

NEAT Working Group on
East Asian Cooperation for SDGs: Sustainable Cities and Communities
Seoul, 26 July 2024

Rationale

The achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) stands as a crucial element in overcoming diverse global crises. Notably, as SDGs address various themes such as poverty, climate change, ecosystems, and peace, there is a growing need for multidimensional cooperation to tackle these complex challenges. While the execution of SDGs falls within the realm of individual countries, it also necessitates international cooperation to complement and synergize efforts. In this context, ASEAN Plus Three (APT) framework presents ample opportunities for cooperation considering the diverse conditions and aspirations of its member states.

Recognizing the imperative for coordinated action, the Network of East Asian Think-tanks (NEAT) has organized the working group in 2022 for further collaboration among APT member countries for SDGs. The working group recommended the development of substantive cooperation programs based on shared understanding and demand, the establishment of a multi-stakeholder SDGs committee encompassing government bodies, local governments, businesses, and civil society, and the organization of special sessions within the United Nations High-level Political Forum to conduct joint country reviews.

To further strengthen institutional cooperation for SDGs, thereby ensuring continuity and follow-up on the discussed topics, NEAT Korea proposes a working group dedicated to exploring policy recommendations for realizing sustainable cities and communities. Sustainable cities and communities, encapsulated within SDG Agenda 11, hold significance as arenas for addressing shared goals related to climate change, poverty, education, infrastructure and so on. By expanding discussions on an East Asian community from a city-level perspective and seeking cooperation at the urban and community levels, this working group aims to enhance regional collaboration and contribute to SDG implementation.

The working group on East Asian Cooperation for SDGs: Sustainable Cities and Communities represents a significant step towards realizing the objectives of SDG Agenda 11 and fostering regional cooperation. By harnessing the expertise of NEAT specialists and facilitating dialogue among stakeholders, the working group aims to accelerate progress towards sustainable urban development and community empowerment in the East Asian region.

Against the background described above, NEAT Korea organized the NEAT Working Group on East Asian Cooperation for SDGs: Sustainable Cities and Communities. The working group met in Seoul on 26 June 2023 attended by representatives of 12 NEAT countries. This working group shared the state of SDGs implementation focusing on agenda 11 encompassing sustainable cities and communities to identify functional challenges and crises we are facing and to discuss ways to enhance cooperation in the APT. The Working Group meeting reflected on the vision of the SDGs, identified the nature of challenges faced by the APT in implementing its goals, and discussed responses and policies for sustainable cities and communities.

On the Discussion

The working group reviewed the state of implementation for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 11, which focuses on promoting sustainable cities and communities within the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) member states. The working group highlighted the pressing need for robust national policies and enhanced regional cooperation to foster urban sustainability and community development. Given the diverse conditions across the member states, a one-size-fits-all solution is not feasible. Thus, it is crucial for APT governments to recognize the significant role of local and sub-national governments in achieving SDGs and in fostering an East Asian community.

SDG Agenda 11 is pivotal as it addresses a range of critical global issues, including climate change, poverty, education, and infrastructure development. This agenda is particularly relevant to the East Asian region, where urbanization and community development challenges are prominent. Expanding the discussion to include city-level perspectives and fostering cooperation at the urban and community levels are essential strategies for enhancing regional collaboration and advancing SDGs implementation. By addressing these areas, the working group aims to improve regional synergy and contribute effectively to the global sustainability agenda.

Cases and Regional Insights

Several case studies from APT member states provide valuable lessons for advancing sustainable urban development: Japan's early experiences with non-Western developmental industrialization offer insightful policy-making models. Its approach to industrialization and urbanization can serve as a reference for other ASEAN Plus Three countries navigating similar challenges. Singapore's case as a sustainable city model for the Global South is noteworthy. The city-state has effectively addressed issues such as water management, housing, health, and environmental sustainability through a combination of national policies and international cooperation. The activities of ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability illustrate the potential for establishing a network of cities committed to sustainability. Such networks can facilitate the exchange of best practices and

collaborative efforts among cities. Dagu-Danang City Cooperation was presented to exemplify successful city-to-city collaboration and serves as a potential model for other cities seeking to establish similar networks. The engagement of students and youth in addressing community issues in China and South Korea provides a valuable example of how local initiatives can be scaled up regionally. Mandalay and Yangon cases highlight the need for focused attention at the national level to address long-term development and urban challenges. The ongoing initiatives by ASEAN to promote urban sustainability are also recognized as significant contributions to advancing SDG 11.

