

TRANSFORMATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY
in Asia and the Pacific



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About the cover

The hourglass represents the tight time frame within which the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has to be implemented and the work to be done to “translate promises on paper into change on the ground,” as United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said.

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FOREWORD

At the end of 2015, world leaders adopted an ambitious global development framework: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There has never been a more urgent need for a concerted, integrated and aspirational compact for sustainable development. At the same time as negotiations for the 2030 Agenda were in full swing, in mid-2015, the global concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere breached the 400 parts per million milestone—a critical red line for climate stabilization—for the first time in recorded history. Planetary health is literally at stake, which could undermine many of the human development achievements of the past decades.

The Asia-Pacific region's contribution to breaching this limit has been significant, with a doubling of regional CO₂ emissions between 1990 and 2012. While the use of resources, such as minerals, metals and biomass, has tripled since 1990, access to these resources has simultaneously become more unequal. Income gaps have widened. Nearly three out of four people in the Asia-Pacific region live in countries in which income inequality has increased or remained unchanged over the past 15 years. The share of income received by the poorest has also shrunk. Coupled with persistent social inequalities and policy failures, this has resulted in shortcomings in access to food, water and energy.

The region's success in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals will depend on whether regional megatrends, such as urbanization, economic integration, rising incomes and changing consumption patterns, are aligned with sustainable development outcomes.

This report examines transformations in four areas: investment flows, social justice, economic structure and patterns of resource use. These areas of transformation are fundamental to reframing the relationships between the economy, nature and people so that stakeholders in each of these dimensions of sustainable development work together rather than at cross-purposes. This is critical for a shift to more sustainable paths.

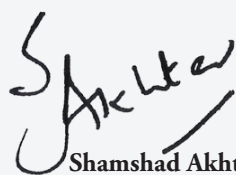
The challenge of delivering the 2030 Agenda is formidable, but there is also immense potential to achieve the necessary transformations. There are now more opportunities than ever to effect lasting and significant change.

The challenge for governments is to initiate and sustain transformation—defining policy, regulatory and institutional changes that enable new and effective alliances of stakeholders whose purposes and interests converge through values that support a sustainable future.

We recognize that the priorities for implementing the 2030 Agenda will differ from country to country. This is why our report focuses on the fundamental transformations required and the capacities of governments to support them, regardless of sustainable development priorities or social and political conditions. It also emphasizes the transformations that will strengthen the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

Multidisciplinary thinking on transformation is best delivered through institutional partnerships, which is why we are pleased to present this report as the outcome of a new partnership arrangement.

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the United Nations Environment Programme have traditionally collaborated in producing several editions in this report series since 1985 (formerly known as the State of the Environment in Asia and the Pacific). The addition of the United Nations University and the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies strengthens this partnership to bring even more policy-relevant reflections to national policymaking and regional cooperation.



Shamshad Akhtar

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and
Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific



Kaveh Zahedi
Regional Director and
Representative for
Asia and the Pacific
UNEP



Anthony Capon
Director of the
United Nations University
International Institute for
Global Health
UNU



Hironori Hamanaka
Chair of
IGES Board of Directors
IGES



ABOUT THE REPORT

Asia and the Pacific is a dynamic region. Regional megatrends, such as urbanization, economic and trade integration and rising incomes and changing consumption patterns, are transforming its societies and economies while multiplying the environmental challenges.

These environmental challenges range from growing greenhouse gas emissions, poor air quality, land use change, pressure on marine ecosystems, biodiversity loss and increasing demand for resources, such as energy and water. These megatrends are already shaping the future patterns of resource use and defining who benefits the most and who loses. A basic premise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is that trade-offs between environmental protection, shared prosperity and social progress can no longer be viewed as acceptable.

Aligning these trends with sustainable development requires political will and action to reshape the relationships between the economy, society and the environment. This report examines four critical determinants of the relationships between these three dimensions of sustainable development as targets for fundamental transformations—in social justice, resource efficiency, investment flows and economic structures.



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Katinka Weinberger, Section Chief, Environment and Development Policy Section (EDPS), ESCAP, provided guidance and direction to the core team who developed the report, with overall coordination by Kareff Rafisura and technical direction by Hitomi Rankine, ESCAP.

The lead authors are Hitomi Rankine (Chapter 1); Jose A. Puppim de Oliveira, UNU (International Institute for Global Health and formerly affiliated with the UNU-Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability) (Chapter 2); Janet Salem and Flavia Speiski, UNEP (Chapter 3); Nobue Amanuma, ESCAP (Chapter 4); Perig Leost, ESCAP consultant (Chapter 5); Jonathan Gilman, UNEP (Chapter 6); and Kareff Rafisura, ESCAP (Chapter 7). Jose A. Puppim de Oliveira also provided technical inputs in conceptualizing the report. Final review was provided by Donovan Storey, ESCAP.

The report is enriched by the guidance from Rae Kwon Chung, former Director of the Environment and Development Division of ESCAP, and Masakazu Ichimura, former Section Chief of EDPS, with contributions from Simon Olsen Hoiberg and Eric Zusman (IGES); Nilapha Ratanavong and Mahenau Agha, UNEP; Kohji Iwakami, Lorenzo Santucci, Rowan Fraser, Erick Ratajczak, ESCAP, Kiki Chan, ESCAP consultant; and Sandra Baquie, Emily Gubbini, Veeramon Suwannasang, Anudari Achitsaikhan and Hwavun Lee, ESCAP interns. The statistical annex of the report was developed

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