

The Evolution of SDGs Audit of the State Audit Office of the Kingdom of Thailand:

From Research to Policy and Innovation

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The SDGs audit by the State Audit Office of the Kingdom of Thailand, as the Supreme Audit Institution of Thailand or SAI Thailand, started in 2016 after the ***Abu Dhabi Declaration***² emphasized the role of SAIs in contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030. The United Nations' adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the increased necessity for effective public auditing and oversight. This is highlighted by the initiatives already undertaken by INTOSAI members to audit the implementation of the SDGs.

SAI Thailand began researching the SDGs across 17 goals. The research question was about the role of SAI in the SDGs. Clearly, the role of SAI is to monitor SDGs achievement and conduct SDGs implementation. The research indicated that the Performance audit should implement the 6Es criteria, which expand from the original 3Es: Economy, Efficiency, and Effectiveness, by adding Environmental, Equity, and Ethics as additional criteria.



Figure 1: Concept of Six Es' Criteria for SDGs audit

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² Meeting in the United Arab Emirates in December 2016 at its Congress (XXII INCOSAI), the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) agreed the Abu Dhabi Declaration.

In 2017, my team and I engaged an external stakeholder, *SDGs Move*, which is a think tank of SDGs. All experts are professors and lecturers from the Faculty of Economics at Thammasat University, a prestigious and influential institution. We worked closely together, inviting them to share "SDGs 101" as an introduction to SDGs for our performance auditors. Meanwhile, we exchanged knowledge about performance audits that could be implemented in future SDGs audits.



Figure 2: Professor Chol Bunnag is a prominent expert on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Thailand and holds a professorship in Development Economics. He was active in initiating the SDGs Move, which has since become a leading think tank on SDGs in Thailand.

In 2018, SDGs audits were included in the long-term State Audit Policy 2018-2022, which the State Audit Commission (SAC) emphasized. At that time, performance audits in Thailand began to follow the SDGs audit approach. Although we did not conduct the preparedness phase, we carried out SDGs implementation and tried to relate and demonstrate SDGs achievements.

From 2018 to 2021, SAI of Thailand was actively involved in the 12th ASOSAI Research Project, under the leadership of SAI UAE. In this collaborative research, SAI Thailand played a critical role as both the group leader and the chapter leader, with a special focus on the accountability and reporting phases of SDG audits.

Conceptual framework: Proposal for Three evaluation steps for SDGs audit report

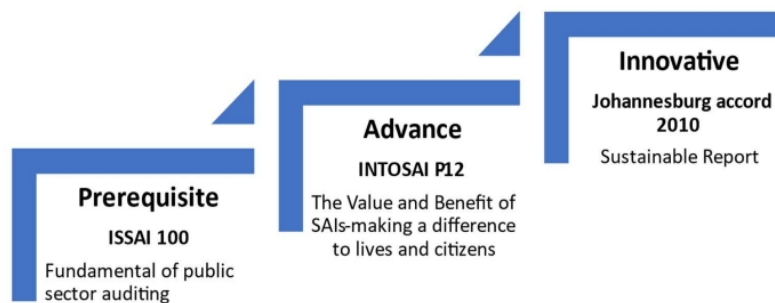


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework: This diagram illustrates the proposed three-step evaluation process for auditing SDG reports, key research finding from the 12th ASOSAI Research Project. The framework is designed to enhance the effectiveness and transparency of SDG audits.

Accountability lines: RCI model



Figure 4: RCI Model: This diagram presents the RCI model which was proposed as a framework for enhancing the accountability lines in SDGs audits. This model, which stands for Report, Communication, and Impact, was another significant research finding from the 12th ASOSAI Research Project. It outlines the steps for reporting, communicating, and measuring the impact of sustainable development efforts.

A key area of emphasis was the future significance of Sustainability Reporting. Additionally, SAI Thailand introduced the RCI model as a framework for SDG accountability. The RCI model encompasses three core components: Reporting, Communication, and Impact, each essential for effectively measuring and communicating the progress and outcomes of SDG initiatives.

In 2020, the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI) launched the IDI SDGs Audit Model (ISAM). We recognized this model and studied it thoroughly. Eventually, in 2021-2022, we implemented this model in the Mekong River project, adhering to the four perspectives of ISAM: Whole of Government Approach, Policy Coherence, Multi-Stakeholder Engagement, and Leave No One Behind. The successful implementation of ISAM in this real-case study affirmed its suitability for us.

