

Main Message for Thailand's Voluntary National Review

Introduction

Thailand attaches great importance to the concept of sustainable development which has long taken root in the country. The country has been guided by the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), conceived by His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej. SEP has been adopted as the core principle of National Economic and Social Development Plan since 2002. The current constitution has integrated SEP and sustainable development as integral parts.

The development approach based on SEP is in conformity with the core principle of the 2030 Agenda and can serve as an approach to support the realization of the SDGs. SEP promotes sustainability mindset and provides guidelines for inclusive, balanced and sustainable development. Therefore, SEP will continue to be our guiding principle in completing the unfinished MDGs business and achieving the SDGs. The cabinet has decided on 25 October 2016 to promote the application of SEP for SDGs in all areas and at all levels. Thailand has also been actively sharing SEP as a development model to the international community especially since her G-77 chairmanship in 2016.

Main Highlights

Mainstreaming the SDGs

SEP and SDGs have been integrated in the 20 – Year National Strategy Framework and the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017 – 2021). As a result, plans and budgeting of all government agencies will be in line with SEP and SDGs.

National Mechanism for Sustainable Development

The National Committee for Sustainable Development (CSD), chaired by the Prime Minister, is Thailand's main and highest mechanism responsible for the country's sustainable development. It has 37 members from public, private academia and civil society, with the Secretary-General of National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) as the secretariat.

The main task of CSD is formulating policies and strategies on national sustainable development and oversight their implementation, including the SDGs. It has established three sub-committees to advance the three inter - connected processes namely mobilizing the SDGs, raising awareness on sustainable

development and the application of SEP, and compiling data and statistics to support the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda.

Three taskforces were established and respectively tasked with (1) reviewing and recommending legal, economics and social measures necessary for achieving the SDGs; (2) coordinating works by numerous agencies, and priority setting; and (3) preparing report on Thailand's progress, challenges, and recommendation in implementing the 2030 Agenda including the VNR.

Key progress by the CSD

CSD has undertaken several steps to advance the SDGs implementation including establishing coordinating body for each of the SDGs, formulating roadmaps for all 17 SDGs, identifying 30 priority targets, synthesizing examples of SEP for SDGs model projects, examining gaps and discrepancies between the national baselines and the proposed global indicators.

Raising SDGs Awareness and Creating Ownership

Representatives of private sector, academia and CSOs were invited to be in the CSD and its subsidiaries. Several rounds of stakeholders' engagement has been conducted including with the private sector, CSO of various constituencies, youth as well as the members of National Legislative Assembly. As a result, these stakeholders are making contributions in accordance with their respective roles and expertise. Global Compact Network Thailand and other private entities are very active in mainstreaming SDGs and UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights into business operations. CSOs organized their own SDGs regional forums to present their views, concerns, and priorities under the SDGs. The CSOs have also produced their own VNR reports to supplement the Government's VNR report. Their inputs as well as contributions from other stakeholders will further synergize Thailand's efforts to achieve the SDGs.

Voluntary National Review - A process

Thailand views the VNR as a process to engage and to create ownership more than a report-making exercise.

The VNR taskforce comprises lead agencies of 17 SDGs and the National Statistical Office. Several rounds of consultations were conducted to gather relevant information. The content of the report derived from two processes: assessing progress and learning from communities.

The report provides a snapshot of significant progress in 2016 together with approaches and good practices applied in 17 SDGs, especially the SEP for SDGs

model projects studied and selected from diverse areas and sectors, as well as challenges faced in achieving some of the goals. Background on data collection and indicators together with statistical annex are also presented.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as chair of VNR Taskforce in collaboration with local universities, organized regional engagement sessions to update stakeholders on the national SDGs implementation and gather their views on how the country should proceed to achieve the SDGs. Greater awareness and ownership have been generated along the process and the report drafting taskforce actually has gotten to appreciate local wisdom and community strength and learned more.

The Progress

Built on the achievement in the Millennium Development Goals, Thailand has a solid foundation for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Here are the snapshots on status, early progresses and challenges.

