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**Follow-up to the implementation at the national,
regional and international levels of all
commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial
Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the
world drug problem**

**Conference room paper submitted by Thailand, entitled
“Outcome Document of the Royal Project International
Conference: From AD to SDGs: Empowering the AD to
Address the Global Challenges”, held from 1–4 December
2024, at Royal Park Rajapruek, Chiang Mai, Thailand****

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Outcome Document
From AD to SDGs: Empowering the AD to Address the
Global Challenges,
1–4 December 2024,
Royal Park Rajapruek, Chiang Mai, Thailand

I. Introduction

1. Pursuant to the resolution entitled “Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (UNGPs on AD): Effective Implementation and the Way Forward” (CND 67/3), adopted at 67th session the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), the Royal Project Foundation (RPF), in collaboration with the Highland Research and Development Institute (Public Organization) (HRDI) and support by the Government of Thailand, hosted the International Conference on the theme “From Alternative Development (AD) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Empowering Alternative Development to Address Global Challenges,” from 1 to 4 December 2024 in Chiang Mai, Thailand.
2. The International Conference was attended by representatives of member states, experts, academic and farmers and villagers practicing alternative development from 29 countries. It provided an open and collaborative platform for participants to share good practices and lessons learned in implementing alternative development approach to address drug-affected and socio-economic challenges across diverse social, geographical, and environmental contexts.
3. The International Conference consisted of three parts: keynote addresses; panel discussions; and field visits to the RPF and HRDI operational areas. Through in-depth discussions and exchanges of views, the International Conference provided a unique opportunity for participants from various backgrounds to engage in meaningful dialogue on how alternative development can mitigate drug-related problems while contributing to global sustainability and building partnerships.

II. International Conference

4. The opening ceremony of the International Conference was graciously presided over by His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkorn Phra Vajiraklaochaoyuhua and Her Majesty Queen Suthida Bajrasudhabimalalakshana on 1 December 2024. His Majesty the King delivered the royal address, “You all have faithfully carried on and fostered the noble legacy of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej The Great, who initiated the Royal Project as a means to improve the quality of life of hilltribe people in the highlands region by squarely tackling the pressing issues of drug, environmental degradation and poverty. It was part of the strategic goal to bring happiness and prosperity to the nation and people. The Royal Project is highly consequential as it seeks to achieve a balanced development in addressing the interwoven economic, social and environmental challenges. This would earn the reward of extensive benefits in all its forms at all levels achieving a truly sustainable development. We rest assured indeed that the outcome of this Conference will be of help and benefit to development operations being carried out in Thailand and beyond, in our effort to keep up with the rapid changes in the global situation, thereby contributing to a long-lasting well-being of humanity, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals”.
5. Following the address, Their Majesties graciously granted royal permission to H.E. Privy Councilor General Kampanat Ruddit, Secretary-General, Royal Project Foundation, Chairman of the Royal Project Executive Board and Chairman of the Organizing Committee, to present the exhibition on the initiation of the Royal Project, its development, and the collaboration with other countries and the UNODC on alternative development, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



A. Keynote Session

6. The Keynote session highlighted innovative approaches to sustainable and inclusive economic development, emphasizing balanced programmes that meet national needs while protecting the environment. This aligns with international drug policy commitments and the Sustainable Development Goals.

(a) H.E. Privy Councilor General Kampanat Ruddit, Secretary-General of the Royal Project Foundation (RPF) and Chairman of the RPF Executive Board, gave a presentation entitled “Royal Project’s 55-Year Journey and the Way Forward”. He explained how the Royal Project’s Sustainable Highland Alternative Development Model eradicated drugs and opium cultivation, and alleviated poverty in highland communities by implementing an alternative development approach. This model prioritized the development of essential infrastructure, economic and social equity, improving educational and healthcare services, and providing sustainable economic opportunities, while adapting to evolving challenges. He also highlighted the Royal Project Development Center Le Tor, the first development centre in operation during the Reign of His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkorn Phra Vajiraklaochaoyuhua. The Royal Project Sustainable Development Model has been extended to national partner agencies and was incorporated as a part of national policy on alternative development for 2023-2027. It has also been applied and replicated elsewhere in the world.

(b) Khunying Puangroi Diskul Na Ayudhaya, Board Member of Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage (MFLF), shared her experiences over 36 years of the Doi Tung Development Project in transforming a community that once relied on opium cultivation into one that is self-reliant, stable, and drug-free through the idea of “Helping people to help themselves”. She highlighted the need to cultivate people and cultivate land by transforming opium growers into reforest workers where people and forest can live in harmony. She also noted the introduction of carbon credit from community forest for sustainability project in 11 provinces in Thailand as part of the effort to engage community in adapting to new challenges, including climate change, and responding to national carbon neutral policy.

