
National City Awards as a Practical Approach to Encourage Local Government Initiatives for Sustainable Cities



The Mayor of Mae Hong Son Municipality, Thailand holding the award trophy and leading the city council's delegation during a local ceremony to celebrate the city's success in winning the Thailand Livable Cities Awards programme in 2011. (Photo credit: DEQP, MoNRE Thailand)

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Executive Summary

- Advancing the agenda of sustainable development in cities requires the **effective allocation of roles at the national and local levels**, as well as **supporting initiatives by regional and international stakeholders**. The **low levels of awareness, capacity and resources** which characterise most local governments in the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is also a key challenge.
- Among many options, **national city awards programmes appear to be a practical and low-cost non-regulatory approach** for Environment ministries to promote the concept of an ‘environmentally sustainable city’ and encourage bottom-up initiatives on sustainable development. City awards programmes incentivise local governments to improve their performance on prescribed indicators, a process which helps to raise the capacity of local governments over time.
- **Environment ministries of four ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand) have introduced city awards programmes** in their respective countries in collaboration with other line ministries and stakeholders. Each programme’s scope and framework are tailored to suit unique national contexts and priorities..
- Judging from the level of participation in the studied programmes, the **reputational incentives of award titles are attractive to many local governments**. Moreover, local governments may also appreciate other benefits from participating in a city awards programme, such as an **objective external performance review to identify areas needing improvement through the assessment process of the awards programme**. The inter-departmental effort to collect data and compile reports – a standard procedure in a city awards programme – was found to help **improve collaboration and working relationships among municipal staff**.
- The commonly encountered **challenges of designing and implementing city awards programmes** are: (i) formulating sound and comprehensive criteria/indicators to reflect all dimensions of sustainable city development; (ii) motivating participation through providing incentives; (iii) coordination and collaboration with other stakeholders; and (iv) programme sustainability. There are **opportunities to address these areas and also enhance existing city awards programmes**, by drawing on ideas and experiences from related initiatives in Australia, China, India, Japan and Sweden.
- In ASEAN countries **where national city awards programmes do not yet exist**, such as Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam, **it may be feasible for Environment ministries (or other stakeholders) to initiate a basic city awards programme** as a starting point for promoting the sustainable city agenda, by **learning from the experiences of neighbouring ASEAN countries**..
- Taking a broader perspective, individual **national city awards programmes can be seen as strategic ‘building blocks’ in each country for a regional initiative** that also targets working with motivated and progressive local governments. Furthermore, such a regional initiative may also attempt to **facilitate the strengthening and establishment of national city awards programmes**. Since existing national awards programmes have a domestic orientation and do not focus on capacity building and technical assistance, a regional initiative (under ASEAN) may **add**

value through capacity building, technical assistance and promoting cross-country knowledge exchange among cities within the region. This idea has been realised through a programme called the ASEAN ESC Model Cities Programme implemented under the auspices of the ASEAN Working Group on Environmentally Sustainable Cities (AWGESc).

1.) Introduction

1.1.) *Background and Focus*

This report has a particular focus on the design and implementation of national city awards programmes, including their challenges and potential linkages to ASEAN's regional framework. In 2010, IGES was requested to design a concept for a proposed new regional local government capacity building programme in Southeast Asia. The programme would be hosted under the framework of the annual Ministerial Meeting of the Environment ministries under ASEAN, and address the priority collaboration area agreed by the inaugural East Asia Summit Environment Ministers (EAS EMM) on 'environmentally sustainable cities' in 2008. The programme's implementing agency would be the AWGESC, which has promoting the realisation of ESC in the region through regional collaboration, including on capacity building and knowledge exchange, as one of its mandates.

To ensure that the new programme would add value to existing work, a survey (elaborated in 1.4 'Scope and Methodology') was conducted among National Focal Points (NFPs) of Environment ministries to identify relevant national initiatives in ASEAN member states. Among the member states, four of them – Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines – reported national city awards programmes had been, or are implemented, as a means to promote the broad and overarching theme of 'sustainable cities'. These programmes are presented as case studies in this paper. Furthermore, it was thought that relevant initiatives in other non-ASEAN countries – though not strictly equivalent to city awards systems but aim to promote the overall concept of 'sustainable cities' – would also lend meaningful lessons and useful ideas for the design of the new programme, so additional case studies were identified and reviewed.

It was found that programme administrators encounter some common challenges in designing and implementing national city awards programmes. However, there is some evidence that these programmes are not overly complex to implement and have been positively received by their targeted beneficiaries (local governments) in terms of improving local government performance and capacity. Finally, it appears to be feasible to link these country-based national programmes to a regional initiative under ASEAN and the AWGESC, as well as other regional activities which target aspiring and high-performance local governments as their participants.

The findings of this report have been incorporated into the design of the ASEAN ESC Model Cities Programme, which was funded by the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF) and implemented for one year from April 2011 – March 2012, under the auspices of the AWGESC. The ASEAN Secretariat and IGES jointly served as the Regional Secretariat for this programme.

Beyond that, it is hoped that this report's findings would also encourage national governments to consider initiating a national city awards programme (or sustain and enhance existing programmes) as a practical means to encourage local government initiatives on sustainable urban development. Meanwhile, supporting organisations are encouraged to support or strategically link with national city awards programmes in their capacity building and networking activities.

1.2.) *Objectives*

This report has the following objectives:

- i. Through case studies, inform readers about the **design and implementation framework experience of national city awards programmes**, which are implemented by national governments, particularly Environment ministries in ASEAN countries, to promote the theme of sustainable cities and local sustainability;
- ii. Through analysis of the case studies, provide some **ideas and observations to practitioners and project managers on** designing and implementing new national city award programmes, or to enhance existing programmes;
- iii. **Discuss the feasibility of national city awards programmes** in terms of their benefits, practicality and affordability, as well as **how national programmes might be fruitfully linked to the higher-level, regional initiatives under ASEAN, particularly the AWGESC**;
- iv. Explain **how the ideas and observations in this paper have been applied to an actual regional programme jointly implemented by IGES and the ASEAN Secretariat** under the ASEAN framework.

1.3.) Target Audience

This report is targeted at project/programme managers and practitioners in Environment ministries (as well as other line ministries) and organisations involved in promoting the agenda of sustainable urban development in the Asian region, such as donor institutions, development agencies, city networks as well as regional inter-governmental bodies like ASEAN.

1.4.) Scope and Methodology

This report draws from both primary and secondary data. First, specific programmes for case studies were identified through direct enquiry with the NFPs of the AWGESC. Where the NFPs did not propose a programme, the authors identified programmes through literature review and sought acknowledgement from Environment ministries. Reports (online and printed documents) about these programmes were procured and studied. Second, interviews (e-mail and in person) were conducted with the programme administrators as well as with local governments who had participated in the national city awards programme to obtain insight about the pragmatic and operational issues.

Three limitations of the case studies in this report should be mentioned:

- Case studies should not be seen as exhaustive. The selection of case studies relied on the inputs provided by Environment ministries who are NFPs to the AWGESC (or their affiliated agencies). Hence, similar initiatives from other ministries¹ may not be considered even though they may have relevance to this study.
- While there may be many programmes implemented by Environment ministries which address *sectoral* aspects of sustainable city or urban management (e.g. solid waste management, air pollution, water quality management etc.), *only programmes which explicitly aim to promote the overarching theme of 'sustainable cities'* are targeted in this study.

¹ Other line ministries are also known to organise national awards programmes targeting local governments, but with a different or sectoral focus. For example, an Interior Ministry may organise national awards or monitoring systems to recognise local governments based on indicators of good governance or administrative excellence, while a Health Ministry may introduce an awards programmes for local governments who have excelled at measures for promoting and improving public health.