Goal 1: Thailand has achieved the MDGs target on poverty and hunger, reducing the number of people living in poverty and hunger by half. However, poverty remains in many manifestations and inequalities persist. Around 7.2 per cent of population lives under the national poverty line, the number could reach 15.5 per cent if we include those who are slightly above the line. Measures such as SEP villages seek to increase income and reduce expenditure for those in the rural area. The government has started a registration scheme to provide support to the poor. In 2016, 17,469 million baht (approximately 485 million US Dollar) was provided to 7.5 million registered low income-earners through the national e-payment system to further support their livelihood. It is expected that the scheme will benefit around 12 million qualified registrants in 2017.

Goal 2: Thailand, also known as “Kitchen of the World”, has successfully reduced the proportion of undernourished population from 34.6 per cent to 7.5 per cent during the MDGs era. Efforts to provide the poor and vulnerable groups with access to adequate, safe and nutritious food will be further highlighted in the 20 – Year National Strategy Framework on healthcare. Measures, including law, have been taken to reduce stunting and wasting in children under 5 year of age. Thailand strives to ensure sustainable food production system through promoting practice of sustainable agriculture in the forms of organic farming and the “New Theory Farming” under the SEP concept, with the target to increase the area of sustainable agriculture farming at 80,000 hectare per annum.

Goal 3: Universal Health Coverage (UHC) has been a crucial factor in the improvement of healthcare service in Thailand with current coverage stands at 99.87 per cent. We also attach great importance to preventive medicine. As a result,

maternal and neonatal mortality rates are well below the global targets thanks to 99.6 per cent of birth attended by skilled health personnel. New cases of pandemic diseases are also on the decline. The government is determined to reduce the number of road traffic accident through legal measures and promoting safe driving behavior to bring down the second most cause of death.

Goal 4: More than 90 per cent of school age children are enjoying subsidized 15- year basic education available to all children in the land, regardless of their nationalities or migrant status. The government is promoting vocational study in particular dual education with an aim to increasing quality workforce in real sectors. We are working harder to advance the quality of education at all levels under the 12th Education Plan (2017-2021) and the National Education Plan 2017-2036.

Goal 5: Gender equality is another success story from the MDGs. Girls enjoy equal access to quality education as boys do. In fact, they even do better in higher education. Female are now accounted for 60 per cent of the workforce and hold a handsome share of 38 per cent of executive level in private sector. The current constitution calls for gender responsive budgeting, on which a pilot project is being implemented in Surat Thani province. Elements of SDG 5 will be incorporated in the Women Development Strategy 2017-2021.

Goal 6: Almost 100 percent of households have access to safe and affordable drinking water as well as sanitation facilities. However challenge remains in remote rural areas where we are doubling our effort to address the situation. The Water Resource Management Strategic Plan 2015 – 2026 has provided a holistic approach both in terms of water-use efficiency and water resource infrastructure to ensure that Thailand can meet her future demand.

Goal 7: Thailand imports more than 70 per cent of energy for domestic consumption each year. The 20 – Year Integrated Energy Plan (2015-2036) is the road map for the country’s energy security. Thailand is trying to diversify the source of energy focusing on domestic source, improve energy efficiency and promote community participation in energy management. Thailand seeks to increase the proportion of alternative energy from 13.83 per cent to 30 per cent by 2036. Currently Thailand has the highest solar power capacity among ASEAN members.

Goal 8: The 20 – Year National Strategy Framework aims to raise Thailand to become a high – income country by 2036. In addition to the projected growth from agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors, the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2016 – 2020) aims to strengthen national competitiveness

with service and digital based economy, enhance skill of the workforces and provide labour protection and welfare.

Goal 9: Thailand has been actively promoting connectivity within and beyond borders for years. The draft 20 –Year Transportation Development Strategy (2017- 2036) aligns with the SDGs in providing effective, green and safe, inclusive and innovative transport for all. At the same time the Thailand 4.0 policy will boost value added in manufacturing sector through promoting greater utilization of creativity, technology and innovation while ensuring environmental friendly practices. The development of STI capacity will have a central role in this endeavour.

Goal 10: Addressing inequality became one of the main targets in recent national development plans. In 2015, income of the bottom 40 per cent of population grew 6.05 per cent comparing to the national rate of 1.66 per cent. Thailand aims to increase the income growth of the bottom 40 to 15 per cent per annum during the next 5 years. Various schemes have been implemented to support and generate income for the poor such as micro financing, providing financial support, welfare and benefit for low income – earners , establishing social enterprises at every province to support communities development.

