



# POINTS OF VIEW

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## **Charting a New Path for Thailand-Spain Cooperation on Sustainable Development**

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Scholars and practitioners gathered on June 5 to discuss opportunities, challenges and the future of sustainability at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thailand-Spain Forum in Bangkok. The Forum was organised as a platform for exchanging knowledge and good practices. The year 2025 is also important because the two countries celebrate the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations.

In this article, I argue that Thailand and Spain have been moving toward green transition triggered by the climate crisis. There are various possible areas of cooperation they can work together such as measures to strengthen climate mitigation and adaptation regionally and bilaterally.

The climate crisis has become more severe and frequent. Anuson Chinvanno and Seksan Anantasirikiat state in their [article](#) that this is a “security” issue that requires socio-economic

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solutions. In Thailand, the effects of climate crisis comprise rising sea level, fresh water scarcity and deteriorating food-health-energy security. They have direct consequences on human well-being and existence. Spain was also affected by similar climate incidents. In 2024, there was a [news report](#) on heavy rain causing serious floods with approximately 200 casualties in Valencia region. Therefore, it is the right time for the two countries to make collaborative efforts to tackle this global challenge.

At the regional level, there are possible areas of cooperation between Thailand and Spain. Thailand looks forward to the early signing of the instrument of accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) by Spain. This will reinforce the country's shared commitment to promote regional peace and cooperation. Climate change could be an entry point for Spain to increase its footprint in ASEAN. As ASEAN Coordinator for Sustainable Development Cooperation, Thailand has been proactive in advancing implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fostering collaboration with various stakeholders inside the EU by co-hosting three ASEAN-EU Dialogues on Sustainable Development pursuant to EU's proposal and the decision of the 21<sup>st</sup> ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting held in 2016 in Bangkok during Thailand's country coordinatorship of ASEAN-EU dialogue relations (2016-2018). Thailand and Spain could explore an opportunity to promote ASEAN-EU cooperation on sustainable development through regional initiatives, including the Global Gateway Initiative and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). The EU's intention to elevate its partnership with ASEAN to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) will advance ASEAN-EU collaboration and mutual benefits to both regions across multiple sectors.

According to [Sustainable Development Report 2025](#) recently released on 24 June 2025, Thailand ranks first in ASEAN on SDGs implementation, enabling the country to be a champion

in sustainable development for 7 years consecutively since 2018. In the Asia-Pacific region, the country ranks third, following Japan and South Korea.

To cope with challenges from the climate crisis, Thailand has been implementing the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy. The policy was developed from the country's rich biological and cultural diversity with four key strategic sectors, namely agriculture and food, energy and materials, health and medicine and creative industries. Possible areas of cooperation between Thailand and Spain could be knowledge sharing on smart agriculture such as the development of drip irrigation system in Thailand and sustainable tourism such as place branding strategy and management tourist attractions. Surachai Sathitkunararat, President, Office of National Higher Education Science Research and Innovation Council (NXPO), [suggests](#) that there are also opportunities in advanced biotechnology in the areas of crop improvement, organic fertilizers, enzymes, bioprocesses and bio-based materials.

The private sector also plays a prominent role in fostering circular economy. “The private sectors from two countries could share best practices in four key sectors, namely textile, medium-sized and large-sized hotel and packaging”, says Bank Ngamarunchot, Director of Science Technology and Innovation Policy Institute (STIPI) at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi. During the session on circular economy, Bank introduced various case studies in the aforementioned areas. In my opinion, these case studies share similar characteristics. First, they identify key problems and priority. Most of them focus on projects aiming at reducing carbon and greenhouse gas emissions. Second, they think that climate adaptation is opportunity, not cost. It is a global megatrend that enterprises could not avoid. Last but not least, they invest in acquiring an appropriate green technology to reach a higher global standard.

Spain has a strength in its energy sector. For example, Acciona is a leading greenfield developer and operator of sustainable and regenerative energy and infrastructure assets. Operating in 55 countries, the company focuses on ecodesign and industrial symbiosis. Guascor Energy has been working together with a Thai local partner, Jiamphattana Energy, on waste to power applications. Andoni Caballero, APAC Territory Manager, Guascor Energy points out that ASEAN countries have some commonalities that are attractive to investors in energy technology because they have large agricultural sector that is valuable for developing renewable energy. Sustainable management in the hotel sector is also Spain's strength. Recently, Meliá Hotels International has been recognised by [Time Magazine and Statista](#) as the most sustainable hotel company in Europe and the second worldwide in 2025.

Another key message from the Forum is the “bottom-up” approach. In my view, the two countries should encourage the community and youth to take part in collaborative efforts to tackle the climate crisis by focusing on two main areas: SDGs in action and strategic narratives in changing behaviour. Learning process through academic sessions between climate youth networks of the two countries and model UN meetings on climate change in universities should be encouraged. On communication, the work of [Esfera Climática](#), a network of female scientific experts on climate change, is a good example. They train climate scientists to be a good communicator and help them narrate right stories to the right audience. In case of Thailand, Sunida Aroonpipat, Associate Professor at Thammasat University, points out that morality and social capital matter in mobilising climate actions by the communities.

In addition to community and youth, the two countries should encourage and strengthen institutional cooperation on climate change between Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and

Madrid City Council, and Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA) and Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID).

The climate crisis is a common challenge of our times that requires joint efforts to cope with. Building on comprehensive relationship between Thailand and Spain, there are many rooms to increase Spain's footprints in this region. Sustainable development is exactly a creative and constructive entry point.

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