- The case studies are intended to be informative and descriptive – they do not provide a basis for comparison or objective analysis of the *impacts* and *effectiveness* of the programmes. The report’s discussion is largely focused on the practical aspects of programme design and implementation and pragmatic linkages with new or existing programmes.

1.5.) Structure

- Section 1 introduces the overall messages, objectives, context, research methodology and structure of the report.
- Section 2 contains key discussion in literature on the roles of national and local governments in the context of sustainable development and sustainable cities, as well as an overview of key governance and capacity challenges faced by local governments in Southeast Asia;
- Section 3 provides case studies of existing national city awards programmes led by Environment ministries to engage local governments on the overarching theme of ‘sustainable cities’ in four ASEAN member states (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand);
- Section 4 provides additional case studies of similar initiatives implemented in non-ASEAN countries (Australia, China, India, Japan and Sweden) as a basis for drawing ideas to inform the design of current and future initiatives in ASEAN;
- Section 5 describes the challenges of designing and implementing city awards programmes and weaves in discussion on potentially useful features and lessons from selected non-ASEAN programmes;
- Section 6 puts together findings and observations from earlier chapters to discuss the feasibility of national city awards programmes from the view of practicality, benefits and affordability; and also considers potential linkages of national programmes with regional initiatives, particularly under ASEAN. It also informs readers how the findings from this study were eventually applied to the design of the ASEAN ESC Model Cities Programme, which was implemented for one year from April 2011 – March 2012².
- Section 7 lays out some conclusions and recommendations, including for future research.

² This was the pilot phase of the programme. The programme has been extended into a second year of implementation from May 2014 – April 2015.

2.) National and Local Governments in the Context of Sustainable Development and Sustainable Cities

2.1.) National and Local Roles in Sustainable Development

Although the aspiration of ‘sustainable development’ is already widely subscribed to among policy circles, translating theories and policies into ground practices and achieving wide-scale transformation remains a formidable challenge. There is concern that the transition towards sustainable development over the past three decades has not occurred at the required speed and scale, and has relied too heavily on being driven by inter-governmental and global processes (Halle, Najam & Beaton, 2013).

Coordination and role allocation (who does what?) is a difficult aspect of sustainable development. The cross-cutting nature of sustainable development measures calls for context-sensitive governance approaches that can foster, guide and coordinate work by a host of actors on a vast complex of inter-connected issues across multiple levels. (Kemp, Parto & Gibson, 2005).

The role of national governments as policy innovators and change agents has been given much emphasis. For instance, Chapter 8 of Agenda 21, in the United Nations’ non-binding global action plan for sustainable development, calls on governments to adopt national strategies for sustainable development (NSDS) which

build upon and harmonise various sectoral (economic, social and environmental) policies and plans. Ideally, national strategies should involve all branches of government and be a two-way iterative process between national and decentralised (sub-national and local) levels, where the national government is seen as responsible for defining overarching principles and directions, while detailed planning, implementation and monitoring is the domain of local actors. (OECD, 2001; Swanson *et al*, 2004; nrg4SD, 2011).

In parallel, recognition of the importance of local sustainability and local government actions is on the rise. With Local Agenda 21 (LA21) as the ‘trigger’ and a critical turning point for the discourse on local sustainability two decades ago, the local sustainability agenda has gradually blossomed into a global movement.

There is a sprawling scope of discourse on ‘sustainable cities’. Today, popular references to local sustainability have greatly diversified to encompass myriad concepts and terms such as ‘green growth’³, ‘eco-cities’, ‘low carbon city’, ‘Eco² Cities’⁴, ‘model cities’, ‘green cities’, ‘local MDGs’, ‘resilient cities’⁵ etc. Since the concept of sustainability is very general and multi-faceted, a rich discussion has emerged in a wide range of disciplines (Blassingame, 1998; Pickette, Cadenasso & Grove; 2004; Andersson, 2006; Bithas & Christofakis, 2006; Egger, 2006)

³ A term adopted by OECD’s Green Growth and Cities Programme (<http://www.oecd.org/greengrowth/green-growth-in-cities.htm>)

⁴ A framework developed by the World Bank. (http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EX_TURBANDEVELOPMENT/0,,contentMDK:22643153~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:337178,00.html)

⁵ A framework advocated by ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability. (<http://www.iclei.org/our-activities/our-agendas/resilient-city.html>). The term is also gaining popularity, and is used by the Rockefeller Foundation (<http://100resilientcities.rockefellerfoundation.org/>) and UNISDR, among others.

but there does not appear to be a universally accepted framework for a 'sustainable city'.

2.2.) Governance and Capacity Challenges of Local Sustainable Development

Numerous studies (Dixon, 2011; Yap, 2011; UN-DESA, 2010; Trevor and Kanaley, 2006) have stressed the necessity of good urban governance and the challenges faced in terms of in moving towards more sustainable development pathways in cities. The complexity of urban or city governance arises naturally from the convergence of many sectoral and thematic issues in city management. infrastructure and services.

With respect to managing sustainable development, both fully centralised and decentralised systems of governance have weaknesses (Ostrom and Andersson, 2008). Since the turn of the 21st century, the concept of a multi-level governance approach has been gaining traction. In most of developing countries, however, systems of governance are still characterised by top-down hierarchies. National governments, through numerous line ministries, still exert a considerable direct and indirect influence and control on the activities of local governments (ESCAP, 2005). Unclear, fragmented and uncoordinated policies – including decentralisation policies – across line ministries often complicate or frustrate implementation by local governments who are occupying the lowest rung on the ladder of policy and decision-making.

Closely intertwined with the governance challenge is the issue of insufficient capacity at the local level, which needs to be addressed in the quest for effective decentralisation. Although national governments do invest in the training and capacity building of local government

officials, the scope and quality of training are inadequate, with a tendency to focus on building administrative over technical capacity.

The interest in supporting sustainable development on the local level through capacity building and technical assistance, often through city-to-city twinning relationships, is growing among international donors, development agencies (ICLEI, 2012) and even among cities in economically advanced countries, such as Kitakyushu, Yokohama, Kawasaki etc. in Japan (Nakamura, 2010).

3.0) National City Awards Programmes

As mentioned in the introduction, the context behind this report was primarily aimed at understanding the existing national programmes or initiatives implemented by the Environment ministries of ASEAN member states to promote sustainable city development in their respective countries. From our survey, it was found that Environment ministries in four ASEAN member states – Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand – have, in common, been promoting the holistic concept of local sustainability or sustainable city initiatives, especially in terms of improving environmental management in urban areas through ‘national city awards’ programmes.

3.1.) Overview of City Awards Programmes

The act of giving ‘awards’ to recognise desirable and excellent qualities and performance is pervasive in almost all fields and levels of human societies. Frey (2006) provides in-depth discussion on the theory and practice of awards. He notes that awards have been studied extensively through the lenses of sociology and to a lesser degree, in psychology, while awards have been explored as a form of incentives in the field of economics. It is posited that awards are valuable because they are scarce (they are difficult to get) and that human nature seeks the benefit of social status (awards convey social position and distinction). The relationship of the award bestower and the recipient is that of the bestower inducing behaviour in its interest. Hence, from the perspective of function, awards can be seen as an tool (along with monetary rewards and intrinsic motivation) to motivate effort.

