

Concept Paper ACD Vision for Asia Cooperation 2030

I. Rationale for ACD Revitalization and Vision for Asia Cooperation

The rise of Asia is indisputable. The region is already a global economic powerhouse. It supplies the world economy with ever-increasing flows of goods and capital – and boasts vibrant, integrated markets and production hubs. It is also home to fast-expanding pools of sophisticated consumers, skilled workers and aspiring entrepreneurs. In short, Asia is at the heart of global trade, supply chain, innovation and growth.

Asia's ascendancy is confirmed not only by tangible socio-economic gains, but also the changing perception of the region. Economic dynamism, made possible by domestic reforms and regional integration, has contributed to Asia's rising status in the international community. Asian countries have adapted well to thrive in the modern international system, making use of their diverse strengths and rich heritage. More than ever, Asia matters to the world – and the world expects Asia to be an active and responsible member of the community of nations.

In this context of Asia's remarkable growth and promising outlook, the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) was born in 2002, at the turn of the "Asian Century". ACD was envisaged to be a continent-wide forum of policy dialogue that would help Asian countries forge stronger bonds, tackle common challenges and fulfill shared aspirations. In this sense, the founding of ACD was intrinsically linked to Asia's rise to global prominence, growing optimism and focus on regionalism.

However, over twelve years since its formation, **ACD has yet to realize its potential as a Pan-Asian cooperation forum.** On the one hand, ACD has attracted the interest of more Asian countries, as confirmed by the expansion of ACD membership to 33 countries. On the other hand, the forum lacks a clear direction going forward. ACD's position in the evolving regional architecture is also unclear. Despite the progress made in specific projects, the absence of long-term vision and goals may undermine the relevance and role of ACD in driving Asian regionalism and growth. **In the context of burgeoning and overlapping regional forums, ACD needs to establish its unique position where it can play a constructive and dynamic role in advancing the shared interests of Asian countries.**

The need for a vision is particularly important given a number of challenges our region is facing. Asia needs to eradicate poverty, reduce disparities across countries and subregions, overcome the "Middle Income Trap", build up backbone infrastructure in technology and connectivity, promote food and energy security, boost labor productivity, prepare for urbanization booms, and ensure sustainable utilization of natural resources. Given these and other pressing concerns, Asia's bright prospect is by no means guaranteed. Collective effort among Asian countries is essential if Asia is to grapple with the challenges, maintain competitiveness, stay on its growth trajectory, and achieve inclusive and sustainable development. **Asia needs its own vision for more effective regional cooperation – and ACD is uniquely positioned to drive the formulation and realization of that vision.**

It is imperative that ACD seeks new momentum that will revitalize the forum. This reinvigoration of ACD requires a clear vision for Asia cooperation - and concrete ways in which ACD can translate that vision into reality. ACD Member States need to review and revise ACD's overarching objectives – and agree on a future direction in which we can advance our partnership. This vision will **provide an impetus for more focused and results-oriented ACD cooperation.** It should **reflect our shared aspirations, make use of our diverse strengths and economic complementarities, and take into account different priorities**

of Member States. It will form a basis on which we can strengthen the fundamentals for Asia's inclusive and resilient growth, thereby ensuring a peaceful and prosperous future for our region.

II. Core Elements of the “ACD Vision for Asia Cooperation 2030”

ACD Member States should endeavor to produce the “ACD Vision for Asia Cooperation 2030”. This ACD Vision document will be a political statement that reaffirms our commitment to ACD and Pan-Asian partnership. The document should be concisely written, seeking to provide a broad but clear vision—a set of ambitious but attainable long-term goals—for regional cooperation. It should also take into account the current realities and prospects of ACD.

Here we propose that the ACD Vision should address the following **overarching issues**:

- What are our shared political and economic aspirations for Asia and regional cooperation? What are our long-term goals for ACD as a Pan-Asian cooperation forum that promotes a stronger sense of “Asian Community” and Asia's inclusive and sustainable development, economic integration and competitiveness?
- What do we envision ACD's unique position and role to be within the broader scheme of evolving regional architecture? How should we strengthen the international standing and credibility of ACD?
- How should we enhance ACD mechanisms, i.e. consolidation of fields of cooperation to be more activity-driven and yield more tangible impact?

To address the above overarching issues, the ACD Vision may comprise, among others, the following **core elements**:

- Promote ACD's core principles and values, and spirit of Pan-Asian partnership, as well as establish our aspirations for Asia as a region of peace, progress and shared prosperity, underpinned by inclusive, balanced, people-centered and sustainable development;
- Strengthen ACD's economic competitiveness and resilience, as well as deepen trade and production linkages within ACD and with other regions, through viable economic integration and investment in connectivity infrastructure and technologies;
- Deepen collective efforts to reduce economic and social disparities while ensuring inclusive growth and sustainable development, both within and across ACD Member States, in order to build a more equitable society in Asia, as well as to promote the sharing of knowledge, experiences and technology to support capacity building and human resource development in the ACD region;
- Consolidate ACD's international profile and credibility, as well as establish a distinctive position in which ACD can play a constructive and complementary role within the array of regional and subregional cooperation forums in Asia;

- Strengthen ACD's role as an active forum for dialogue and collective action on global and regional issues of common concern, as well as promote ACD's engagement and partnership with relevant stakeholders, including international organizations and non-ACD countries;
- Enhance ACD capacity through review and restructuring of existing fields of cooperation to promote more focused, activity-driven and result-oriented cooperation.

These Core Elements shall be deliberated and revised by Member States. New elements may be proposed and added. They shall be finalized and adopted by the 2nd ACD Summit.

The timeframe for the ACD Vision should be agreed upon. As a starting point for discussion, Thailand proposes that Member States consider formulating the ACD Vision for a 15-year time horizon (ACD Vision for Asia Cooperation 2030).

III. ACD Blueprint 2016-2020

The ACD Vision for Asia Cooperation should be supported by **a single and coherent ACD Blueprint**. The Blueprint should serve as a detailed plan of action, outlining the specific steps that need to be taken to advance various aspects of ACD cooperation in the pursuit of the ACD Vision. The Blueprint may be based on a medium-term perspective of five years (the first Blueprint should be for 2016-2020). The drafting of the Blueprint should commence after the ACD Vision has been endorsed.

IV. Next Steps

Thailand, as ACD Chair and Coordinator, will gather views and inputs from the discussion on overarching issues and core elements of the ACD Vision at the Ministerial Meeting with a view to develop and propose a draft ACD Vision which will be circulated to ACD Member States for further comments prior to the 2nd ACD Summit.