(c) Mr. Karma Tenzin, Deputy Chamberlain, Head for Royal Project of Bhutan, highlighted the thriving partnership between Thailand’s and Bhutan’s Royal Projects since 2003. Through mutual technical cooperation, the two kingdoms have fostered cooperation and exchanged knowledge on various sectors, drawing inspiration from each other’s philosophies: Thailand’s Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) and Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness (GNH). The collaboration anchors on a shared commitment to sustainable development and the betterment of rural communities through meaningful changes and long-lasting progress for the people.

(d) Ms. Ghada Waly, Director-General of the United Nations at Vienna (UNOV) and Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), noted that alternative development has been a mainstay of international

drug policy and underlined its effectiveness in combating the complex root causes of global drug problems by investing in human development, equality and sustainability. The UNODC has been supporting the scaling up of alternative development by building an effective value chain, providing support on entrepreneurship and business skills, making alternative livelihoods sustainable. By converging alternative development with broader development efforts, it will be engines for Sustainable Development Goals and can address multi-faceted issues, namely climate change, rural women empowerment, access to education for children, women's participation in decision making.

(e) Mr. Jong-Jin Kim, Assistant Director-General and FAO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific, presented the FAO's perspective on sustainable highland development, emphasizing the pivotal role of highlands in promoting global food security and environmental sustainability. He underscored the necessity of addressing challenges such as poverty, migration, and natural disasters by prioritizing agrifood strategies that foster adaptation to changing conditions and mitigate the impact of climate change.

(f) Mr. Chen Haiping, Consul General of the People's Republic of China in Chiang Mai, elaborated on China's success in poverty alleviation, by upholding the principle of "people-centered development" and implementing targeted poverty alleviation, and the achievement of a "moderately prosperous society". He also pointed out that lifting people out of poor living condition was not the end, but the beginning of a new life where the government needed to address imbalance development, reduce urban-rural disparities and achieve comprehensive human development for the common prosperity of all people.

(g) Mr. Timo Menniken, Country Director for GIZ Thailand, reflected on alternative development, responding to needs of target groups, as the frontrunner approach for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He exemplified the initial collaboration between GIZ and the Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) of Thailand during 1981-1998 to reduce the opium production in the northern provinces of Thailand, which was a successful and sustainable project that led to the Global Partnership on Drug Policies and Development (GPPD). To achieve sustainability, it is necessary to undertake an integrated approach and factor in social responsibility, ecological balance and economic capability.

(h) Mr. Petipong Pungbun Na Ayudhya, former Minister for Agriculture and Cooperatives and former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives of Thailand, underscored that the success factors of the Royal Projects are continuity and advocacy to turn research into action, by starting small with participation of communities to eradicate opium cultivation, and progressively expand into agriculture market access and development of infrastructure. This has resulted in sustainable development benefitting communities.

(i) Pol. Lt. Gen. Panurat Lakboon, Secretary-General, the Narcotic Control Board (NCB), highlighted the ongoing challenges of combating synthetic drugs. The ONCB is deploying various strategies, including alternative development approach, to address the issue. However, the evolving drug landscape, fuelled by globalization and technological advancements, continues to pose significant risks and obstacles.

(j) Mrs. Pimwadee Sovaratanapong, Deputy Director-General, Acting Director-General, the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA), Thailand's key focal point for international development cooperation, shared TICA's experiences and success stories in sustainable development cooperation, offering valuable insights for others seeking to implement similar initiatives.

Key Conclusions

1. Sustainable development requires comprehensive and balanced economic, social and environmental considerations.

2. Effective sustainable development can be achieved through communities engagement and collaborative efforts from both national and international organizations.
3. Human capital development, particularly continuous education and training, is crucial in contributing to success and sustainable development.
4. Strengthening community resilience is essential for long-term sustainability.



B. Panel Discussions

7. Three panel discussions were held under the overarching theme of “Yesterday’s Milestones for Wisdom of Today and Tomorrow.” Sustainable development is a collective endeavour that requires cross-sectoral collaboration from all segments of society. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is imperative to learn from past experiences and share best practices with other countries. This will enable us to fully explore the potential of alternative development and build resilience in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. International cooperation is also essential for achieving these goals.

(a) **Panel 1 – “Shaping Today’s Value from Past Experiences”** The panel takes note of the experts’ insights and experiences in introducing alternative development approach to hill tribe communities. The discussion noted key lessons learned, which are: alternative development projects took at least 10 years to yield concrete outcome; opium cultivation eradication had to go hand in hand with community development initiatives, with both short and long term measures; market access was key success factor for villagers to gain sustainable revenue from substitute crop; and, most importantly, collaboration with all concerned agencies to bring change.

