

**2017 Annual Regional SDG Report
under the ESCAP/ADB/UNDP Asia-Pacific SDG Partnership
Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing Asia-Pacific**

Overview 23.11.2016

The ESCAP-ADB-UNDP Partnership supported implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for over a decade through producing analytical knowledge products, facilitating high-level policy dialogues, generating higher visibility of MDG goals and targets, and strengthening the interest of planners and policy makers at the regional, sub-regional and national levels.

With the start of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, this partnership is turning its attention to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the development of knowledge products, evidence-based policy advocacy, monitoring of the SDGs, and capacity development to strengthen regional follow up and review and national implementation efforts.

The Annual Thematic report will be produced every year to support discussions at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable development. Emphasizing a people-centred approach, it will focus on the theme of the High-level political forum on sustainable development for each year.¹ Through its interface with the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development² and other dissemination efforts and drawing from stakeholder perspectives, the annual thematic report will.

- Describe regional trends in relation to the theme and identify primary driving forces
- Highlight good practices and lessons learned
- Draw attention to systemic interventions required to support efforts for sustainable development.

The theme for the 2017 Annual Thematic Report is aligned with that of the 2017 session of the High-level political forum on sustainable development – “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world.”

The basis for, and outline of, the report

Chapter 1 of the report sets the scene at the start of the 2030 Agenda, in relation to poverty eradication and promoting prosperity. The situation and trends in the region in relation to poverty eradication and promotion of prosperity are described.

¹ As defined by UN General Assembly Resolution 70/299, the themes for the HLPF will be as follows: 2017 - Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world; 2018 - Transformation toward sustainable and resilient societies; and 2019- Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality;

² This regional forum has been agreed by member states as a platform for follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. See <https://www.unescap.org/events/apfsd3>

The chapter elaborates first on the issues of prosperity and poverty. The Asia-Pacific region has been experiencing considerable slowdown in economic growth and productivity gains in recent years³, while there is also evidence to suggest that the region's progress in poverty reduction is slowing down and inequalities are rising.⁴ This is consistent with the understanding that the marginal returns of poverty eradication efforts diminish. The region therefore faces an uphill task to reach the last mile, to "leave no one behind" at a time when widening income inequality is impacting the long-term economic outlook and dividing societies.

In terms of prosperity, the chapter underlines that it is a multi-dimensional concept - in the World Bank's Prosperity Index it encompasses the Economy, Entrepreneurship & Opportunity; Governance; Education; Health; Safety & Security; Personal Freedom; and Social Capital.⁵ Education, access to networking opportunities, social innovations, and government investments have led to improvements in some aspects of prosperity. At the same time, there are diminishing gains in other areas— for example in relation to social cohesion, vulnerability of employment or access to natural resources critical for food security or livelihoods.

The report emphasizes that reaching the last mile in eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity will depend on the quality of growth and the provision of access to services and public goods. An enhanced quality of growth – growth that is inclusive, dynamic, productive and efficient, and promotes balanced investments in various forms of capital (including natural and social capital), and which respects environmental limits is critical for poverty eradication and prosperity.⁶ Access to basic services and public goods (including education, health, transportation, energy, water and shelter) remains the foundation for poverty alleviation, but is persistently unequal. In some cases, access is being eroded due to lack of investment, misdirected investment and economic forces.

It argues that both quality of growth and access to services and public goods are profoundly affected by regional megatrends such as demographic change, urbanization, trade and regional integration that drive economic, social and environmental change in the region. The chapter then briefly introduces some major determinants of a "changing Asia Pacific" and on the basis of these determinants describes three main areas that are related to the theme of the report and will be further explored in the consequent chapters as follows:

- Poverty, prosperity and inclusion in the urban context
- Natural resources management and rural poverty
- Infrastructure and its financing and governance

The chapter points out that persistent poverty and lack of prosperity are features of both cities and rural areas, but the rural-urban divide, as well as decisions on resource management and infrastructure, characterize and shape much of wider picture of poverty in the region. The report emphasizes that efforts to develop prosperous, inclusive and liveable cities must be implemented hand in hand with strategies for natural resources management, rural development, investment in natural capital, food security and appropriate infrastructure in order to ensure that no one is left behind.

³ United Nations ESCAP, *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2016*

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ The annual Legatum Prosperity Index ranks 142 countries across eight categories.

