

Concept Paper

NEAT Working Group on Institutional Sustainability of NEAT

Towards the East Asian Community

March 2016

Theme

Institutional Sustainability of NEAT towards the East Asian Community

Background

The Network of East Asian Think-Thanks (NEAT) has functioned as a pivotal intellectual venue for sharing ideas and promoting mutual understanding towards the East Asian Community since its inception in 2003. Throughout the numerous workshops and meetings organized, NEAT has promoted the academic exchanges and provided intellectual insights for East Asian cooperation. A wide range of issues such as the architecture of community building, enhancement of cultural exchange, energy security cooperation, investment and financial cooperation and so on, has been discussed to yield academic findings and policy recommendations. Such intellectual outputs by NEAT have been reported to the APT Summit to be materialized into actual measures of cooperation. Indeed, NEAT has served the academics joining the tract II diplomacy in the APT process to work together in fertile ways.

However, NEAT may not stand away from the ups and downs of the regionalism in East Asia. The re-surfacing strategic rivalries between the major powers amid the mushrooming regional institutions have become more of hindrance rather than help to building the East Asian community, which NEAT has pursued. It is evident that East Asia is by no means a hermetically sealed entity but a dynamically transforming creature. Since shaping and sharing norms through socialization is often distorted by strategic differences, NEAT has faced the challenge to prove its efficiency in dealing with increasing regional challenges in traditional and non-traditional security issue areas. Under-institutionalization of NEAT inherently would preclude APT from practicing the measures in dealing with regional challenges.

Main activities of NEAT, according to its official website, are to "... facilitate the theoretic research on the integration and community building of East Asia". There are considerable gaps between the current institutional arrangements for a common vision and effectively implementing/monitoring it at the regional level. There is still much work to do to improve sustainable institution building process, which is crucial to build a regional community. It also needs to be develop institutional sustainability.

Institution includes rules, procedures that shape patterns of behavior, interaction, and role or organization. NEAT to secure institutional capacity to produce outputs that are well-valued and perform over the longer period than the life of segmented projects so that it assure the useful and valued contribution to the process of building regional community at the equal and higher level.

NEAT as a Track II body needs to review and re-examine its role in the APT process and East Asian community building. There are increasing demands for regional arrangements for institutional connectivity by facilitating discussions and in-depth inquiries to reach a consensus on feasibility and priorities in a harmonious way. As to the current challenges, the following questions can be considered in the proposed working group. How has NEAT interacted within it and with Track I and Track III?; is there, a created path-dependence (institutional constraints) and, if so, how will it enable APT to have transformative capacity to meet its challenges?

Role of NEAT Specialists

NEAT Korea will organize a NEAT Working Group Meeting on Institutional Sustainability of NEAT towards the East Asian Community, Korea in late June 2016. The experts in the related fields from ASEAN+3 and ASEAN Secretariat will be invited and their participation will be a valuable addition to the joint research and findings could lead to greater contribution to the institutional sustainability of NEAT. The outcome of the Working Group Meeting shall be submitted to and discussed at 2016 NEAT Conference.

Topics for Discussion

NEAT and Track II Diplomacy Facilitation;
Regional Institutional Connectivity in East Asia
Policy Recommendations

Objectives

- To review the progress of NEAT and Track II Diplomacy
- To assess each country's need for enhancing NEAT;
- To prioritize the NEAT and regional institutional connectivity to supply a continuing stream of benefits;
- To seek ways to adjust and harmonize the institutional connectivity to survive over time as identifiable units.

In this regards, the working group shall

- a) Draft the guidelines to review and evaluate projects and programmes conducted under NEAT;
- b) Address issues arising from projects and programmes at the national and regional level;
- c) Review the previous working groups' reports;

- d) Review the NEAT's structure and process;
- e) Make appropriate recommendations for institutional mechanism and connectivity for enhancing its institutional sustainability;
- f) Review and consider other matters related to NEAT.

Hospitality

In line with past practice, NEAT Korea will bear the cost of international round travel (economy class air-fare) and two-night local accommodation for one participant from each ASEAN+3 country and ASEAN Secretariat.

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