Let us now position awards in the context of cities. The recipients of city awards are ‘cities’ or ‘local governments’ who are represented by

mayors or officers of equivalent rank. A ‘City awards’ programme is an approach of (i) setting qualitative and quantitative indicators to define desirable inputs, outputs and outcomes; (ii) measuring and rating local governments against those indicators; and then (iii) rewarding the best performing ones with positive public reputation through awards. The criteria can be seen as an expression of normative expectations of local government performance or actions in each country to contribute towards sustainable development.

3.2.) How City Awards Programmes Contribute to Capacity Building

Interviews with programme administrators have revealed two broad expected effects of city awards. First, it sets out to promote better performance of participating local governments in city development by recognising ‘excellence’ in a public manner (i.e. the evaluation and results are made available in the public domain, such as through mass media). This rests on the theory of ‘reputation’ – that public disclosure of performance metrics can create strong motivation for performing desired actions. City awards play on the glamour and prestige aspect of the rewards, by having high-level patrons (members of the royal family, prime ministers/presidents etc.) hand awards to the winners in an official and grand ceremony.

Second, through the congregating function of the award ceremonies and the dissemination of outreach/communication materials to non-participating local governments, city awards programmes are also expected to function as a mechanism with indirect ‘ripple effects’ in terms of raising awareness, fostering networking for mutual learning as well as facilitating good practice/policy replication. This gradually leads to changed behaviour and raised capacity of local governments over time.

It is assumed that local governments are willing to compete for awards for both aspirational and utilitarian purposes. The attainment of awards can be used as a signal of good governance to attract additional resources from the national government or external agencies, as well as to gain the approval of the electorate. Astute mayors will require their staff to be ready for participation once these programmes are announced and when the anticipated benefits are perceived as justifying the extra time and efforts required.

3.3.) Programmes in ASEAN Countries Implemented by Environment ministries

Table 1 summarises the implementing arrangements, period, programme cycle, objectives, primary theme(s) and assessment indicators of the four city awards programmes in ASEAN member states studied in this report. Subsequently, Sections 3.3 – 3.6 provide more detailed description on the background and implementation experience, to serve as a basis for discussion in subsequent sections.

Table 1: Summary of City Awards Programmes in ASEAN Member States

Country	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Thailand
Programme name	Adipura Environmental Awards	Bandar Lestari Sustainable City Awards	Clean and Green Awards	Livable City Award
Implementer (Lead)	Ministry of the Environment	Department of Environment, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment	Department of Natural Resources and the Environment (DENR)	Department of Environmental Quality Promotion (DEQP)
Co-Implementers	Other line ministries	Department of Local Government, National University of Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia)	Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG)	National Municipality League of Thailand (NMLT), Thailand Environment Institute (TEI)
Implementation Period	1986 – 1997; re-launched in 2002 - present	2004 - present	1993 – 2005; National-level awards were halted in 2005 but continued in selected regions	2004 - present
Programme cycle	Annual	Biennial	Annual	Biennial
Objectives	To promote and encourage good environmental governance practices at the local level	To give recognition to urban centres for their overall commitment and efforts towards environmental sustainability	To inculcate in the minds of Filipinos the values of discipline, self-reliance, resourcefulness, cooperation, cleanliness and environmental awareness, and, at the same time, to help transform rural and urban areas into clean and green communities that are healthy and pleasant to live in	To develop a role model for other municipalities and to foster ties and networking among local government organisations in promoting the realisation of livable cities throughout Thailand
Primary Theme	Environment	Environment	Environment	Environment, Society
Indicators	Physical environment and non-physical (public participation, vision of the city, quality of public institutions)	i) Physical environment; ii) Ecological initiatives; iii) Urban services (mainly on waste and transportation management); iv) Environmental governance; and v) Education and awareness.	Physical conditions relating to general cleanliness, solid waste management and urban greening as well as the 'support systems', defined as the level of community mobilisation and participation in the cleaning and greening process.	40 indicators in five dimensions not restricted to 'environmental' concerns – i) Quality of life; ii) Citizen happiness and well-being; iii) environmental sustainability; iv) Developed learning organisation (referring to the municipality); and v) Good governance.
Reference	KLH Indonesia (2011)	Pereira <i>et al</i> (2008)	DILG (2011a, 2011b)	TEI (2009, 2010)

3.3.1) Adipura Environmental Awards Programme (Indonesia)



The Adipura Environmental Awards Programme, first implemented in 1986, is a pioneer and one of the longest running city awards programme in the region⁶. It aims to 'promote and encourage good environmental governance practices at the local level' and is presently regarded as the most prominent and prestigious environmental initiative for local governments in Indonesia. Participation is mandated under the Ministry of Environment's regulation No. 2009/1 and its implementation is supported by provincial governments. Participating cities are divided into three main categories (Metropolitan/Big, Medium and Small). When the 'passing' marks of the prescribed criteria are met or exceeded, awards are handed out to city mayors by the President every year in June in conjunction with World Environment Day, accompanied by heavy press coverage. To date, about 400 local governments have participated in this programme administrated by the Ministry of the Environment.

As this programme was originally designed to address the mismanagement of solid waste and public cleanliness in urban areas in a non-regulatory manner, the criteria were designed to evaluate the physical aspects of cities in these two areas, as well as non-physical aspects such as public participation, vision of the city, quality of public institutions (as measured by its budget and human resource allocation) and the capacity of planning and implementation of measures for improving the city's performance against the criteria. Participating local governments have to submit a self-evaluation questionnaire, which

⁶ The programme was temporarily suspended in 1997 due to the Asian financial crisis but was later revived in 2002.

was then validated by the central Adipura team through unannounced inspections (Paluttri *et al*, 2011).

The success of Adipura could be partially evidenced by the rising number of cities managing to meet the passing requirements. For example, in 1986, only two cities achieved the awards, but by 1997, this number has risen to 273. Adipura also inspired subsequent reputation-based programmes such as PROKASIH and PROPER, which target river and industrial waste respectively (Afsah, Garcia and Sterner, 2011).

In recent years, the Adipura Committee has gradually expanded the programme's assessment criteria to cover air and water quality as well as other aspects of sustainable, including public green spaces, climate change and green economy, among others – thus making it a more holistic programme promoting overall sustainable city development (KLH, 2011). In 2011, a new 'advanced' award title ('Adipura Kencana'), which recognises a higher level of excellence compared to the conventional Adipura awardees, was introduced in 2011 to motivate interventions in a wider scope of urban management.

3.3.2.) Bandar Lestari Sustainable City Awards, (Malaysia)



Since 2003, Malaysia's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources has been organising a national city awards programme called 'Bandar Lestari Environment Awards' through the Department of the Environment, in partnership with the Ministry of Housing and Local Government as well as the Institute for Environment and Development, National University of Malaysia. Its objective is to give

recognition to urban centres for their overall commitment and efforts towards environmental sustainability

Initially, participation was open only to the state capital cities. In 2008, the programme was opened to all other local government units. Participation is voluntary and based on nomination by respective State Governments. The award is presented in a high-profile ceremony every two years by the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister.

Cities are assessed for their accomplishments using indicators in five categories: i) Physical environment; ii) Ecological initiatives; iii) Urban services (mainly waste and transportation management); iv) Environmental governance; and v) Education and awareness. As with other city awards programmes, evaluation data is first collected from self-reported sources which are verified via on-site inspections by a multi-stakeholder committee which includes a public opinion survey (Pereira et al., 2008).