(b) **Panel 2 – “Cultivating Tomorrow Sustainability from Past and Present Journey”** The panel noted the changing global landscape and new challenges, including digital technology for agricultural production and climate change, to sustainable development. The panel explored the critical role of sustainable development in improving living standards while preserving the planet for future generations. Therefore, the panellists suggested that the government integrated alternative development as part of national policy, utilize alternative development as an integral policy in addressing climate change, which will enable access to funding for alternative development projects, and promote international cooperation and political will to collectively move alternative development agenda forward.

(c) **Panel 3 – “Voices from the Unheard”** The panel was joined by representatives of marginalized populations, that are often left unheard, coming from one of the most remote areas in Thailand and various parts of the world. They voiced the effects and changes made, following the introduction of alternative development to their communities and the improvement of their livelihoods. They are ensured with

basic needs and dignified incomes from licit crops, provided with opportunities to make choices, entrusted to care over communal forest and live in harmony with it. Through generations, they recognized the importance of upholding sufficiency economy philosophy in leading their lives, and coming back to give back to their hometown as no one knows their communities better than they do.

Key Conclusions

1. Experiences gained and lessons learned help provide useful guidance and direction for future development strategies.
2. Sustainability is recognized as a core principle for transformative growth.
3. Empowering alternative development is about supporting alternative livelihoods and strengthening collaborative efforts to achieve sustainable development.
4. Adapting lessons learned is needed to further advance alternative development and address drug issues in today's changing global landscape.
5. Embracing innovative approaches helps address contemporary challenges.
6. Promoting inclusive and equitable development practices is crucial.
7. Cooperation among all relevant stakeholders must be fostered to address complex and transborder development challenges.
8. Investing in education and capacity-building empowers future generations.



C. Field Trips: Site Visit

8. Participants were invited to visit one of the three successful highland community development projects implemented by the Royal Project Foundation (RPF) and the Highland Research and Development Institute (Public Organization) (HRDI). These projects exemplified Thailand's concrete and successful alternative development models in highland areas.

(a) **Group 1 – Angkhang Royal Project Agriculture Research Station, Chiang Mai Province** The Angkhang Royal Project is the first Royal Project Agriculture Research Station, established in 1969 by His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej to eradicate local opium cultivation and improve the lives of local hilltribe communities by offering alternative livelihoods. It was once a heartland of opium cultivation, which was later reborn as a model of sustainable living. The research station has played a pivotal role in transforming Angkhang community at its root causes by providing seeds for cultivation, securing villagers' income by purchasing the total agricultural products to be processed and sold domestically and internationally under the Royal Project Brand. Today, the region is lush green with man-made forests. This is a testament to building a resilience by the communities and for the communities. The Angkhang Royal Project Agriculture Research Station works continuously to develop and provide new plant species with stronger resistance

and adaptability to constant environmental changes, while maintaining a connection with the local communities.

(b) Group 2 – Le Tor Royal Project Development Center, Tak Province

The Le Tor Royal Project Development Center is the 39th and the first Royal Project Development centre, established in 2016, during the reign of His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkorn Phra Vajiraklaochaoyuhu. The area was once a remoted area, cut off from the region, riddled with poverty. Villagers relied on opium cultivation as the main source of income. With the guidance of the Royal Project Foundation, Le Tor has become illicit crops cultivation-free and self-sustained communities. It now serves as a model for the Royal Project’s innovative approach designed to urgently address emerging challenges, such as drugs, reforestation, climate and environmental challenges, making it different from the gradual development model exemplified by Angkhang. Key elements of Le Tor’s accelerated development strategy include:

1. **Rapid Infrastructure Development:** Prioritizing the rapid development of critical basic infrastructure to facilitate inter-agency coordination and joint efforts in addressing serious challenges.
2. **Intensified Intersectoral Integration:** Fostering strong collaboration across all relevant sectors to achieve comprehensive and sustainable development.
3. **Rigorous Legal Framework:** Implementing rigorous legal frameworks to guarantee that land use management adheres to applicable laws and regulations, including addressing the issue of the borderline of forest and agricultural zones.

By adopting these strategies, Le Tor has achieved significant progress in just eight years, demonstrating the effectiveness of this new approach in rapidly tackling economic, social, and environmental issues.