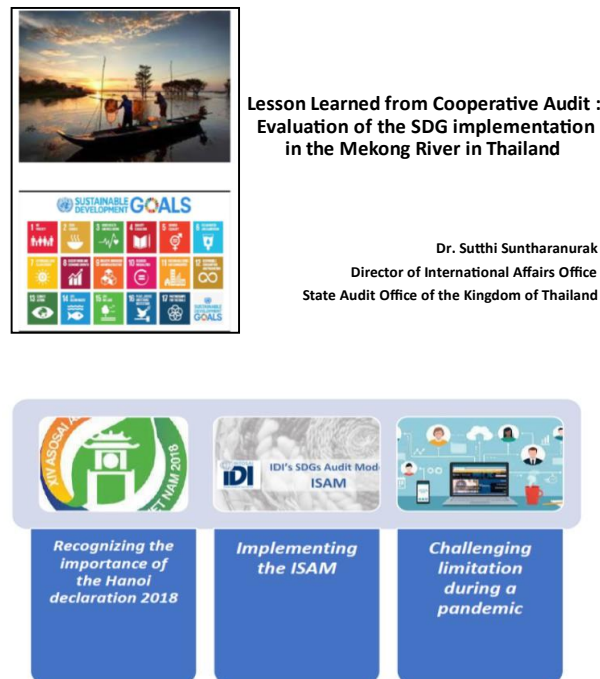


Figure 9 Lesson learned from the cooperative audit project

Figure 5: These illustrate the implementation of the ISAM (IDI SDGs Audit Model) by the State Audit Office (SAO) of Thailand for evaluating SDG implementation along the Mekong River. This project is part of a fruitful cooperative audit initiative led jointly by SAI Vietnam, SAI Myanmar, and SAI Thailand, highlighting their collaborative efforts in monitoring and promoting sustainable development in the region.

However, the key challenge was how to disseminate this model within our office. In 2023, we conducted further research and found that while performance auditors recognized ISAM, they were concerned about the new concept and expressed a need to understand it better. They also proposed an ISAM workshop tailored to the Thai context.

My team and I saw that Design Thinking clarified things because it focuses on user experience. Before launching it as the SDGs Audit Laboratory, we conducted five focus groups with 60 performance auditors from around the country. We developed **"ISAM 101,"** an e-learning course for self-paced learning that supports the basic concepts of ISAM. Following that, we started the Design Thinking Workshop.

"The concept is simple: we believe that innovation requires simplicity."

The five stages were as follows:

- (1) Empathize;** we opened the floor for 12-15 auditors to share their feelings about problems on behalf of taxpayers and citizens, as well as auditors.
- (2) Define,** after identifying the pain points, we tried to pinpoint the key challenges of SDGs audits, using simulation scenarios from the SDGs Atlas of INTOSAI.
- (3) Ideate:** brainstorming sessions to find solutions through their audit mandate, encouraging them to share audit questions and objectives.
- (4) Prototype:** we used the Audit Design Matrix (ADM) from the ISAM manual. Participants could design the ADM based on the four perspectives of ISAM, encouraging them to apply it in real cases.

From this lab, we were satisfied with the participants' improved understanding of SDGs audits and ISAM through this Design Thinking approach. We prepared a lesson-learned matrix as follows:

1. Key success factors include support from the State Audit Commission's policy and the backing of the Auditor General, coupled with the auditors' eagerness to adopt innovative approaches such as the ISAM. Additionally, conducting implementation research on SDG audits has been crucial in expanding knowledge in this field. Engaging with external stakeholders like SDGs Move, a prominent SDG think tank, has also been vital for learning and sharing diverse perspectives on sustainable development.

2. Challenges: We found that the Thai context seemed to be concerned about language, which we addressed by simplifying explanations. We shared several audit cases from around the world with them to boost their confidence.

3. Room for improvement: we expanded the ISAM Network within SAI Thailand using the Line program as an open area to share progress and challenges about ISAM implementation. We plan to hold the Design Thinking workshop for 15 Regional Audit Offices over two years. Additionally, we are enhancing the learning experience by introducing Gamification, including Card Games and Board Games, and using Simulation to make ISAM easy and simple for everyone.

Finally, we catalyzed by our experience that:

1. Design Thinking can be a powerful tool to learn and improve new concepts.
2. My team and I are merely facilitators, and an important skill is deep listening.
3. Design Thinking enables auditors to use strategic thinking, problem-solving skills, and systematic thinking. They can also practice storytelling.
4. Innovation needs to be simple. It should address the problems of users in a straightforward way.