3.3.3 Green and Clean Awards (Philippines)



The ‘*Gawad Pangula sa Kapitaligiran*’ programme in the Philippines, also known in short as the ‘Green and Clean’ Awards, was a national city awards programme covering all local governments which

began in 1993. It was jointly implemented by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), other government agencies as well as other stakeholders including the private sector (DILG, 2010). It has an overall objective to ‘inculcate in the minds of Filipinos the values of discipline, self-reliance, resourcefulness, cooperation, cleanliness and environmental awareness, and, at the same time, to help transform rural and urban

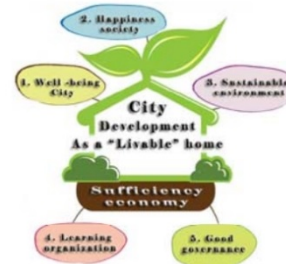
areas into clean and green communities that are healthy and pleasant to live in’. Besides being conferred a title and a trophy, awardees receive prize money (PHP1,000,000) which is to be spent on environmental management activities.

Consecutive winners for three to five years are granted a higher level recognition through the ‘Hall of Fame’ status. Besides awarding top performers, the programme also identifies the worst performers in each category who would earn a ‘presidential reprimand’. An indication of its prominence was how the award was quickly elevated from a departmental to a presidential level award just one year after its introduction in 1994.

Its assessment framework covered physical conditions relating to general cleanliness, solid waste management and urban greening as well as the ‘support systems’, defined as the level of community mobilisation and participation in the cleaning and greening process. River management was also covered.

Despite its success and wide reach, the national level awards scheme was discontinued and devolved to selected provinces in 2005. The main factor for discontinuation was the challenge in securing funds for the prize money from other sources, as well as waning core funding by DILG (DILG, 2010a; 2011b).

3.3.4 Thai Livable Cities Awards (TLCA), (Thailand)



The starting point of the TLCA was the desire to develop a credible and robust interpretation of a ‘sustainable city’ in the Thai context, incorporating the core principle of ‘self-sufficiency economy’

promulgated by the King of Thailand. It aims to develop role models for municipalities and to foster ties and networking among local government organisations by promoting the agenda of ‘livable cities’ throughout Thailand.

Since 2004, the Department of Environmental Quality Promotion (DEQP) (under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment), the National Municipality League of Thailand and the Thailand Environment Institute (the programme secretariat), have been jointly implementing this programme which presents awards to the top-performing municipalities on a biennial basis. Winners in the programme’s three categories (large, medium and small) receive a trophy from the members of the Thai Royalty, which is considered very prestigious and has huge political value for the mayor.

Participating cities are evaluated according to about 40 indicators in five dimensions not restricted to ‘environmental’ concerns – i) Quality of life; ii) Citizen happiness and well-being; iii) environmental sustainability; iv) Developed learning organisation (referring to the municipality); and v) Good governance. The philosophy behind its assessment framework is that its indicators seek to evaluate the ‘process’ or ‘efforts’ of a municipality, rather than the ‘outcomes’, which is reflected in physical conditions (TEI, 2009). In this way, it evaluates and rewards the level of effort, motivation and innovation demonstrated by municipalities, e.g. the behaviour that is intended to be encouraged and stimulated. In other words, the programme takes into account the reality that municipalities often do not have overriding control over a range of environmental, economic and social circumstances (TEI, 2010). According to the programme secretariat, the participation rate is increasing, from 108 (1st cycle; 2004), 111 (2nd cycle; 2007), 140 (3rd cycle; 2009) to 150 municipalities (4th cycle; 2012).



Photo: Author

Left: The trophy awarded to Mae Hong Son Municipality under the Thailand Livable City Awards. It is displayed in the city's cultural and information centre under a photo of the Thai princess who is a patron of the programme.



Photo: Palembang Municipality

Above: The emblem of Indonesia's Adipura Environmental Awards has been proudly erected as a monument in City of Palembang's public park. It is the city's ritual to invite foreign delegates to plant a tree around the monument when they visit for the first time.

Palembang city used to be heavily polluted, but being named as one of the worst performers under the Adipura programme years ago compelled the city leaders to transform it. It is now widely known as one of Indonesia's most famous environmental cities.



Photo: The Borneo Post

Left: Malaysia's Minister of Natural Resources and Environment's Dato Sri Douglas Uggah Embas presenting the award to the Mayor of North Kuching Municipality for the Bandar Lestari Sustainable City Awards in 2010.

4.) Programmes on Sustainable City/Local Sustainability in non-ASEAN Countries

4.1.) Purpose of Including Additional Case Studies

To enlarge the basis for discussion in the subsequent chapters, this study also conducted cases studies of relevant programmes that have been implemented in other non-ASEAN countries, namely Australia, China, India, Japan and Sweden (Summarised in Table 2).

While not all of these programmes have been implemented by Environment ministries and may also not be strictly relatable to the governance context in ASEAN countries and also not strictly comparable to city awards systems, it is thought that there may be features and lessons which would help to inform the design and implementation of city awards programmes. The case studies in this chapter will focus on highlighting interesting and contrasting features, as compared to city awards programmes in ASEAN member states.

4.2.) Australian Sustainable Communities Awards (Australia)



The Australian Sustainable Communities Awards initiative administers a variety of

awards ⁷ to Australian cities, including a Sustainable City Award which was launched in 2007. The awards aim to ‘encourage, motivate and celebrate the local sustainability achievements of urban communities across Australia’. Finalists are selected and awarded at the sub-national (State/Territory) level, who then go on to compete for the overall national award in several categories focusing on specific areas of excellence. The categories include: Community Action & Partnerships, ‘Dame Phyllis Frost’ Litter Prevention, Resource Recovery & Waste Management, Environmental Innovation & Protection, Water Conservation, Energy Innovation, Heritage & Culture and Young Legends. Finalists are assessed against the national criteria when they provide a written entry and are visited by the ‘national judge’. Winners receive a certificate, media coverage and the admiration of their peers.

A key difference when compared to the ASEAN-based city awards programmes is that this programme is led by a non-governmental organisation with a highly decentralised institutional set-up. The programme is administered by the Keep Australia Beautiful National Association’s ⁸ (KABNA) network which is primarily made up of independent community-based associations collaborating closely with sub-national and local governments as well as businesses, plus the Australian National University for financial and in-kind support. As a federation of independent offices

⁷ The Australian Sustainable Communities Awards consist of the Tidy Towns, Sustainable Cities and Clean Beaches Awards. The awards aim to encourage, motivate and celebrate grass roots initiatives that foster social, economic and environmental sustainability.

⁸ KABNA is a not-for-profit environmental organisation which was established in the early 1970s by Dame Phyllis Frost, a lady who had a vision for a litter-free Australia. The association is organised as a federation with an office in each state and territory, which are all run separately. KABNA is not a governmental agency, but engages the state and local governments in varying degrees depending on each office. Its Sustainable Community Awards programme was selected for this study due to its wide coverage across Australia and its long-running status.

coordinated by a national office, each office is responsible for its own funding which generally consists of a mix of industry and government sponsorship and grants (KABNA, 2010). According to the programme administrators, this set-up has allowed greater flexibility in fund-raising to sustain the programme. In addition, the single judge system, as opposed to a multi-stakeholder judgment panel significantly reduces the coordination and logistical challenges (and thus, costs) during the assessment process.

4.3.) China National Environmental Model Cities (CNEMC)(China)

China's national government had commenced quantitative monitoring and evaluation of the environmental performance of cities from as early as 1989, with its Urban Environmental Quality Examination System (UEQES). In the past decades, the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) and other ministries have implemented numerous quantitative and objective evaluation and monitoring programmes related to sustainable urban development (Zhao, 2011).

