Second National Dialogue on the Urban Nexus in Thailand
Bangkok, 2 March 2017

REPORT

The Second National Dialogue on the Urban Nexus in Thailand took place on 2 March 2017, in Bangkok, Thailand, and was organised by ESCAP in partnership with GIZ. The National Dialogue was organized in the context of the project “Integrated Resource Management in Asian Cities: The Urban Nexus”, financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by GIZ in partnership with ESCAP, ICLEI and the nexus partner cities, Chiang Mai and Nakhon Ratchasima being the two partner cities in Thailand.

The workshop was attended by around 60 participants from six local governments, provincial government, ten line ministries and concerned authorities, Embassies, UN agencies, international NGOs and donor organisations.

Dr. Peer Gebauer, Minister, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, and Dr. Stefanos Fotiou, Director, Environment and Development Division, ESCAP delivered opening remarks. In pursuit of implementing the global development agendas at a national, provincial and local level, the importance of integrated and collaborative approaches was underlined. Within this context, the ESCAP-GIZ-ICLEI project offers an opportunity for cities to turn challenges into opportunities through practical implementation of urban nexus initiatives or pilot projects.

Mr. Teeparat Vacharangkura, Senior Advisor, Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board highlighted the importance of localizing global development agendas within a tailor-fit framework, for its implementation. For example, in Thailand, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) is a unique framework for sustainable development. Many of the principles underpinning SEP addresses water, energy, forest and land management to reduce poverty, hunger and alleviate universal health care. Learning lessons from the ‘Doi Tung Development’, ‘Sunny Bangchak’, ‘The New Theory Framework’ and ‘Forest for Food Security’ projects on evidence-based approach, multi-stakeholder engagement and good governance, participatory mechanisms in decision-making and integrated solutions were emphasized as the key enabling factors.

The result of a concrete project, the Health Care Center for elderly people in Chiangmai, was presented, as illustrated below. Through EE simulations of the design it has been possible to make the building more energy efficient with rather low additional investment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps taken</th>
<th>% of energy savings</th>
<th>Costs (THB)</th>
<th>Payback period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Replacement of fluorescent</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>94,100</td>
<td>1.2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through LED lighting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roof insulation</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>225,400</td>
<td>2.2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inverter for AC</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>992,500</td>
<td>5.7 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The workshop also highlighted the relevance of integrated resource management in Thailand, especially in the critical areas of energy, water and food (land) security and land-
use planning, and allowed discussing key challenges and opportunities related to mainstreaming of nexus approach, in particular, required regulatory, institutional and fiscal framework. It aimed to identify key entry points for the nexus approach to facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda.

In this era of rapid urbanisation and with the recognition of the centrality of cities in the pursuit of sustainable development, a strong need is felt to galvanize the international community to focus on ‘resource efficiency’, ‘circular economy’ and sustainable consumption patterns. In this regard, cities like Chiang Mai and Nakhon Ratchasima have a key role to play in the sustainable development of Thailand, including the cooperation with provincial governments and national authorities in this endeavour. Learning from experiences on integrated waste management, natural resource management and urban resilience, it is to be noted that urban areas transcend administrative boundaries. Therefore, an integrated approach cannot be implemented by local governments alone, and new formats of communication to enhance cooperation across government levels (horizontal & vertical integration) and between concerned departments as well as with multiple stakeholders are critical.

This workshop provided an opportunity to review the recent urban strategies, policies and plans in Thailand in key areas such as energy, water and waste water, solid waste management, housing and urban planning, and highlighted the relevance of integrated resource management and collaborative governance. It was also emphasized that formulation of coherent policies and integrated initiatives for Thailand, especially in these critical areas will facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement. The interdependencies and sustainable use of critical natural resources were on the forefront of discussions and it was emphasized that if sustainability and trade-offs are not respected in the competing use of resources, the society will move towards an endangered future life.

Moreover, it was noted that, based on the SEP principles, the Thai government places high importance on the equality and well-being of people, as well as inclusive and equitable access to basic services. Therefore, in addition to sectoral policies, there is broad recognition of a need for integrated approaches to address the growing gaps between resource use and sustainability. In this regard, a number of national strategies and plans are currently being reviewed and revised for achieving tangible and sustainable results. For example, the commitment of the Ministry of Energy by setting a target of 30% renewables in total energy consumption by 2036 in its Alternative Energy Development Plan (AEDP) 2015-2036 and of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment through its National Waste Management Master Plan 2016-2021 setting a target from 19% to 75% for municipal solid waste disposal as per set standards, reflects a shift towards sustainability.

