

NEAT MEMORANDUM No. 18
NETWORK OF EAST ASIAN THINK TANKS (NEAT)

I. INTRODUCTION

As a track two process of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT), the Network of East Asia Think Tanks (NEAT) provides intellectual support for East Asian cooperation. NEAT reaffirms that the goal of community building in East Asia is promoting the welfare and well-being of the people and realize the East Asian Vision of Peace, Prosperity and Progress. Community building should be based on universal values, including good governance, the rule of law, democracy, human rights, and international law and norms. East Asian countries should promote these values as common goals.

II. NEAT ACTIVITIES IN 2021

Amidst the pandemic, NEAT maintained its core activities:

(1) Convening of Country Coordinators Meeting (CCM)

The 33rd and 34th NEAT CCM were held virtually last 20 April 2021 and 1 September 2021, respectively. NEAT Philippines hosted these meetings with the participation of twelve (12) Country Coordinators from APT countries and their delegation.

(2) Organizing Working Group meetings

In addition, five (5) Working Group (WG) Meetings were undertaken on these topics:

- A. Climate Change and East Asian Sustainable Development (18 June by NEAT China);
- B. ASEAN Plus Three and COVID-19 Pandemic: Country Responses and Regional Cooperation (14 July by NEAT Indonesia)
- C. Toward 2050¹ Carbon Neutrality in East Asia (17 August by NEAT Japan),
- D. East Asia cooperation and Human Security in the Post-Covid 19 Era (23 July by NEAT Korea)
- E. ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation on MSMEs: Accelerating Digital Adoption to Thrive in the New Normal (21 July by NEAT Philippines)

NEAT Philippines wishes to express its appreciation to the Country Coordinators (CCs) for their support, and to the WG Coordinators, experts and participants for their highly-valued efforts and contributions during these meetings.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the activities held in 2021, NEAT respectfully submits the following main recommendations in the five (5) areas for consideration of the APT leaders. The detailed and complete list of policy recommendations appears in the Annexes.

¹ While this is an aspirational goal for some countries, this is non-binding on all APT countries

(1) Climate Change and East Asian Sustainable Development

Climate change presents the single biggest threat to sustainable development globally. For East Asia, changing weather patterns and more extreme and frequent weather events have posed huge risks to sustainable development, especially in maintaining its food security and natural disasters management. It is pressing to identify the impacts of climate change on the above issues and find ways to improve the level of food security and disaster management through strengthening cooperation regionally and globally. To this end, the following key policy recommendations are put forward:

- A. Upgrade institutionalization level of cooperation
 - Formulate an action plan for APT food security cooperation on climate mitigation and adaptation, identifying specific goals, road map, timetables and measures for regional cooperation for 2022-2030;
 - Push the establishment of APT disaster management ministers meeting for promoting policy coordination and decision -making in harmonizing climate change and disaster management;
 - Create an APT Forum for Climate Change and Sustainable development for all parties to showcase and share experience, best practice and knowledge; and
 - Strengthen existing mechanisms represented by AFSIS and APTERR and their collaboration with other mechanisms and institutions on national, regional and international levels.
- B. Strengthen cooperation on capacity-building and empowerment
 - Foster cooperation on education, training and joint research in developing green technology, enhancing productivity, conserving crop variety and exploring new ones, using land and water, spreading Climate-Smart Farming and disaster management;
 - Implement village-level pilot projects. For those on Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA), a corresponding fund could be established to provide regularized financial support besides more assistance from regional developed economies; and
 - Advance engagement of all relevant stakeholders to empower people, especially small farmers, vulnerable groups and disaster-prone populations to realize sustainable production and development.