One such programme is the CNEMC, which was launched in 2007 to 'create a group of model cities which embody implementing a urban sustainable development strategy that coordinates social and economic development with good environment quality, complete urban infrastructure, clean urban appearance, and virtuous ecological cycles toward sustainable development'. It awards a 'model city' status to cities that achieve superior management performance (that is, surpassing national average values) measured against a set of criteria covering urban environmental infrastructure, energy, greenery, pollution control, and environmental quality, among others.

By the end of 2008, more than 70 cities had garnered the title of National Model City (NMC). Overall, more than 100 cities have been actively implementing initiatives towards being awarded. Bremer (2011) noted that the NMC certification has helped cities to acquire foreign investment and attract technical assistance, quoting Shenyang⁹, Nanjing and Tianjin as a successful examples.

The interesting feature of a certification-type of programme like the CNEMC is that the 'status' or 'reputation' it confers is not as a one-time award or one-off incident, but is time-bound based on validation by periodical monitoring. The title may be removed if the cities do not maintain the required performance levels (Hsu, 2011).¹⁰ In 2011, the government revised the criteria, and as a result, as of 2012 only 10 cities¹¹ (of 77 cities before 2011) retained the model city under the CNEMC programme.

4.4.) Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) (India)



The JNNURM was launched by the Government of India in 2005 for the period June 2005 to December 2011.

The programme aims to drive and fast-track reforms and planned development of identified cities focusing on efficiency in urban infrastructure, services delivery mechanisms, community participation and accountability of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) or para-statal agencies. A total of USD11 billion was allocated for 63 selected 'Mission' cities', which were classified in three

¹¹ Langfang City, Zhenjiang City, Jurong City, Daqing City, Shaoxing City, Zhuji City, Weihai City, Rongcheng City, Wendeng City and Rushan City.

categories: a) Cities/Urban Authorities (UAs) with a population of 4 million and above; b) Cities/UAs with a population of 1 million, but less than 4 million; and c) selected cities/UAs with important characteristics pertaining to religion, history or tourism. A separate category was also created for projects relating to water supply, which was determined as a priority for the development of Indian cities.

To qualify for selection as ‘Mission Cities’ and to access the programme’s funds, selected cities are required to formulate a medium-term City Development Plan (CDP), prepare Detailed Project Reports (DPR) as well as to plan and implement the urban sector reforms which were stipulated in a tripartite formal agreement between the recipient state governments and the national government (Government of India, 2011). In 2012, it was announced that the JNNURM would be extended into a second phase with expanded funds and with greater involvement of private sector through partnerships. (Indian Express, 2012).

When compared to the city awards programmes in ASEAN, what stands out is the JNNURM’s focus on infrastructure and governance reforms, and its incentive structure which leans heavily towards financial, rather than reputational incentives. While being selected as a participating ‘Mission City’ does convey some prestige or signal some gain in status, it is fair to assume that the funding support offered under the programme is a key factor for enticing participation. In relation to this, it should be noted that the programme is led mainly by non-Environment ministries, namely, the Ministry of Urban Development and the Ministry of Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation, which naturally extends the scope of the programme beyond the environment and sustainability.

4.5.) The Local Authority’s Standard in Environment (LAS-E) (Japan)



The LAS-E programme has been implemented from 2003 by the Coalition of Local Government for Environmental Initiative (COLGEI), which is a national membership network of local governments. By prescribing standards and criteria for the qualification of ‘Environmental Local Government’, LAS-E aspires to promote citizen-driven sustainable development policies and governance systems led by Japanese local governments towards realising sustainable development at the local level.

In Japan, with the widespread adoption of the ISO14001 certification, many local governments have developed competency in implementing environmental quality management systems in areas within the jurisdiction of the local administration. The LAS-E standards, however, adopt a broader and socially-inclusive approach compared to ISO14001, by promoting a more participative and citizen-oriented approach to certification – where interventions and the subsequent monitoring and evaluation involve all segments of civil society (i.e. citizen groups, private sector and others). Through this, improved environmental outcomes are expected in spheres *beyond* the traditional and statutory mandates of local governments, such as in residents’ daily life and business activities.

There are four levels of certification that local governments can aim for under LAS-E: basic stage, 1st stage, 2nd stage and 3rd stage. Advancing to the higher stages require increasingly comprehensive, participatory and creative forms of policies and governance by the local government.

The key differentiating feature of the LAS-E approach, compared to other city awards’ frameworks, is that the standards or criteria

prescribe *how* plans and actions (the process) should be developed and implemented, rather than *what* actions (inputs and outputs) are expected of the local government by an external party. That means that even the decision of whether the local government qualifies for certification is reached through the inclusive, participatory decision-making system prescribed by LAS-E standards.

4.6.) Eco-Model Cities Programme (EMC), (Japan)



The EMC programme of Japan seeks to ‘showcase cities with pioneering and concrete initiatives towards becoming a low-carbon society, thereby serving as models to other Japanese cities and to the world’. Organised by the Cabinet Secretariat¹² and unveiled in 2008, a total of 13¹³ cities were conferred ‘Eco-Model City’ status by a selection committee made up of national and multi-stakeholder experts. This committee evaluates the ambitious and pioneering low-carbon local development strategies which also help to revitalise local economies and aging communities. After the 2011 Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, the programme broadened its framework to promote thinking about the ‘resiliency’ of cities. In March 2013, a further 7 cities¹⁴ were added to the total list.

¹² The Cabinet Secretariat (Naikaku-kanbo) is an agency in the Japanese central government, headed by the Chief Cabinet Secretary. It organises the Cabinet’s public relations, coordinates ministries and agencies, collects intelligence for the government (including the Cabinet Satellite Intelligence Center) and organises other miscellaneous tasks for the Cabinet, including the Prime Minister’s office (Kantei) and residence (Kōtei).

¹³ Chiyoda (special ward of Tokyo), Iida City, Kyoto City, Minamata City, Miyakojima City, Niigata City, Obihiro City, Sakai City, Toyama City, Toyota City, Shimokawa Town, Tsukuba City, Yokohama City and Yusuohara Town.

¹⁴ Tsukuba City, Niigata City, Mitake Town, Kobe City and Amagasaki City, Nishiawakura Village and Matsuyama City.

The programme hosts the ‘Promotion Council of Low Carbon Cities’ (PCLCC), established in December 2008 and chaired by the Mayor of Kitakyushu City, which aims to spread the good practices of the model low-carbon cities within and beyond Japan. There are a total of 233 organisations¹⁵ which are members of this council, such as interested municipalities, prefectural governments and governmental ministries or agencies. Besides that, there are also working groups on the following subjects: ‘A Subject Share and Solution Examination of Low Carbon City Planning’, ‘Promotion of Measures for low-carbon city or region’, ‘Green Economy’ and ‘Best Practices Expansion’¹⁶.

The outstanding feature of EMC is that no financial rewards are provided, but the title of ‘Eco-Model City’ by itself manages to attract the bids of local governments. This shows that a number of Japanese local governments perceive value in gaining the domestic and international status conveyed by the title, and possibly, the indirect expectation of being given priority or favoured consideration for national financial assistance or subsidies under other government programmes for implementing innovative or pilot activities.

The EMC was later positioned as being complemented by the FutureCity Initiative, a parallel programme also implemented by the Cabinet Secretariat, which uses the same approach of collecting and publicising the ambitious, innovative plans and goal-setting of selected cities. FutureCity focuses more on the social and economic dimension of city development, whereas EMC’s focus is on environment, especially low carbon cities. These

¹⁵ Data from the Cabinet Secretariat. As of 10th September 2013.

