



Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.



CONCEPT NOTE

ASEAN-China-UNDP Symposium: Innovation in Achieving the SDGs and Eradicating Poverty

4–5 September 2019
Ha Noi, Viet Nam

1. Background and Rationale

ASEAN has made significant achievements in sustainable development and in lifting the standard of living of its people. One of ASEAN's notable successes includes poverty reduction, with the number of people living with less than US\$1.25 per day declining from 1 in 2 persons in 1990 to 1 in 8 persons in 2015.¹ The research report on *Financing the Sustainable Development Goals in ASEAN: Strengthening Integrated National Financing Frameworks to Deliver 2030 Agenda* also found that ASEAN has made significant progress in achieving a number of key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) namely SDG 4, which focuses on quality education, with primary school completion rates being above 95 percent for all ASEAN Member States (AMS) and SDG 3 in the areas of health such as maternal mortality and tuberculosis prevalence, which are steadily declining in almost all AMS.

Despite marked progress, many development areas need further improvement as the challenges ahead may undermine the gains attained thus far. For instance, while primary school enrolment rates are on the rise, decumbent enrolment rates for secondary education remain an issue of concern. In six AMS, secondary enrolment rates are at 75 percent or below. Equitable access to health care also is an intractable quandary in many parts of ASEAN with only four countries having achieved universal health coverage. Moreover, while 90 percent of the ASEAN people have access to improved water sources, only 72 percent have access to improved sanitation sources.

¹ ASEAN People Then and Now

The above-mentioned data and analysis imply the need for further efforts in making sustainable development a reality for the people of ASEAN. The AMS are currently accelerating their implementation of sustainable development particularly under the umbrella of the SDGs. Yet, one of the major barriers to effective implementation of the SDGs is often found in weak institutions and systems of governance. During the *ASEAN-China-UNDP Symposium on Localising the SDGs and Realising Poverty Eradication held in 2018 in Siem Reap, Cambodia*, it was raised that challenges in SDGs implementation in AMS entail insufficient capacity, especially of the local governments, lack of reliable data and monitoring system, and incoherent policies between the national and sub-national level as well as limited financial resources. These obstacles are compounded by the fact that some SDGs are cross-cutting and interconnected which necessitates strategic direction and nexus thinking from all relevant stakeholders. Last but not least, ASEAN's vulnerabilities to disaster add additional and intricate dimension to the implementation of SDGs.

Against this backdrop, the need for more innovative ways to implement and to localise the SDGs is ever more compelling. Exponential scale and ambition of the SDGs require innovation in development and innovation for development including bringing innovation into the development thinking, planning and programming. In this regard, strengthening and optimising the utilisation of innovations could help AMS to forge ahead with the SDGs. Certainly, innovation is not only a focus of SDG 9 but also a key enabler of most, if not all, of the goals. The high-reaching spirits of the 2030 Agenda will require fundamental changes in the ways in which health, energy, food, water, housing, welfare, mobility and other goods and services are delivered, distributed and consumed, where innovations can play pivotal roles.

The importance of innovation in achieving the SDGs has been recognised at all level. In this context, *innovation is construed as new forms of social practice, institutional change and organization as well as new or improved technological products and processes and is not confined to the area of technological and scientific innovation* (UNCTAD 2017). Indicatively, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development announced the launch of a "Technology Facilitation Mechanism" (TFM) in order to support the implementation of the SDGs. The TFM facilitates multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnership through the sharing of information, experiences, best practices and policy advice among AMS, civil society, the private sector, the scientific community, United Nations entities and other stakeholders.

The importance of innovation is further emphasised by the ASEAN Leaders when adopting the ASEAN Declaration on Innovation at the 31st ASEAN Summit. Among others, the Declaration promotes the use of science, technology, and innovation (STI) in realising the SDGs by promoting further use of STI to address global challenges and development matters such as food security, gender equality, health, energy, water, transport, environment, empowerment of vulnerable groups and disaster-related problems, so as to improve the

well-being of the ASEAN people in the urban and rural communities. There have increasingly been ASEAN's initiatives that support the use of innovations to harness the actualisation of the SDGs such as the use of big data analytics in e-health sharing network and the getting to Zero social innovation of the health sector, the Future of Work initiative by the labour sector, women's empowerment through digital and financial innovation by ASEAN Committee on Women, bridging science and decision making in risk monitoring review project by disaster management sector as well as the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) and the *Smart* Blueprint of ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community initiative, among others.