(2) ASEAN Plus Three and COVID-19 Pandemic: Country Responses and Regional Cooperation

The COVID-19 pandemic has imperiled the lives and livelihoods of billions of people in the world including the citizens of APT countries. To further strengthen regional cooperation to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to prevent future pandemic, following recommendations are put forth:

- A. Strengthen the solidarity among APT countries and demonstrate commitment to a stronger regional cooperation in responding to the multidimensional impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- B. Enhance the effectiveness of existing cooperation mechanisms and frameworks such as ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund, ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies for Public Health Emergency (RRMS);
- C. Develop regional cooperation in ensuring adequate supply and equitable access to vaccines. APT should consider pooled procurement for COVID-19 vaccines and consider initiatives to develop the vaccine production capacity of APT member countries;
- D. Develop regional mechanisms to strengthen pandemic preparedness, including by expediting the establishment and operationalization of ASEAN Center for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases as a central body for public health emergencies preparedness and response, investing in public health capacity, strengthening information sharing, and developing protocols and procedures at the regional level, such as: (i) regional standard of transparency in pandemic situations, (ii) regional protocol on border closure and lockdowns and (iii) regional protocol on migrant people protection during pandemic;
- E. Enhance capacity building; and
- F. Strengthen science and technology cooperation, as well as transfers on technologies proven to be essential in dealing with pandemic.

(3) Toward Carbon Neutrality in East Asia

East Asia is vulnerable to various climate-related risks and can get better off by limiting global warming. As momentum towards decarbonization grows globally, APT countries are also exposed to transition risks, and it is important to ensure that they are able to respond to these risks. To achieve this, it is recommended that APT countries:

- A. Commitment to accelerating efforts to achieve carbon neutrality as soon as possible in the second half of this century, as well as to set and achieve the aligned mid-term emissions reduction targets, thereby sending strong signals to the market and society; and
- B. Deliver green stimulus packages to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic with an aim of both facilitating transformation of economic, energy and social systems toward decarbonization and ensuring just transition which allows such transformation to be made in a smooth and “no-one-left-behind” manner, including reskilling of workers, green job creation, and financial support for them.

(4) East Asia Cooperation and Human Security in the Post COVID-19 Era

The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that the pandemic requires multilevel - local, national, regional, and global - response measures and that the ASEAN+3 can provide a nice cooperative mechanism for East Asia to enhance human security in the post COVID-19 era.

APT countries are enjoined to:

- A. Acknowledge the current challenges of COVID-19 pandemic as a human security issue. It should be recognized that the complexity and interconnected nature of the pandemic require a human security approach for further aligned regional responses and prevention measures by the ATP processes;
- B. Intensify efforts to enhance adequate financing to mitigate the health, economic, social, political, security and psychological impacts, which diverts resources from arms and military spending to healthcare, social services and peacebuilding;
- C. Set up an “APT reserve of essential medical supplies”; and
- D. Task the APT Ministers related to human security to develop the “APT Human Security Initiative “to ensure non-discrimination, transparency, respect for human dignity, climate commitment. Special attention should be paid to the needs and vulnerabilities of the underprivileged such as women, indigenous peoples, refugees, stateless, and asylum seekers, etc.

(5) ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation on MSMEs: Accelerating Digital Adoption to Thrive in the New Normal

In the APT region, MSMEs are considered as the backbone of the economy as these entities sustain the livelihoods of millions of people. While the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on MSMEs, it has also provided opportunities for them to shift to digital solutions and accelerate the digitalization of business processes. However, there are common constraints and challenges that need to be addressed for MSMEs to fully harness the benefits of digitalization. Two major recommendations are put forward:

- A. Continuously develop, improve, and effectively and efficiently implement capacity building programs for all the stakeholders involved in the digitalization of MSMEs; and
- B. Closely collaborate with all the stakeholders to develop and sustain an enabling environment for MSMEs to thrive in the new normal (APT governments, APT as a region, and business sector).

IV. CONCLUSION

NEAT greatly appreciates serious consideration by the APT SOM, Ministers and Leaders of the recommendations in this Memorandum, and welcomes opportunities to interact further with decision-makers. We reiterate our continued support to build a sounder, healthier and flourishing East Asian Community. We look forward to supporting more positive contribution towards the socio-economic development of the community in the region.