¹⁶ From <http://ecomodelproject.go.jp/en/pclcc/P16> (Accessed 2 October 2013).

cities¹⁷ may avail themselves to a special government fund to help implement their activities in a subsequent competitive selection process, which serves as an indirect financial incentive for cities to be recognised under this programme.

4.7.) Local Investment Programme (LIP) (Sweden)

In 1997, the Swedish central government established the LIP (1998 – 2003). This programme made SEK6.5 billion available for



the modernisation of buildings, infrastructure and energy systems at the local level. The overall objective of the LIP was to enhance the capacity of the local level stakeholders (local authorities and supporting domestic stakeholders) to promote sustainable development in Sweden. The programme's stated aims include improving 'ecological efficiency' at the local level, while at the same time promoting local employment through the creation of 'green jobs' (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2005).

The overall concept of the LIP is that it was expected to act as a catalyst providing the financial 'kick-start' to stimulate municipal authorities and their local partners, both from within civil society and from the private sector, to promote sustainable development. This involvement would, in turn, lead to behavioural changes on a broader scale, building a virtuous cycle of support for sustainable development activities. The programme allocated funds to 211 local programmes covering a total of 1,814

environmental measures spread across 161 municipalities (plus two associations of local authorities). With matched local funding, the LIP managed to mobilise a total investment of around SEK27.3 billion for local environmental management in Sweden.

The LIP served as a precursor for another investment programme called the Climate Investment Programmes (Klimp). Klimp is a government strategy for Sweden to achieve its climate change objectives, by facilitating the disbursements of grants to municipalities and other local actors for long-term investments that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. LIP was reviewed thoroughly and the experiences and lessons learned from it were used as inputs to design the Klimp (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2005).

Similar to the JNNURM (India), LIP has a focus on infrastructure and offers financial investment-driven 'rewards' or incentives to deserving local governments for innovative local sustainability actions. However, it also differs from the JNNURM as it emphasises the integration of environmental and economic goals (green jobs creation) being implemented through the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. Positive features that could be considered for other programmes include the requirement of mobilising 'matching' funds by local governments, as well as providing financial support for multi-municipality projects (municipal associations).

¹⁷ Higashimatsushima City, Iwanuma City, Kashiwa City, Kamaishi City, Kashiwa City, Kitakyushu City, Ofunato City, Minamisoma City, Miyagi City, Rikuzentakata City, Sumita Town, Shimokawa Town, Sumita City, Toyama City and Yokohama City.

Table 2: Summary of Relevant Selected Programmes in non-ASEAN Countries

Country	Australia	China	India	Japan	Japan	Sweden
Programme name	Australian Sustainable Community Awards	China National Environmental Model Cities (CNEMC)	Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM)	Eco-Model Cities	Local Authority's Standard in Environment (LAS-E)	Local Investment Programme (LIP)
Implementer (Lead)	Keep Australia Beautiful National Association (KABNA)	Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP)	Ministry of Urban Development, Ministry of Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation	Cabinet Secretariat, Government of Japan	Coalition of Local Governments for Environment Initiative (CoLGEI)	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency
Period	2007 - present	1997 - present	2005 - present	2008 - present	2003 - present	1998 - 2003
Programme cycle	Annual	Irregular	Irregular	Irregular	Irregular	Irregular
Objectives	To encourage, motivate and celebrate the local sustainability achievements of urban communities across Australia.	To create a group of model cities which embody implementing a urban sustainable development strategy which coordinates social and economic development with good environment quality, complete urban infrastructure, clean urban appearance, and virtuous ecological cycles towards sustainable development	To encourage reforms and fast track planned development of identified Cities, focusing on efficiency in urban infrastructure, service delivery, community participation and accountability of local governments and agencies.	To showcase cities with pioneering and concrete initiatives towards becoming a low-carbon society, thereby serving as models to other Japanese cities and to the world	To promote citizen-driven, sustainability-oriented development policies and governance systems led by Japanese local governments towards realising sustainable development at the local level.	To enhance the capacity of the local level (local authorities and supporting domestic stakeholders) to promote sustainable development in Sweden.
Theme	Social, Environment	Environment	Economy, Social, Environment, as well as governance reform	Economy, Social, Environment	Environment	Social, Economy, Environment
Reference	KABNA (2010)	Zhao (2011)	Government of India (2011)	N. Hamashima (2010)	http://www.colgei.org	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (2005)

5.) City Awards Programmes - Design and Implementation Challenges

While city awards programmes in the four ASEAN countries have all achieved a reasonable level of success and longevity (enduring at least two cycles), Environment ministries also shared some challenges in programme design and implementation. This section will describe and discuss these challenges, drawing from observations made both in Sections 3 and 4.

5.1.) *Sound and Comprehensive Assessment Criteria*

The Environment ministries recognise that 'local sustainability' or 'sustainable city development' is, in theory, holistic and comprehensive. Hence, their evaluation metric should ideally encompass all relevant dimensions of local government actions in the context of sustainable development. This means a balanced coverage of economic, social and environmental dimensions.

However, designing a comprehensive set of criteria and indicators has been difficult, or has not been prioritised, for a variety of reasons. First, a practical reason is that it is difficult for Environment ministries to address issues that are outside their mandate, hence, they tend to avoid focusing on social and economic issues. Most of the city awards programmes focus on the environment dimension of city management, or particular sectors within environmental management. Second, considering the generally lower level of capacity of local governments compared to national governments, one viewpoint is that it is better to focus on a narrower and critical area, rather than to be overambitious and

challenge local governments to fulfil a wide array of obligations.

For both the Bandar Lestari (Malaysia) and Green and Clean (Philippines) programme, the evaluation metric covers mainly environmental aspects of urban management. Meanwhile, the Adipura (Indonesia) programme's evaluation criteria has expanded from focusing primarily on public cleanliness and greenery to cover a more holistic range of factors. This illustrates a trajectory for how assessment criteria may evolve over time. Demonstrating another approach to criteria design is TLCA's (Thailand) assessment framework, which takes care not to discourage local government participation by only assessing efforts that are within the locus of authority of Thai local governments.

5.2.) *Motivating Participation and Providing Appropriate Incentives*

Environment ministries have stated that they are generally eager to secure a high level of participation. The higher the level of participation, the more competitive the programme is, and thus, the stronger the prestige and incentive effect of the awards. On the other hand, low level of participation raises the concern of whether the programmes only highlight a group of 'elite' or 'strong' cities, neglecting the weaker ones that actually need support and to be made aware of the areas that are in need of improvement.

Unfortunately, responding to the evaluation process, especially the data collection and documentation, is time consuming and not part of the regular work of busy local government officials. Also, local governments which are not very confident of winning an award and do not perceive any other benefits to entering an awards programme are unlikely to participate for the fear of being negatively ranked in the programme.

The Green and Clean (Philippines) awards offered a financial incentive (cash reward or

development grants) to winners in addition to the award title to motivate participation. Financial incentives (in the form of development or special-purposes project grants) could be made the primary incentive (over the reputational incentives of being selected for participation in a programme), such as in the case of the JNNURM (India) and LIP (Sweden). However, additional incentives have a downside - they inflate the cost of a programme, making programme sustainability a greater challenge. When the cash reward provided in earlier cycles of the Green and Clean programme was withdrawn, the incentive structure was compromised and local governments were discouraged from participating due to the perception that the level of rewards being offered had diminished.

To obtain some insight into the perception of local governments, this study asked some local governments which participated in such programmes to explain what other benefits might appeal to local governments. Beyond the potential to win awards, it was revealed that local governments value the 'auditing' or performance review services provided by the programme as a form of external and constructive feedback on their work and suggestions for improvement, as well as the positive effects of participation on the morale on their staff.