Nevertheless, we must ensure that innovation in and innovation for sustainable development is responsible and inclusive. And it is critical to mitigate the unintended divisive consequences of utilisation of innovation while embracing its potentials to amplify development outcomes. Henceforth the 4th Symposium will serve as a platform for governments, policy makers, development practitioners and experts, private sector, academe, civil society organizations, community leaders and relevant stakeholders to think together and share with each other visions, practices, lessons-learned and future plans on innovation in achieving SDGs and eradicating poverty in ASEAN.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the Symposium are:

- a. To provide a learning platform for policy makers for AMS and other stakeholders to share vision, knowledge and good practices on utilization of innovation in achieving the SDGs and in eradicating poverty;
- b. To discuss and share policy options, success stories, and possible action points for policy makers in AMS, ASEAN sectoral bodies and relevant stakeholder;
- c. To promote exchange of views and ideas among the participants on how to further strengthen the roles of innovation and ensure inclusive approach in achieving the SDGs and in eradicating poverty; and
- d. To provide strategic direction and inputs to the research on Emerging Models for Inclusive Innovation: an ASEAN perspective.

3. Area of Focus

There are several angles to conceptualize and define "innovation" and its utilization to achieve the SDGs involves inevitably expansive areas. In many cases, innovation is understood in the realm of science and technology. They are indeed crucial and have contributed to actualizing the SDGs. As such, devising concerted strategies for AMS to adopt and strengthen

the roles of science and technology is one of the anchors of this Symposium. Nevertheless, innovation can also be construed from broader perspective. In its broader usage, innovation is regarded as system model that focuses on identifying more effective solutions to development challenges. Innovation can be about dynamic experimentation for problem-solving; incremental improvements to existing systems; supporting the redesign of public service delivery; engaging stakeholders of different demographics; and encouraging digitization and data innovation.

At the same time, development problems and solutions might differ from one country to another, from one region to another as well as from one locality to another. Therefore, innovation model should not be considered as one-size-fit-all.

With the background above, this Symposium will focus on the following areas:

1. Pro-poor and inclusive innovation

In many cases, the benefits from innovations can only be enjoyed by certain groups of society. The poor and marginalized, or those living in remote areas often do not have access to the benefits offered by (especially technological) innovations. Therefore, while AMS endeavor to generate more innovations to accelerate the implementation of SDGs, it is also important to extend the beneficiaries and ensure that innovations are pro-poor and inclusive.

2. Social innovation

In addition to technological innovation in achieving the SDGs, AMS can also benefit from social innovation, which is generally held to refer to innovations in social relationships, practices and structures that are primarily aimed at addressing social needs and at improving human well-being. There have been examples of social innovations that help fulfil the needs of the people. For example, Thailand has several successful social enterprises, such as Grass-roots Innovation Company, which promotes integrated organic farming by smallholders in rural Thailand, and ChangeVentures, which raises funds from social investors and social investment funds to support other social enterprises.²

3. Policy innovation

Policy innovation denotes government's approaches and strategies (innovation) in improving policy making process to result in better outcomes. They may include innovative methods of engaging the public in policy, program and service development (e.g. participatory budgeting, crowdsourcing), innovative methods of evaluating the efficacy of policies, programs and services (e.g., behavioral insights, service design methods) and innovative methods of funding (e.g., social finance).

² UNCTAD, *New Innovation Approaches to Support the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals*, 2017.

4. Partnership innovation

Innovations can grow faster through collaboration among stakeholders. Each stakeholder possesses certain advantages in promoting innovations, requiring collaboration and partnership among stakeholders. The stakeholders can be state and non-state actors and the collaboration may include transfer of technology and knowledge sharing among AMS.

5. Science and technology innovation (STI)

STI is centered on how science and technology can further contribute to achieving the SDGs. At the same time, it also seeks to address potential negative impacts of technologies. This is due to the fact that some technologies can also bring potential impacts, for instance, to environment.

4. Targeted participants

This Symposium will gather policy makers from AMS, representatives from ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, representatives from China and representatives from ASEAN Secretariat. In addition, development practitioners and experts, international organizations, private sector, and innovation communities, community leaders, representatives from academic institutions among others, will also take part in in the Symposium.

5. Format

The symposium will be held for two days. Within two days, the participants will participate in the following main sessions:

a. Visit to a local community / innovation hub

The visit will provide the participants with an opportunity to directly interact with a local / innovation community (TBC), hear their views and learn from their lived experiences. The visit is expected to inform the participants and help shape the discussions during the subsequent sessions.

b. Keynote address

c. Panel discussions

d. Roundtable discussions

e. Presentation on the initial research findings

A research will be conducted to complement the symposium. Focusing on the ASEAN way of promoting inclusive innovations, the research on Emerging Models for Inclusive Innovation: an ASEAN perspective will provide analysis on fundamental elements of inclusive innovation and showcase case studies and good practices from AMS. Preliminary findings of the symposium will be presented at the Symposium for further guidance and inputs.

6. Date and Venue

The Symposium will be held on 4-5 September 2019 at Sheraton Hotel in Hanoi, Viet Nam.

7. Expected Outcome

The Symposium, together with the research report, are expected to be successful knowledge-sharing platform for policy makers from AMS and relevant stakeholders on the potential strategies to strengthen the roles of innovation in achieving the SDGs. The knowledge and learning derived from the Symposium are also expected to be useful for ASEAN sectoral bodies in preparing their next work plan and its ensuing strategies. In addition, follow-up activities can potentially be initiated after the Symposium.