Addressing Regional Challenges and Regional Cooperation

The APT member states face numerous challenges, including population decline, economic instability, and environmental sustainability. The triple planetary crises—encompassing climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss—intensifies these issues, pushing ecosystems and marine life to the brink of extinction. To address these challenges, it is vital to leverage local resources and foster collaboration among cities. Strengthening the integration of climate mitigation and adaptation into city planning and infrastructure investment is essential for guiding sustainable development efforts.

The introduction of a Perception-Based Livability Index may represent a crucial step towards understanding and achieving SDG goals. Observations from the Philippines underscore the importance of integrating smart technology and promoting inclusive growth. Digital platforms that harmonize socio-ecological and economic connectivity are essential for sustainable urban development. Moreover, establishing sustainable monitoring mechanisms that utilize fourth industrial technologies, such as artificial intelligence, is critical for informing policy and enhancing governance.

Continued regional collaboration and knowledge exchange will be crucial for overcoming these challenges and achieving the vision of sustainable development in East Asia by 2030. Supporting city-to-city cooperation and exchanges, including relevant sub-national government projects related to sustainable development or climate investments, will enhance regional learning and collaboration.

Enhancing local and sub-national government capacity for sustainable development in East Asia involves recognizing and empowering these entities as crucial drivers of sustainable development. This includes implementing capacity building programs to strengthen their abilities in sustainable urban planning, natural resource management, and climate adaptation. Additionally, allocating sustainable development funding to local governments ensures they have the necessary resources for infrastructure projects, climate mitigation efforts, and community resilience initiatives. Integrating local sustainable development goals (SDGs) into national policies and funding priorities further promotes coherence and alignment across different levels of governance.

Promoting city-to-city cooperation and knowledge-sharing in East Asia aims to foster collaboration between cities and regions to exchange experiences, successes, and challenges. This effort includes establishing peer learning networks where cities facing similar issues can share best practices and innovative solutions using digital and AI platforms. Facilitating exchanges of experts and practitioners across borders helps promote cross-border learning and adaptation of successful models. Encouraging joint projects on sustainable urbanization, environmental management, and economic development among participating cities leverages their comparative strengths and resources.

Strengthening multi-stakeholder engagement in sustainable urban development involves enhancing the involvement of diverse stakeholders such as citizens, the private sector, academia, and civil society in urban planning and development processes. This can be achieved through implementing mechanisms for participatory planning to ensure inclusive decision-making where community voices are heard and integrated into development strategies and fostering collaborations between local governments and the private sector to finance and implement sustainable infrastructure projects through public-private partnerships. Establishing knowledge sharing platforms and forums for multi-stakeholder dialogue promotes transparency and accountability in urban sustainability governance.

Policy Recommendations

The participants reaffirmed the vision of the SDGs to root the idea of sustainable development across generations—from elders to youth, from governments to communities, and from the region to every corner of the nation. After acknowledging the state of SDG implementation, particularly Agenda 11, in APT member states, the working group participants agreed that the recommendations aim to leverage the capacities and resources of local and sub-national governments, promote collaborative learning and innovation among cities, and ensure inclusive and participatory approaches to sustainable urban development. By implementing these policies, cities and communities can more effectively address challenges related to population decline, aging demographics, economic instability, and environmental sustainability.

Based on discussions on various issues related to the sustainability of cities and community development, here are three policy recommendations:

To integrate these goals into national policies and regional cooperation frameworks and reaffirm their commitment to implementing SDGs, particularly Agenda 11, which encompasses the goals related to Sustainable Cities and Communities, the APT governments are required to

- 1) Strengthen the capabilities of local and sub-national governments for sustainable development through capacity-building and financial support. This should include urban planning, resource

management, climate adaptation, and improvements in housing and living conditions.

- 2) Promote city-to-city cooperation through regional networks to enhance learning, facilitate exchange programs, and develop collaborative projects on urbanization, environmental management, and economic development. Utilize fourth industrial technologies, including artificial intelligence, digital platforms, and space technology, to support decision-making.
- 3) Strengthen multi-stakeholder engagement in urban planning and development processes. This involves promoting inclusive decision-making, fostering public-private partnerships for infrastructure projects, and establishing knowledge-sharing platforms. These measures aim to address challenges such as population decline, economic instability, and environmental sustainability by leveraging local resources and fostering collaboration among cities.