In the interviews, senior representatives of Muangklang¹⁸ and Pakkred Municipality¹⁹ (participants of TLCA in Thailand) said that participating in such programmes helped to uncover previously neglected areas of potential improvement in their administration. It was also remarked that an unexpected benefit gained by the city during the process of participating in a city awards programme was the enhancement of inter-department

communication and collaboration during the data collection process, which might not have occurred under normal circumstances. This shows that participation in city awards programmes might also contribute to a more positive organisational culture within local government administration.

5.3.) *Coordination and Collaboration*

A programme with extremely high levels of participation and also truly nationwide reach requires an effective channel of communication with the local governments. In cases where channels to local governments and supporting stakeholders were weak, Environment ministries saw the need to join forces with the other ministries or agencies that possess a strong presence and connections at the local level. In all programmes, inter-ministry rivalry (or the high costs of inter-ministry cooperation), which are difficult systemic issues, have been cited as key challenges for programme implementation to varying degrees.

Therefore, in the programmes of Thailand and Malaysia, the programme's implementing role (the secretariat) was outsourced to a non-governmental, independent third party, (such as a university, in the case of Bandar Lestari; and an NGO, in the case of TLCA). There is an expectation that a neutral non-government entity may be able to effectively extract support and foster greater collaboration from the relevant ministries and stakeholders without being constrained by the 'baggage' of past work history and ministerial 'silos'.

The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) stage of a city awards programme has also been reported as being extremely challenging. A formulaic approach is found to be present in almost all case studies, beginning with informational self-reporting (conducted by the participating cities), followed by a more stringent third-party, multi-stakeholder evaluation by a committee of technical experts and other non-government actors. The Bandar

¹⁸ Interview with Mr. Somchai Chariyacharoen (Mayor, Muangklang Municipality), 22 September 2011.

¹⁹ Interview with Ms. Rungnapa Kimngounsong (Senior Officer, Policy and Planning Department, Pakkred Municipality), 3 December 2010.

Lestari (Malaysia) programme goes a step further, by incorporating a public opinion survey into its monitoring and assessment process.

The M&E process is crucial to maintaining programme credibility. As with any kind of rating initiative or competitive/selective process, the validity of the evaluation and results of city awards and urban programmes are not immune to dispute as well as allegations of corruption (such as cities offering bribes in exchange for favourable consideration). However, if these problems are allowed to become chronic, they would cause serious detriment to the programme's reputation and undermine the programme's sustainability. That some city awards programmes have endured for more than a decade suggests that those programme administrators have been able to maintain reasonable controls to uphold programme integrity. In fact, viewed from an optimistic perspective, scrutiny or criticism could be dealt with constructively as a form of programme improvement, and is also an indication of the programme's perceived importance and currency.

5.4.) Programme Sustainability

Several programme administrators interviewed highlighted the constraints of limited funding and their worries about losing the core operational budget. Programmes that are wholly reliant on a single source of funding are the most susceptible. At initiation, a programme is usually provided with core funding for a certain number of years by the lead implementing agency, in-kind resources are contributed by other stakeholders, including the private sector, such as in the case of the Green and Clean Awards (Philippines).

Single source funding is risky and diligent efforts are required to mobilise additional funding beyond the initial seed funded period. As a programme matures, it will be more able

to establish additional stakeholder links to mobilise funds and resources, as shown by KABNA (Australia). The decentralised structure of KABNA, with branch offices in different territories/regions, allowed it to flexibly and strategically explore and raise funds from diverse stakeholders, including different branches of government and the private sector. This contributed to the longevity of the programme.

On the other hand, it must be noted that funding is only one of several key factors that contribute to a programme's sustainability. Equally or more importantly, a programme which is well-operated and able to show clear benefits and impacts to participants will have a higher likelihood of success in terms of maintaining its given budget and mobilising contributions to keep the programme afloat. For instance, in the case in Japan's EMC, setting up a promotion council which is chaired by a participating city (Kitakyushu City) which hosts a regular meeting, is a way to sustain programme momentum without being overly dependent on a core programme fund.

6.) Discussion

This section will attempt to relate findings and observations from Sections 2 - 5 to briefly address two questions: First, are national city awards programmes feasible options for policymakers, especially Environment ministries? Though the paper's scope does not allow an assessment of programmes' effectiveness, some observations can be made regarding their practicality, benefits and affordability. Second, what are the potential linkages between national city awards and regional-level initiatives, such as those under ASEAN?

6.1) Practicality, Benefits and Affordability

Though they have some design and implementation challenges, **national city awards programmes appear to be a practical and low-cost non-regulatory instrument** that can be designed and implemented by Environment ministries in ASEAN countries to help raise awareness and promote actions towards 'sustainable cities' and local sustainability.

While this paper did not compare and analyse the actual performance and effectiveness of national programmes against their stated goals, the findings in this initial study suggest the practicality of the approach. It also demonstrates that the benefits perceived by participating local governments are commensurate with the costs of participating in the bid for city awards.

The durability of the programmes (being implemented for at least two cycles or more), as well as the significant or growing *voluntary* participation rates in the studied city awards programmes demonstrate that reputational incentives – in the form of city awards – are sufficiently appealing and perceived as beneficial to a reasonably large number of local governments in countries where these programmes have been implemented.

In particular, it should be noted that reputation of an official nature (conferred by the national government) and endorsed by high-profile dignitaries (Prime Ministers, President and members of Royalty) are valued by a sizeable number of local governments, especially in Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. The spirit of open and healthy competition also appears to be compatible with the domestic governance culture.

Finally, the approach is practical because of the flexible manner by which basic elements (criteria, awarding cycle, funding model, assessment system, implementing arrangements etc.) of common 'city awards' can be configured to suit the context and needs of different countries. This suggests that city awards may be introduced and adapted to other countries without too much difficulty.

Other benefits are suggested by the statements of local governments who reported the perceived non-award, non-reputational benefits from the process of participation. These include promoting cross-department collaboration and objective, external feedback on areas of weakness to be improved.

In a well-designed, credible city awards programme, it is quite possible that the participation of local governments is a crucial starting point which helps to trigger self-reflection and positive transformation. The voluntary approach of such national city awards programmes may possibly lead to longer-lasting commitment, benefits and deeper change at a genuine level compared to forced, regulatory approaches.

On affordability, the specific start-up and operational costs of the city awards programmes studied are not identified. However, when compared to regulatory and more sophisticated approaches, it may be reasonable to assume that an award programme that only confers a title (i.e. no monetary rewards) is affordable and within

the justifiable means of Environment ministries. Furthermore, the high visibility of the city awards approach may render it easier to justify the funding.

6.2.) Linking National City Awards Programmes to ASEAN

The AWGESC, established in 2003, is one of the thematic ASEAN working groups that report to the annual ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment and to the ASEAN Environment Ministers Meetings. This Working Group meets every year to discuss and implement joint initiatives that could promote the environmental dimension of 'sustainable cities'. The AWGESC also has the mandate of promoting capacity building through regional cooperation. AWGESC initiatives for capacity building are coordinated by the ASEAN Secretariat and are led by either ASEAN Member States or ASEAN Dialogue Partners²⁰, which may be nation states or organisations.

One of the key initiatives led by ASEAN Member States is the ASEAN ESC Indicators Programme, which attempts to assess selected ASEAN cities on their performance with regards to quality of air, water and land (solid waste management), and to recognise the top performing cities via the biennial ASEAN ESC Awards. According to the AWGESC NFPs, the national city awards programmes studied in this paper are linked to the regional ASEAN ESC Awards to a certain degree. In particular this is in terms of identifying deserving cities to be 'elevated' to receive higher-level, regional awards.

