



## **Expert Group Meeting on regional cooperation for inclusive and sustainable development: South and South-West Asia Development Report, 2015-16**

New Delhi, 17-18 September 2015,  
ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office, New Delhi

### **Concept Note**

#### **I. Background**

As part of its programme of work, ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office (ESCAP-SSWA) will produce the report “Regional cooperation for inclusive and sustainable development: South and South-West Asia development report, 2015-16”.

Building on the work of ESCAP substantive divisions and the SRO-SSWA, the report will present an analysis of priority development challenges for the South and South-West Asia subregion and key policy recommendations for leveraging regional cooperation, especially in the context of the end of the millennium development goals and implementation of the sustainable development goals. The report will also serve as a knowledge-sharing tool for key policy makers in the subregion, academia and other development policy stakeholders, to inform about core development trends, gaps and policy options for countries of the subregion. As a key publication on regional cooperation in the subregion, the report will provide information on good practices and lessons learned to enable policy makers to replicate successful and sustainable development policies.

Coming as it would soon after the adoption of SDGs as a part of the Post-2015 Development Agenda by the UN General Assembly in September 2015, the report will present a perspective on implementation of SDG priorities by South Asian countries especially through harnessing the potential of regional economic cooperation and integration. It would also highlight key policy issues that could be pursued in associated regional organizations of South and South-West Asia member States, including for the 19<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit to be held in Islamabad in 2016.

## **II. Report outline**

### **CORE POLICY AGENDA: Chapters 1-4**

#### **Chapter 1: Closing Sustainable Development Gaps in South and South-West Asia**

This chapter provides an overview of the key development gaps in the 10 countries of South and South-West Asia and how regional cooperation can help close these gaps in the context of the paradigm shift in development policy towards sustainable development pathways. The chapter outlines the key challenges of the subregion in terms of core development gaps, especially in South Asia, with stark gaps in providing basic needs, as demonstrated through its mixed MDG performance. Analysis of the sustainable development agenda and the integration of economic, social and environmental pillars of development will draw upon the ESCAP perspective and apply this in more detail at the subregional level, with good practices and case studies that highlight policy priorities for managing spillovers between the three dimensions of sustainable development.

#### **Chapter 2: Regional Economic Integration in South and South-West Asia**

This chapter contextualizes the slow but steady improvements of regional economic integration in South and South-West Asia. The analysis considers the progress in trade and investment trends in the subregion and the underperformance of improvements in intra-regional trade and regional value chains. The chapter considers the enormous potential of the subregion, especially as an emerging centre of global production and unrealized demand, to achieve inclusive and sustainable development gains if significant progress can be made in further regional economic integration in South Asia, and between South Asia and South-West Asia. The chapter also draws on lessons and good practices from other economic integration efforts in neighbouring subregions to highlight key sectoral reforms and policies, in infrastructure, energy, natural resource management and finance that complement trade and investment strategies to spur greater integration and faster development in South and South-West Asia.

#### **Chapter 3: Regional Connectivity in South and South-West Asia**

This chapter provides an analysis of the potential for regional connectivity to improve overall trade and development of South and South-West Asia. Land transport in road and rail corridors and their place in other multimodal transport strategies is considered in improving intra-subregional and inter-subregional connectivity in particular through the ITI-DKD-Y rail corridor and TIPI-BM road corridors and their potential in strengthening South Asia-Central Asia connectivity. The analysis considers the development benefits of these corridors and their importance for development of regional value chains and growth of lagging areas. Development of land corridors will also improve options for multimodal transportation within the subregion as well as connectivity of the subregion with Central Asia, South East Asia and Europe. It will also draw upon ESCAP's recent work on potential of transport connectivity in development of border regions in Eastern South Asia.