The recommendations put forth by the working group emphasize leveraging the capacities and resources of local and sub-national governments, fostering collaborative learning among cities, and ensuring inclusive and participatory approaches to sustainable urban development. By implementing these policies, cities and communities can better address challenges related to population decline, aging demographics, economic instability, and environmental sustainability. These measures are essential for achieving SDG 11 and advancing the broader vision of sustainable development in East Asia by 2030.

Annex I programme

PROGRAMME

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NEAT Working Group on

" East Asian Cooperation for SDGs: Sustainable Cities and Communities "

25~27 July 2024

(Times are at Seoul /GMT +9 hours)

Shilla Stay Gwanghwamun, Seoul

25 July 2024 Arrival of the participants

19:00-21:00 Welcome dinner (Ensung Restaurant)

26 July 2024

08:30-09:00 Registration

09:00 -10:30 **Session I**
Moderator : Prof. In-Won Hwang

NEAT Japan

NEAT Philippines

NEAT Indonesia

NEAT Singapore

NEAT Korea

NEAT Cambodia

10:30~10:45 Break Time

10:45~12:15~ **Session 2**

Moderator: Dr. Hyung-Jong KIM

NEAT Thailand

NEAT Vietnam

NEAT Malaysia

NEAT Laos

NEAT China

NEAT Myanmar

12:15-13:30 Lunch

13:30-15:00 **Wrap-up and Closing**

27 July Departure of the participants

- The End of Working Group -

Annex II

List of Participants

Country	Name and Institution
Cambodia	Mr. Vibolseth Pen Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia
China	Dr. Xue Xiaopeng Northeast Asian Studies, Dalian University of Foreign Languages
Indonesia	Dr. Hendricus Andy Simamarta University of Indonesia
Japan	Dr. HAYASHI Mahito Kinjo Gakuin University
Korea	Ms. SON Bonghee ICLEI Korea
	Ms. Kyoungun Lee ICLEI East Asia Secretariat
	Prof. In-Won Hwang Country Coordinator Gyeongsang National University
	Prof. Suhong Chae Seoul National University
	Dr. KIM Hyungjong Yonsei University Mirae Campus

Laos	Ms. Mimala CHANTHASONE Institute of Foreign Affairs
Malaysia	Ms. Kieran Li Nair Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia
Myanmar	H.E. Htin Lynn Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies
Singapore	Dr. Lim Tai Wei National University of Singapore, East Asian Institute
Thailand	Dr. Wijitbusaba Marome Thammasat University
Philippines	Dr. Marife M. Ballesteros Philippine Institute for Development Studies
Vietnam	Mr. Tu Anh Tuan Institute for Foreign Policy and Strategic Studies, Diplomatic Academy of Viet Nam (DAV)

Working Group Organizing Committee

Kyunghwan Boo
(Seoul National University)

Jungki CHO
(Université Paris Cité)

Yuchan Seong
(Seoul National University)

Concept Paper

NEAT Korea

Theme:

East Asian Cooperation for SDGs: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Background

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The proposed working group on East Asian Cooperation for SDGs: Sustainable Cities and Communities represents a significant step towards realizing the objectives of SDG Agenda 11 and fostering regional cooperation. By harnessing the expertise of NEAT specialists and facilitating dialogue among stakeholders, we aim to accelerate progress towards sustainable urban development and community empowerment in the East Asian region. We look forward to the active participation and support of all APT member countries in this endeavor.

Role of NEAT Specialists

NEAT Korea will convene a Working Group Meeting on East Asian Cooperation for SDGs: Sustainable Cities and Communities in Seoul in July 2024. Experts specializing in city and community development will be invited to participate, their insights invaluable for enriching joint research endeavors. The outcomes of this meeting will be presented and deliberated upon at the 2024 NEAT Conference of Coordinator Meeting (CCM).

Topics and Objectives for Discussion

The working group will focus on the following objectives:

- ✓ Identifying contemporary challenges faced by cities and communities in the East Asian region.
- ✓ Evaluating the progress of cities and communities in realizing SDGs.
- ✓ Establishing a network of cities and communities committed to SDG implementation.

To achieve these objectives, the working group will:

- ✓ Address issues arising from evolving regional and global dynamics amid emerging challenges.
- ✓ Facilitate knowledge-sharing on best practices for SDGs implementation among cities and communities in East Asia.
- ✓ Propose strategic responses and policies to enhance APT functional cooperation and visibility.

Schedule of WG

- ✓ Nomination of the participant by 5 July 2024
- ✓ Submission of paper by 19 July 2024
- ✓ Working Group on 26 July 2024