²⁰ ASEAN Dialogue Partners include 'ASEAN Plus Three' countries of Japan, China and Republic of Korea; East Asia Summit participating countries Australia, India, New Zealand, the United States, Russia; as well as Canada and Pakistan. Others with 'Dialogue Partner' status to ASEAN include international/regional organisations such as the European Union and the United Nations.

Both the ASEAN ESC Indicators and ASEAN ESC Awards do not have a direct focus on capacity building and technical assistance, in the sense that no funds are allocated to implement capacity building activities for local governments. Therefore, it may be fruitful for a future regional programme under the AWGESC to have an explicit focus on linking capacity building and technical assistance to awards. This would have the positive effect of empowering deserving local governments (based on their excellent performance in the national city awards programme) to make even more concrete progress.

In addition, current AWGESC initiatives still do not focus on promoting the establishment of national city awards programmes in ASEAN countries where such programmes do not exist. The common challenges faced by administrators of national city awards programmes, as revealed in this report, point to the value of having a regular dialogue for discussion and mutual exchange among countries through an inter-governmental platform. Hence, in ASEAN countries where city awards programmes do not yet exist, such as Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam, it may be feasible for Environment ministries (or other stakeholders) to initiate a basic national city awards programme as a broad measure to promote the sustainable city agenda and help raise local government capacity by learning from the experience of neighbouring ASEAN countries.

Based on these observations, the idea for a programme called the 'ASEAN ESC Model Cities Programme' was proposed under the auspices of the AWGESC, with funding from the JAIF. The findings from this report were applied to the design and implementation of this programme as outlined in Table 3. The ASEAN Secretariat and IGES jointly served as the Regional Secretariat for this programme.

Table 3: How the Findings of this Report were Applied to the Design and Implementation of ASEAN ESC Model Cities Programme Year 1 (April 2011 – March 2012)

	Findings from this Report	Application to the Design and Implementation of the ASEAN ESC Model Cities Programme
1	Individual national city awards programmes can be seen as strategic 'building blocks' for a regional initiative under ASEAN and other relevant initiatives targeting the involvement of motivated, progressive local governments	<p>The programme requested that its National Focal Points to link with National City Awards Programmes identified in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Philippines.</p> <p>The National Focal Points in these countries utilised the criteria of existing City Awards Programmes to fast-track the selection of the first batch of 'Model Cities'.</p>
2	In ASEAN countries where national city awards programmes do not yet exist, such as Cambodia, Lao, Myanmar and Vietnam, it may be feasible for Environment ministries (or other stakeholders) to initiate a basic city awards programme as a starting point for promoting the sustainable city agenda, learning from the experience of neighbouring ASEAN countries.	<p>The programme encouraged and provided seed funding to the National Focal Points of Cambodia, Lao, Myanmar and Vietnam to initiate country-based activities, referring to the City Awards Programmes of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Philippines as examples.</p> <p>As a result, Cambodia initiated a national Clean City Awards campaign, while Vietnam began to conduct baseline research into national ESC indicators that would suit the context and priorities of Vietnam. These represent critical ground work that would support the eventual implementation of national city awards programmes in these countries.</p>
3	Local governments appreciate reputational incentives and other benefits from participating in a city awards programme, such as objective external performance review, as well as technical assistance and capacity building to support strengthening areas that have been identified as needing improvement through the assessment process of the awards programme.	<p>The programme provided the reputation of 'Model Cities' to the selected cities under the programme in Year 1²¹, which helped to strengthen the regional and international profile of these cities, on top of their reputation by winning national city awards programmes.</p> <p>Beyond that, the programme was designed with the overall objective of increasing the capacity of the selected cities, by providing seed funding, technical assistance and other forms of support (including a high-level, multi-stakeholder reporting platform which facilitates city-to-city knowledge exchange and networking with supporting organisations) .</p>
4	It would be strategic for any other programmes which need to work with motivated, progressive local governments to synergise with, or build on national city awards programmes to mobilise more assistance and benefits to local governments.	The programme organised a Grand Regional Seminar which invited many supporting organisations. At the Seminar, the selected Model Cities presented their visions and goals, as well as their achievements and proposed plans to the supporting organisations, while supporting organisations were requested to explain what forms of collaboration they can offer to help Model Cities. The Seminar was linked directly to the High Level Seminar on Environmentally Sustainable Cities (HLS ESC), which is under the framework of the East Asia Summit Environment Ministers Meeting (EAS EMM), a periodically convened meeting ever since the inaugural EAS EMM in 2008.

²¹ Phnom Penh, Siem Reap in Cambodia; Surabaya and Palembang in Indonesia; Xamneua in Lao; North Kuching in Malaysia; Yangon in Myanmar; Palo, Leyte and Puerto Princesa in Philippines; Mae Hong Son, Muangklang and Phitsanulok in Thailand; and Cao Lanh and Danang in Vietnam.

6.3.) Relevance of National City Awards to Other Organisations

Taking a broader view, national city awards programmes may also be relevant to other organisations which aim to help raise the capacity of local governments in the context of sustainable development, such as CITYNET, ICLEI, UN-HABITAT and many others. The initiatives by these organisations are primarily geared towards the provision of theoretical and practical frameworks which make sense to local governments, with the main objectives being capacity building and cross-country networking for knowledge exchange. These initiatives help to fill in gaps, or complement existing initiatives by national governments..

One of these notable programmes is ICLEI's Cities for Climate Change Protection (CCCCP), programme, which has assisted local governments in intensifying their political commitments and has also supported the implementation of effective climate change mitigation strategies and actions. In addition, CITYNET regularly organises regional training seminars and pilot projects based on thematic clusters such as 'disaster', 'climate change', 'infrastructure' and the 'Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)'. Meanwhile, the Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment (KI) has used its second phase from 2005 – 2010 to provide technical assistance and

training to a number of Asian local governments on organic waste management and composting. Annual and regular regional networking seminars or conferences are organised by these city networks to promote the dissemination of good practices and policies in the area of sustainable urban and city management.

Basically, national city awards programmes enable the national government and other stakeholders to recognise local governments that are motivated and progressive in adopting sustainability principles. It would also be strategic for any other programmes which need to work with such local governments to synergise with national city awards programmes by mobilising assistance and resources in areas that do not come under the focus of national city awards.

7.) Conclusions

This paper suggests that **national governments and supporting stakeholders could introduce national city awards** (or enhance/support existing ones) as a practical and promising approach for encouraging local government initiatives on sustainable development, and to further strategically link national city awards to relevant regional programmes, particularly the ASEAN Working Group on ESC, to realise greater benefits.

Those who are establishing new programmes may learn from the experiences and successes of the programmes featured in the case studies in this report, so they do not have to build everything from scratch.

ASEAN has a viable role to promote inter-country learning and to add value to existing national city awards by streamlining them with a regional initiative under ASEAN. This initiative would be helpful by providing additional capacity building, technical assistance and other forms of resources to ASEAN cities (in addition to national efforts for capacity building) as well as promoting networking and mutual learning on best practices and policies among ASEAN cities. In fact, as a real example, the findings from this paper have been incorporated into the design of the ASEAN ESC Model Cities Programme.

Going forward, it may be meaningful for further research to investigate: i) the effectiveness and performance of national city awards programmes in relation to their stated goals; and ii) how the basic factors of a standard awards system (award criteria, awarding cycle, funding model, assessment system, implementing arrangements etc.) could be varied and adjusted to suit different country and governance contexts.

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