⁶ "Shifting from Quantity to Quality: Growth with equality, efficiency, sustainability and dynamism." ESCAP (2013) http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/FINAL%20Q2Q%20Shifting%20from%20quantity%20ESCAP2675_JP.pdf

Chapter 2 of the report focuses attention on the challenge and opportunities urbanization provides for building prosperity while reducing poverty, inequality and exclusion, as part of a New Urban Agenda. The Asia-Pacific region is urbanizing rapidly, as millions of rural dwellers move to towns and cities and urban centres expand to encompass their rural surroundings. More than 50 per cent of the region will live in its cities by 2018.⁷

This urban transformation presents both challenges and opportunities. Cities are the seats of economic power and growth, and of social and economic innovation. The concentration of people, knowledge, skills, infrastructure and financial resources creates a potent basis for economic growth and human development. This helps reduce poverty and build prosperity. But cities are also where some of the most vulnerable groups of people are seeking to fulfil their aspirations for a better life. Here, migration and other demographic patterns are in evidence. Migrants, youth, women, minorities, the landless and the urban poor all face challenges in accessing the opportunities that cities can provide. At the same time, cities are producing environmental impacts that detract from well-being gains provided by cities and that impact both urban and rural areas. Creating urban systems that promote inclusion and provide the opportunity of prosperity for all in a sustainable way is fundamental to poverty reduction in the SDG era. Where urbanisation processes are driven by an inclusive vision that integrates economic, social and environmental concerns, a liveable and competitive city can reduce poverty, boost prosperity and help to ensure that no one is left behind.

Chapter 3 of the report focuses attention on Asia-Pacific's natural resources and rural areas where 76% of the region's poor live⁸. Rising affluence, economic integration, urbanization, and changing lifestyles and consumption patterns, is driving an increase in demand for natural resources and rural lands for bioenergy production, fuel extraction, food production, and for tourism or residential use. The declining resource and land availability base affects mostly the well-being of the poor.

More than 50% of global resource use now originates in the Asia-Pacific region. This rising demand for resources increases pressure on the natural resource base, on which the livelihoods of rural people largely depend. New investment in rural areas is often directed to uses of natural resources which provide poorly-distributed economic benefits and often, the means for further exploitation⁹.

Exploitation of natural resources, whether in the context of agro-industrial, small farming, or subsistence use, can lead to a spiral that deepens impoverisation, and degrades natural resources, due to inability and/or lack of incentives to invest in sustainable management. More than 2.2 billion people in the region depend on an agricultural sector with an average farm size of only 1.6 ha.¹⁰ The sector is often impacted by a nexus of economic pressures for exploitation of natural capital, under-investment in human capital and infrastructure, unequal power relations, and governance shortcomings. The large material footprints of developed countries

⁷ Habitat and ESCAP (2015). State of Asian and Pacific Cities: Urban transformations, shifting from quantity to quality (United Nations, Bangkok).

⁸ IFAD (2016). Rural Development Report 2016: Fostering inclusive rural transformation.

⁹ An additional element that needs to be taken into account when looking at the relations between poverty and natural resources management is the concept of 'investment' poverty which refers to households' capacity in terms of various forms of capital that enable them to invest in **natural resource maintenance**. As per this concept poverty, as related to environmental resource use, refers not only to households' inability to satisfy their current needs, but also to their inability to invest in the future, which requires additional levels of income, capital and general economic security.

¹⁰ *Ibid*

show that the link between rural poverty and natural resources needs to be discussed in a larger context of increasing inequality and globalisation.

The chapter will discuss poverty and inequality in relation to access to, use and management of natural resources between different demographic populations, and in the context of rural development. Finally, the chapter proposes policy interventions. Investing into sustainable management of natural resources and appropriate infrastructure can be an important tool to reduce disparities and inequalities between rural and urban areas and at the same time improve environmental sustainability. The report advocates for creating synergies between the interests of the rural and urban populations, in particular where incentives can be created for investment in natural capital.

Chapter 4 of the report shows how prudent infrastructure investment serves not only to increase and sustain economic growth but also to broaden access to economic opportunities and improve human welfare, particularly of the poor. It stresses the need for infrastructure to enhance ecological services and to be climate resilient alongside avoiding adverse environmental impacts. The chapter reflects how emerging regional trends – related to demographic transitions, trade and regional integration, connectivity and urbanisation processes affect the types of infrastructure that will be developed, financed, and managed.

The chapter recognizes two main challenges for an effective infrastructure response in the region – finance and governance. Scarcity in domestic public capital and increasing infrastructure demand require innovations in how infrastructure needs are met and financed, and encourage private sector participation prompting the treatment of infrastructure as a public asset. These shifts require stronger and more effective governance capacities, related to core functions including project development and negotiation of contractual arrangements with private partners that strike an appropriate balance in incentives and risk sharing.

Finally, the chapter discusses the role of various actors – governments, non-state actors, multilateral development organizations in determining the response and opportunities to allow infrastructure investments to meet a country's development needs with respect to eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity.

Chapter 5 of the report concludes with critical action points for poverty eradication and promoting shared prosperity at the national, subregional and regional levels to support

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