These shifts are quite laudable in their kind, yet are quite challenging goals to meet within the tight time line, and may not necessarily reflect the on-ground reality. For example, use of renewable energies today amounts to 13%, which is intended to go up to 30% by 2036. Similarly, the installed capacity of wastewater treatment is 35% of the total wastewater generated, but only 25% of the wastewater generated is actually treated. The National
Environmental Quality Management Plan (2017-2021) which is built on the principles of balancing natural resource management, environmental quality management, protection and rehabilitation and increasing efficient use of natural resources is also a key plan to address cross-sectorial issues within the context of reducing energy demand, recycling waste, improving water resources quality and waste management. It also addresses issues on climate change and international cooperation. Thus, this calls for strategic actions.

In reviewing such national plans and policies on critical sectors, for integrating the nexus thinking into current and future urban development planning, prominent role for both the provincial government and the local government, and multiple stakeholders in the decision-making process, as key drivers for development is crucial. This would allow putting cities on a more sustainable path. However, it was noted that these ambitious road-maps and plans exist more at the higher level and there is little ‘trickle-down effect’. Often the provincial and the local governments are either not well-informed of these policies or there is information in abundance to interpret and make a rational choice to reap the benefits.

One of the noteworthy examples of regional empowerment is of the ‘Housing Development Plans’ that are mainly located at the provincial level and the 4-year Provincial Development Plans formulated keeping local governments need in mind. In this regard, the meeting noted that limited finance options may not be a bottleneck, when critical importance is given to the implementation mechanism and the subsidies in place. Within the recent trend of decentralization process, stronger roles are being assigned to the provinces. Likewise, empowerment of local government, for the application of new forms of taxes or tariff rates will be more effective in appreciating returns. This workshop recommended the need to capacitate the local governments of these national policies and strategies in a way to facilitate implementation of infrastructure and cross-sectorial projects at the local level.

Local governments agreed that consumption-based tariffs can promote resource efficiency and hence setting up unified tariffs for water supply and waste water management was proposed as one of the feasible options, as being initiated by Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. This presents an opportunity to local governments, but also a challenge, as the existing legal or policy frameworks require enforcement and strict regulations to monitor and drive wastewater management. It also calls for clearer roles for different concerned authorities as there is overlap of responsibilities and fragmented boundaries.

Thus, one of the major challenges for the application of cross-sectorial and integrated initiatives lies in the existing organizational horizontal & vertical structures, mandates and financial and human resources. For example, for the application of a holistic approach to urban sewerage and drainage management or integrated waste water management, working across relevant departments to engage in a constructive institutional framework is critical. National Solid Waste Management Master Plan (2016 - 2021) which builds on the 3R (reduce, reuse, recycle) dimension, National Strategies 20 Year Period (2017 – 2036) by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment which is built on the principles of balancing social, economic and environmental aspects, and the Strategic Plan for Water Resource Management for 20 Year Period (2017 – 2036) are good examples being mapped out for sustainable development of Thailand.
This workshop also highlighted the linkages of Thailand’s energy policies with the ‘Urban Nexus’ approach in promoting and supporting the sustainable utilization of renewable energy from domestic resources, for commitment to low-carbon society. This would also promote bioenergy generation from solid waste and reduce waste generation and land use. Besides, the criticality of participatory mechanisms in engaging the communities in such initiatives was underlined.

The need for a coordinating mechanism to implement local actions in Thailand was exemplified by the setting up of the National Committee on Sustainable Development and in the formulation of the 11th and the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plans, for the implementation of the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda. The strategies for efficient national, provincial and local development involve infrastructure development and the logistics system; science and technology, research, and innovation; urban, regional, and economic zone development; and international cooperation for development. Coordinating ministries can play a key role in integrating government agencies, available data and information, to support the implementation of SDGs and related goals and targets. With support from relevant line ministries, information and case studies from a global level can be contextualized in Thailand.

The workshop summarized that the implementation of the urban nexus can be challenged by lack of policy coherence, undefined or overlapping institutional mechanism, weak governance, capacities of concerned staff in the municipalities, awareness of general public on cross-sectorial initiatives, lack of strict regulatory frameworks and enforcement codes, and limited financial resources. In particular, key challenges identified by participating cities included information asymmetries across different levels of government and between relevant line ministries, correct interpretation of the urban policies for local governments to be benefitted, inability of local governments to access private financing and data.

The key highlights from the workshop were:

- It was agreed that nexus can be a vehicle for the implementation of global development agendas at a local level.
- In order to address the existing gaps between the national and the local government required institutional, fiscal and policy framework should be formulated to strengthen both the provincial and the local government.
- It provided a platform for active dialogues between local, provincial and national authorities.
- All participants have acknowledged that such dialogue is important and should continue on a regular basis, and possibly beyond the boundaries of the project. Thereby, key ministries can take a lead in institutionalizing this initiative.
- It provided opportunities for peer-to-peer learning between cities. In this regard, four non-partner cities, Khon kaen, Nondindaeng, Phuket and Saraburi, were also engaged in-depth discussions with the two partner cities.
- It was also an opportunity for various national agencies to present in an integrated way their plans and response to the work they do in promoting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda at the local level.