



PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development in Asia and the Pacific



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INTRODUCTION



The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a comprehensive framework adopted in 2015 by world leaders to eradicate poverty and ensure access to basic services for all. It offers an unprecedented opportunity for the Asia-Pacific region to transform its economies through an integrated development framework, balancing the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability.

The General Assembly has entrusted ESCAP to support member States in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda, especially in facilitating effective follow-up and review, while supporting national governments in their sustainable development priorities through regional policy consistency and coherence.

As a regional commission, ESCAP is strategically positioned to accelerate this implementation given its interdisciplinary nature, its broad analytical expertise, its technical cooperation capacity and its unique convening power of outreach and engagement with governments, civil society and development partners.

At the 72nd Commission session in May 2016, member States adopted a series of resolutions focusing on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their supportive tracks including mobilization and coordination of finance; trade and investment; science, technology and innovation (STI); data and statistics; and climate and disaster resilience.

Under the guidance of member States, ESCAP has been working to streamline both the conference structure and its work programme to better align with these mandates.

In particular, ESCAP is strengthening its intergovernmental platforms through high quality analytical work to promote policy integration and stability, and advice to member States on options and modalities for financing of development, trade facilitation and ways to leverage STI, along with supportive capacity building.

ESCAP is also supporting national statistical offices to engage governments, the private sector, academia and civil society for the production, dissemination and use of statistical information to support the implementation of the SDGs in their national contexts.

The Asia-Pacific region has never been better equipped to tackle existing and emerging development challenges than it is today. With the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the region has the blueprint for the future in terms of global sustainable development and supportive financing, as well as a new agreement on climate action. It also has the resources needed to implement the SDGs but with more than 2.6 billion people in the region still living on less than \$2 per day, many significant challenges remain.

This report is a reflection of the work ESCAP is undertaking to support its member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda. It includes links to our analytical work and e-learning tools that we hope will be useful for these member States, as well as other stakeholders, in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

ABOUT ESCAP



Vision

ESCAP envisions a resilient Asia and the Pacific region based on the balanced integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions, in line with the 2030 Agenda. It contributes to this vision through its comprehensive multilateral platform which promotes cooperation and concerted action among its member States.



Who we are

As the regional arm of the United Nations, ESCAP plays a unique role as the only intergovernmental forum for all countries and territories of the Asia-Pacific region. Established in 1947, ESCAP today has 53 members and 9 associate members, representing more than two-thirds of the world's population.



Our work

ESCAP serves as the hub for sharing regional experiences, forging regional consensus and ensuring policy consistency, coherence and coordination in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In addition, ESCAP's intergovernmental platform provides support for strong participation of least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states in the region.



Our outcomes

ESCAP works to overcome some of the region's greatest challenges by providing various forms of assistance to member States:

- ESCAP promotes rigorous analysis and peer-learning through its eight core areas of work: macroeconomic policy and financing for development; trade, investment and innovation; social development; transport; statistics; energy; environment and development; and information communications technology (ICT) and disaster risk reduction.
- These analyses are translated into policy dialogues and recommendations to implement innovative solutions.
- ESCAP also provides good development practices, knowledge-sharing, capacity building and technical cooperation to member States in the implementation of these recommendations.
- The norm-setting and policy work of ESCAP supports member States in shaping and implementing a more balanced and inclusive development agenda for the region.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In view of the transformational challenges and opportunities of the 2030 Agenda, ESCAP's current focus is on:



01 | MACROECONOMIC POLICY AND FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT

To help address the \$2.5 trillion per year it could cost to close infrastructure gaps in the region and provide universal access to social protection, health and education, as well as action on climate change, ESCAP has repurposed its intergovernmental Committee on Macroeconomic Policy, to include poverty reduction and financing for development. The new committee will promote financing as an effective means of implementing the 2030 Agenda and provide member States with a platform to address issues such as domestic fiscal resource mobilization, capital market development and financial inclusion.



02 | TRADE, INVESTMENT AND INNOVATION

While the region is at the leading edge of innovation, accounting for almost 43 per cent of global research and development activity, 95 per cent of researchers are concentrated in just five countries. ESCAP's research provides a range of policy recommendations to support countries in harnessing science, technology and innovation (STI) for sustainable development. At the same time, a regional STI platform has been established to create agreement on a common framework, policies and standards.

With many Asia-Pacific economies still hampered by high trade costs, new work is being undertaken by ESCAP to promote trade in services, environmental goods, and technology, as well as to improve understanding of the role of preferential trade agreements and the landscape of international investment agreements.



03 | TRANSPORT

Improving regional connectivity has been placed high on the development agenda across the Asia-Pacific region. ESCAP's analytical work provides a comprehensive account of the current regional transport system, examining progress as well as present challenges still facing development practitioners, regional governments and civil societies. ESCAP has also developed a five-year Regional Action Programme (2017-2021) that supports sustainable transport connectivity and incorporates the SDGs.



04 | STATISTICS

To support member States in identifying and tracking their SDG implementation, ESCAP is bringing experts together to build the capacity of national statistical systems to promote the use of 'Big Data' for sustainable development.



05 | SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

With 2.6 billion people still trapped in poverty in the region and 650 million people with disabilities, inequality, in its multiple forms, is rising. ESCAP's analytical work is helping to address this challenge. The *Time for Equality Report* identifies progress and provides evidence-based policy directions to advance social development. The Social Protection Toolbox, a dynamic database of good practices, and the Gender Portal initiative, are also strengthening national social protection systems.



06 | ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

In addition, ESCAP has developed regional platforms such as the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and the International Forum on Urban Policy for the SDGs, to bring diverse perspectives together by sharing best practices.



07 | ICT AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

The digital divide in the region continues to be one of the widest in the world, and only one-third of the population has Internet access. In response, ESCAP is promoting connectivity through the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative to increase the availability and affordability of broadband by strengthening Internet infrastructure in the region.

Asia and the Pacific is still the most vulnerable region to natural disasters. Over 40 per cent of the disasters that occurred globally between 2005 and 2014 took place in the region, with more than 1.4 billion people affected and over half a trillion dollars in severe economic damage. ESCAP is enhancing disaster risk resilience by extending its Regional Space Application Programme to ensure effective use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) applications for early warning, and by building capacities to deal with disasters through climate adaptation.



08 | ENERGY

The region is also home to the majority of the world's energy poor, with some 455 million people lacking access to energy. In response, ESCAP has established a Committee on Energy to promote regional energy connectivity and integration, and has committed to implementing outcomes of the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum to support effective energy sector decision-making for sustainable development.



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