Goal 11: Thailand is aligning new urban development plan with the New Urban Agenda. Land ownership and land distribution will be addressed with legal measures. The government is developing a 10 – Year housing development strategy, targeting at 2.72 million households living in inferior housing condition or informal settlement. In addition, 22,434 million bath (approximately 623 million US Dollar) preferential housing loan has made available to the low and middle income population. Already trained in 972 communities in 2016, the Community Based Disaster Risk Management programme based on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction will be further expanded to local communities nationwide.

Goal 12: The concept Sustainable Consumption and Production is closely related with SEP which advocates a balanced lifestyle that promotes growth and conserves the environment at the same time. In this regard, Thailand has developed the “SCP roadmap 2017- 2036” to further promote the SCP concept in different sectors, and implemented various medium and long term plans and strategies on green industry, chemical and waste management, environmental management, green procurement, as well as various green labeling schemes to ensure the achievement of SDG 12.

Goal 13: Thailand is one of the countries with high vulnerability to the impact of climate change. This places the issue among national priorities. Consequently measures on climate change has been incorporated in the National Economic and Social Development Plan since 2012 and also integrated in the 20 – Year National Strategy Framework (2017-2036). Thailand’s Climate Change Master Plan (2015-2036) aims to enhance adaptation and mitigation capacity of various sectors. 17 provinces and 32 municipalities have been trained and developed climate action plan for their respective constituencies, complementing their provincial disaster risk reduction plans.

Goal 14: The Coastal reforestation programme has resulted in 5.24 per cent increase of mangrove forest area during 2004 – 2014, returning to its former health. Currently, areas under different marine resource and ecological management regimes account for 15.68 per cent of total marine area in Thailand, including 18,136 square kilometers of protected marine and coastal areas. The National Plan of Action to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing was designed to fulfill Thailand’s responsibilities to marine fisheries resources both inside and outside Thai waters.

Goal 15: Thailand has set a target of increasing forest area from 31.6 percent of land area to 40 per cent through various forestation schemes and financial mechanisms. Authorities are also working with communities in forest areas to uplift their well-being, providing alternative means of income and reducing the need to deforest or endanger biodiversity. The Elephant Ivory Act 2015 has been proven to be effective in controlling illicit ivory trade and possession, demonstrating Thailand’s determination in combat wildlife trafficking.

Goal 16: SEP inspired initiatives such as alternative development and the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders – the Bangkok Rules, have been identified as measures to promote and support peaceful society. Thailand has the “zero tolerance for human trafficking” policy and continues efforts in prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership. On combating corruption, another national agenda, several legal measures have been enacted and amended. The establishment of Criminal Court for Corruption and Misconduct Offence in 2016, for example, will help reduce the time to finalise such cases more quickly.

Goal 17: Thailand firmly believes that only through partnership we can achieve the inclusive and sustainable development. Thailand has created enabling environment for the private sector to enhance MOI in other developing

countries. The Duty Free Quota Free regime for LDCs has been implemented since 2015, complementing Thailand's outbound investment promotion in developing countries. For years, Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA) and Neighbouring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency (NEDA) have been providing cooperation on sustainable development in terms of technical assistance, financial grants and concessional loans as well as development projects. One of the legacies of Thailand's G-77 chairmanship in 2016 is the "SEP for SDGs Partnership" with ongoing SEP model projects in 10 countries from different continents and many more projects in the pipeline. Thailand is actively promoting regional cooperation on sustainable development. Thailand has supported UN Office for South-South Cooperation to resume its regional office in Bangkok. Thailand is the Coordinator of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to promote complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the 2030 Agenda and the prime mover and coordinator in promoting sustainable development in the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) respectively.

Conclusion

VNR is not only about reporting or sharing our good practices and challenges. Thailand believes that the VNR process has provided countries with opportunities to take stock on sustainable development efforts and strengthen SDGs implementation as well as mobilize public awareness and contribution. It will serve as a solid foundation for future SDGs follow up and reviews, and bring about concerted efforts from all stakeholders for achieving the SDGs. VNR is a practical tool and an engaging process that should be encouraged.
