

4th ASEAN Connectivity Symposium: "Partnering Private Sector for ASEAN Connectivity"



Photo: Session 5 of the ASEAN Connectivity Symposium

The 4th ASEAN Connectivity Symposium, entitled 'Partnering Private Sector for ASEAN Connectivity', was held on 27 August 2013 in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam.

This year's Symposium focused on the role of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC). The discussions centred on (i) identifying the right policy environment and regulatory framework for PPPs; (ii) learning PPP best practices from various regions; and (iii) exploring the potential for private sector involvement in ASEAN Connectivity projects.

H.E. Le Luong Minh, Secretary-General of ASEAN noted the need to increase private sector investment in the region to address the massive financing requirements for ASEAN Connectivity projects. Through public-private partnerships (PPPs), governments would be able to work with the private sector to close funding gaps and tap its expertise to develop sustainable and high-quality infrastructure. As such, he said more efforts are needed "to create a favourable environment for PPPs, which in turn, will support our ASEAN Connectivity agenda."

Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Brunei Darussalam, concurred, noting that several ASEAN countries have taken steps towards greater private sector involvement in infrastructure development since the 1980s. He argued that "infrastructure that gets built now will stay on for generations and will be the platform for the future economic and social development

in this region”. Therefore, there is a need for more innovative arrangements in PPP, especially for cross border projects.

The participants exchanged views on the possible measures that could be undertaken by ASEAN Member States to create a policy environment conducive to PPPs. They also discussed PPP best practices by examining regional case studies with useful insights from the private sector.

Prof. Hidetoshi Nishimura, Executive Director of the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) pointed out that “PPP with regional perspectives and cooperation will be one of the solutions for advancing ASEAN Connectivity, including the development of Mekong-India Economic Corridor (MIEC)”. He reiterated the importance of PPP guideline for ASEAN which can bring about “PPP in an ASEAN Way”. He also mentioned “the need to have a Regional PPP Centre of Excellence which could include the provision of technical assistance and capacity building, exchange of knowledge amongst stakeholders and the promotion of cross-border projects”.

The annual ASEAN Connectivity Symposium is a public-private sector consultative process which enables relevant stakeholders to discuss concrete steps and articulate perspectives on the implementation of the MPAC. A flagship outreach activity of the ASEAN Connectivity Coordinating Committee (ACCC), this year’s Symposium was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Brunei Darussalam, the ASEAN Secretariat and the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). The Symposium brought together approximately 140 government officials, researchers and private sector representatives from ASEAN Member States and Dialogue Partner countries, as well as international organisations.