#### **Chapter 4: South and South-West Asia's Partnership for Development**

This chapter will consider the application of regional cooperation to support the development of the subregion's countries with a focus on LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. The chapter

will situate the CSNs of South and South-West Asia within the global programmes of action of Istanbul, Vienna and the SAMOA Pathway. An analysis of the capacity of LDCs in the subregion to graduate from LDC status by 2020 or 2022 is considered in the context of the specific challenges facing the subregion's LDCs, and the threat of external shocks such as the Nepal 2015 earthquakes. The chapter also takes into account the recent ESCAP CSN report and in this context, assesses the ability of CSN's in South and South-West Asia to improve their productive capacity. Lessons learned from other countries that have achieved graduation, including the Maldives, will be considered against the current strategies of the subregion's four LDCs. The role of development assistance from conventional and emerging donors including the larger neighbours in the subregion and their effects on CSN economies are also considered. The potential to engage in further development support through the implementation of the sustainable development goals and cooperation from other countries in the subregion is assessed in terms of effects on accelerating graduation and SDG achievements by 2030.

## **THEMATIC SUBREGIONAL POLICY PRIORITIES: Chapters 5-7**

### **Chapter 5: Regional Cooperation for Energy Security in South and South-West Asia**

The chapter highlights South and South-West Asia's challenge of energy security for ensuring sustainable development and the goal of Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All). Although endowed with a diverse range of energy resources, energy infrastructure and dependence is based upon increasingly unreliable, unscalable, costly and unsustainable production systems. Existing policies and a lack of regional cooperation to offset supply and demand mismatches exacerbate energy gaps and inhibit investment in new energy technologies, especially those that are renewable and rely on advantages of the region's natural geography and climate. An analysis of the opportunities for investment in more sustainable energy systems for the region will provide the basis for a set of key policy recommendations for carrying forward ESCAP mandates including from the APEF and the creation of new Committee on Energy and adoption of the Energy Framework Agreement by the 18<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit to facilitate integration of subregional and regional energy markets, share greater energy information and engage in far deeper investments for regional technology development in energy resource management.

### **Chapter 6: Regional Cooperation for Food Security in South Asia**

The chapter highlights South Asia's economic emergence, which is contrasted by a significant food security challenge with the region representing the largest concentration of people living in hunger and malnutrition in the world. National food security strategies should be complemented by regional cooperation that can provide a policy pathway to address both short-run and long-run food security challenges. These food security challenges require changing current locked-in food access and availability paradigms. Drawing upon new research and policy dialogues conducted by SRO-SSWA, a 10-point priority agenda is proposed for regional cooperation that identifies key areas to strengthen national food security strategies. It includes (1) climate resilient sustainable agriculture; (2) regional institutions such as food banks; (3) regional trade liberalization for food security; (4) cooperation in R&D; (5) regional knowledge networks; (6) Efficiency, waste and logistics; (7) policy coordination in global markets; (8) regulatory coherence with respect to IPRs and food safety regulations; (9) natural resource management including trans-boundary resources such as water; (10) food security information and IPC implementation. In the context of the SDGs, this policy agenda could assist the South Asian

countries implement key actions for faster, food-secure development and achieve eliminate hunger.

### **Chapter 7: Regional Cooperation for disaster risk reduction in South and South-West Asia**

South and South-West Asia is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world for disasters, due to the challenges of vulnerable disaster-prone geography, large populations living in precarious conditions and the economic, social and environmental development gaps that multiply the adverse impacts of disasters. This chapter reviews the multidimensional vulnerability of the countries of the subregion to disasters and the global importance of recent mandates to improve disaster risk-reduction strategies. The chapter analyzes the benefits for investing in disaster risk reduction strategies in terms of faster progress towards sustainable development and the lower impact of disasters that are increasingly cross-national in effect and economic, social or environmental impacts. The chapter also considers the various strategies and initiatives that have been taken or started at the regional level through regional and subregional organizations to assess good practices suitable for replication and scaling up, including disaster loss and assessment methodologies, disaster information management and sharing as well as early warning systems.

### **III. Objective of the meeting**

The objective of the expert group meeting is to provide a forum to receive inputs and discuss key messages to be included in the South and South-West Asia Development Report. The meeting will assess key regional characteristics and trends for each of the core and thematic issues of sustainable development in South and South-West Asia that should be analyzed and discussed in the report. Experts will provide insights into state of the art policy design, current policy information and evidence-based policy for countries to progress towards sustainable development. The meeting will discuss alternative national priorities and strategies to secure inclusive and resilient medium and long-term development gains. Experts will assess and advise on key interventions and pathways through regional cooperation that countries can take that integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development; economic, social and environmental.

The specific objectives are:

- i. To review and discuss the key thematic and policy messages for the report

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