(c) Group 3 – Pa Pae Highland Development Project, Chiang Mai Province Pa Pae Highland Development Project was formerly a community that once relied on Miang (a type of native tea) as their main source of income. The local community faced with unstable income when prices of Miang plummeted. In addition, Pa Pae community struggles with an aging population, with almost half of its residents aged 60 years and above. To address these challenges, the Highland Research and Development Institute (HDRI) introduced a knowledge-driven approach, disseminating research findings and promoting value-added Miang production and sustainable farming practices, tailored to the needs of older farmers. As a result, household incomes increased, and the community gained a deeper appreciation for environmental conservation.

Key Conclusions

1. Human Resource Development:
 - Empowering women, youth, and local leaders for active participation in highland development.
 - Fostering local ownership to ensure sustainable alternative development implementation.
2. Economic Development:
 - Promoting marketing and E-Marketing to strengthen the Sufficiency Economy model at the community level.
3. Natural Resource and Environmental Conservation:
 - Implementing Highland Appropriate Agricultural System and Agroforestry System to address challenges arising from climate change and promote sustainable development.

4. Integrated Partnership:
 - Collaborating with Local Government, Government Agencies, the Royal Project Foundation Model, and the Private Sector to collectively achieve shared goals.
5. Role of Royal Project Development Centres:
 - Leveraging research and development to identify and disseminate best practices to enhance community well-being in the face of global challenges.



D. Reflection on Alternative Development in Action

9. The final day of the event was a platform for “Reflection on Alternative Development in Action” where participants reflected on the practical implementation of alternative development through presentations from all site visit groups. To ensure the ongoing relevance and effectiveness of alternative development, participants engaged and presented their perspectives by identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and ultimately providing brief guidelines on the development of more sustainable and impactful strategies that address global challenges.

10. Given the evolving global drug landscape, the traditional AD approach to addressing drug issues may be insufficient. Today, illicit drugs evolve from crops to various kinds of synthetic substances, penetrating communities of all levels, ages and genders. A transformative AD approach to drug abuse prevention is urgently needed, shifting the focus from mere suppression to a more comprehensive “Prevention Development” model that addresses the underlying social and environmental factors in vulnerable regions. A key is to empower communities through territorial approaches to develop diverse livelihood opportunities and ensure social equity and environmental sustainability, domestically, regionally, and globally. These approaches are holistic and inclusive based on people-centric principles. They also contribute to the advancement of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to ensure that no one is left behind.



III. Key Conclusions and Recommendations

11. Alternative development has increasingly been recognized as a strategy to address the world drug problem. The alternative development programmes are introduced to promote licit crops cultivation primarily to address poverty and lack of

livelihood opportunities, which are, in most cases root causes of illicit drug crop cultivation.

12. Thailand has promoted the implementation of AD since 1969 with His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej The Great's Royal Project, as the pioneer in development and promotion of crop substitution to opium poppy under the principles of "Understanding, Empathy and Development" along with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Until present, the Royal Project has achieved its opium eradication objective with successful introductions of the wide range of (a) "new" cash crops including temperate fruit trees and vegetables, and high value cut flowers for crop substitution programme under environmentally-friendly practices and (b) new types of livestock and fishery development.

13. As one of the largest world opium-producing countries in the past, Thailand has now become a successful model in alternative development. In December 2013, the UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS) adopted the UN Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (UNGPs on AD) as an important reference for UN member countries to carry out alternative and sustainable development effectively. The AD model pioneered by the Royal Project has been studied and implemented by many organizations within the country and beyond including Lao PDR, Myanmar, Bhutan and others.

14. Due to uncertainties and challenges, it is necessary for all organizations to work closely together. This requires continued and regular discussions to shape and update alternative development strategies that balance social, economic and environmental considerations. The outcomes of these new strategies should also be linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and be able to, but not limited to,

(1) Further advance a broad-based economic recovery that offers a range of alternative livelihoods, while safeguarding social equity and environmental sustainability on both domestic and global levels. Based on the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, this approach prioritizes moderation, reasonableness, and balance across all dimensions to foster immunity, knowledge, and moral support, thereby achieving sustainable development;

(2) Advocate transformative reforms to strengthen national and global governance that strives to foster a more equitable world where essential global public goods are made available and accessible, and risks to human well-being and the planet are minimized;

(3) Encourage the willingness and full participation of local communities, relevant organizations, and civil society in designing and implementing AD strategies and programmes to ensure ownership and long-term sustainability by empowering human resources to address global challenges;

(4) Promote inclusive leadership development, that engages independent analysts, government officials, business leaders, and civil society organizations. By empowering individuals from all backgrounds, that can work together to promote synergy as we rethink the future with an open mind;

(5) Foster AD programmes as a key component of national and international development agendas, by "Leaving No One Behind".