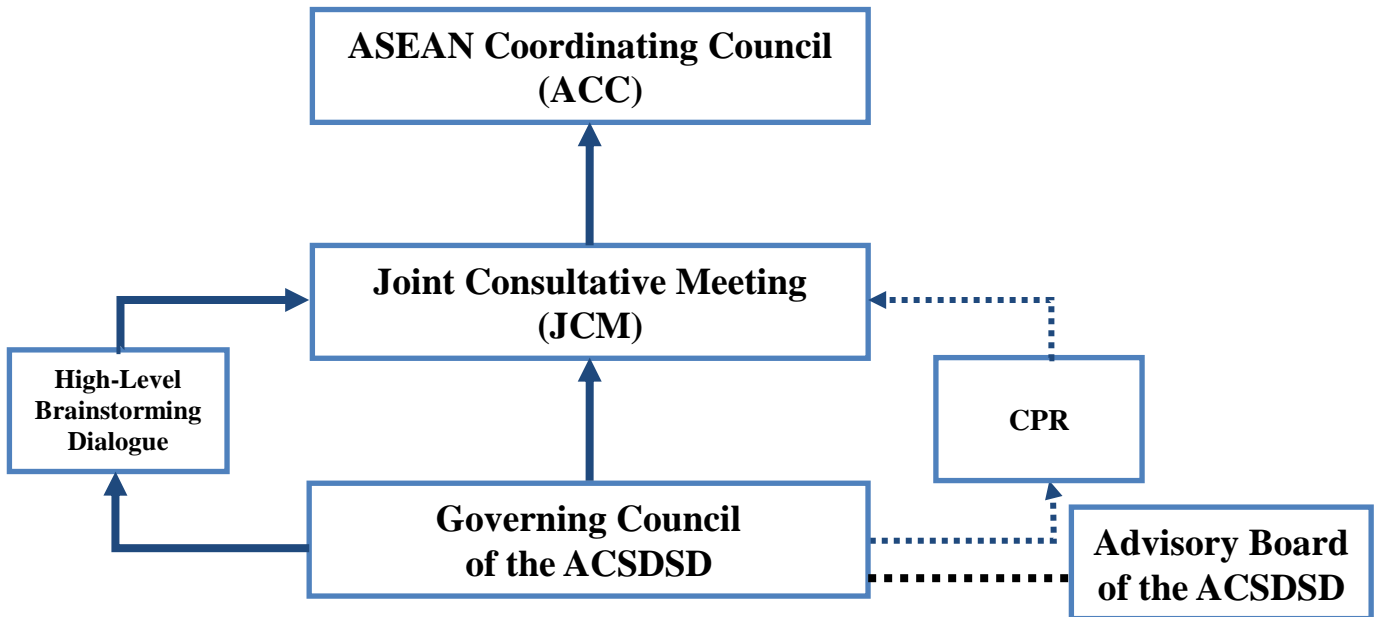
5.3. **A Governing Council** will be the policy guidance body of the Centre, comprising (1) Ambassadors of ASEAN Member States to Thailand, in their capacity as Permanent or Alternate Representatives of ASEAN Member States to UNESCAP, or a designated senior representative from each ASEAN Member State and (2) a representative from the ASEAN Secretariat. The Council is envisaged to meet twice a year, with one meeting probably back-to-back with the annual High-Level Brainstorming Dialogue in Bangkok, or as required, to review policy and to ensure that projects/activities under the Centre are appropriate and in accordance with ASEAN principles, processes and priorities. Decision-making of the Governing Council will be by consensus. The Governing Council will develop its own rules of procedure.

The work of the Centre will be supported by the ASEAN Secretariat, especially the Sustainable Development Directorate and the ASCC Monitoring and Analysis Directorate, under ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department (ASCC Department), who will coordinate with relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies across all three pillars of the ASEAN Community and other departments of the ASEAN Secretariat on the implementation of projects/activities of the Centre. The ASEAN Secretariat will also provide the Centre with relevant information and statistics, when so required.

5.4. **An Advisory Board** will play an advisory role for the Centre. It would comprise representatives of ASEAN Member States, and relevant ASEAN's

external partners, such as UNESCAP, UNDP Regional Office in Bangkok and other UN agencies, the World Bank, ASEAN Dialogue Partners, Sectoral Dialogue Partners and Development Partners. The Advisory Board is envisaged to meet once a year to provide support to the Governing Council. The Advisory Board will develop its own rules of procedure.

5.5. Reporting Mechanism Due to the cross-sectoral nature of sustainable development issues, the Centre will report its work and progress including the outcome of the annual High-Level Brainstorming Dialogue to the Joint Consultative Meeting (JCM) as the primary reporting mechanism, through Thailand as the ASEAN Coordinator on Sustainable Development Cooperation. The JCM will then report to the ASEAN Coordinating Council. The CPR will be notified of progress in the implementation of the Complementarities Initiative and of the work of the Centre. The flow chart of the envisaged reporting mechanism is as follows:



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