

Balancing the Pillars of Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific





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ESCAP's Vision

ESCAP is committed to a resilient Asia and the Pacific founded on shared prosperity, social equity and sustainability.

Our vision is to be the most comprehensive multilateral platform for promoting cooperation among member States to achieve inclusive and sustainable economic and social development throughout the region.

Foreword

Asia-Pacific economic growth has anchored the recovery of the global economy, and has lifted tens of millions of people out of absolute poverty over the past few decades. This growth has, however, come at a price: increasing inequalities and damage to our environment including widening development gaps, such as those between the rich and poor, between

urban and rural areas, and between women and men.

The mounting cost of this growth, to our people and our planet, threatens hard-won development gains, and slows our progress. We must shift the region to a more inclusive and sustainable development path to ensure the future we want.

The commitment by world leaders, at the landmark Rio+20 summit last year, to sustainable development and a post-2015 development agenda that builds on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), offers Asia and the Pacific an unmatched opportunity to shape and contribute to this global future.



ESCAP is therefore working to accelerate achievement of the MDGs, in a big final push to 2015, and will use the momentum this provides to help our member States better balance and integrate their economic, social and environmental development, to build an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient future.

In Asia and the Pacific this calls for a new approach to growth – a transformative agenda that moves away from conventional development paradigms, based on trade-offs between the three pillars of sustainable development. Our new paradigm must, instead, harness synergies between economic, social and environmental priorities, it must stress partnerships, and generate shared and sustained prosperity across generations.

To build on what we have learned from the MDG process, our Asia-Pacific sustainable development agenda — and the strategies that flow from it — must be considered in light of the post-2008 financial-crisis world. Rather than “one-size-fits-all”, it must be flexible, recognizing that not all countries and regions are the same, and that they have different initial conditions and resource bases.

ESCAP will continue to be the most inclusive intergovernmental platform for our member States to share ideas and effective strategies for sustainable development. To help developing countries achieve sustainable development, ESCAP is focusing our efforts on assisting in areas of poverty eradication, government policy formation, capacity building, exchange of best practices and lessons-learned, regional economic integration and cooperation, evidence-based information, and collection and compilation of country inputs to inform national, regional and global decision-making to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities and address sustainability.

Sustainable development is already the focus of much of our work at ESCAP. In the pages that follow, you'll learn more about how we are currently working with our member States, as well as national, regional and global partners, to ensure sustainable development is the cornerstone of growth in Asia and the Pacific. Together we can move towards development paths which enable us all to grow in a more inclusive and sustainable way—now and for a better, shared future.

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Making Economies Work for Everyone



As Asia and the Pacific develops, rapid economic growth often masks the rising costs of environmental degradation and the ongoing struggles of millions of people facing persistent poverty and vulnerable employment. That the region is home to a large number of least-developed, landlocked and small island states that have yet to fully benefit from economic dynamism creates additional burdens.

ESCAP tackles these sustainable development issues through innovative macroeconomic policies, and support for sustainable agriculture and achievement of internationally agreed-upon development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We provide strategic analysis and policy advice, multi-sectoral capacity building activities and platforms for regional cooperation.

ESCAP in Action

Macroeconomic policies can be powerful tools for achieving inclusive and sustainable development. ESCAP focuses on forward-looking policies that complement the region's growth with a renewed emphasis on equity and rights, social development and environmental sustainability. ESCAP's *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2013* provides estimates of required public expenditures for a set of employment, education, health services, pensions, disability benefits and energy-access related programmes. The results show policymakers how such investments are not only affordable but also will not jeopardize macroeconomic stability.

Delivering results

Sustainable agriculture is vital for achieving food security and inclusive development, particularly in developing Asia-Pacific, where agriculture employs about 60 per cent of the working population and shelters a majority of the poor. ESCAP provides research and training, and enables technology transfer through programmes such as the Network for Knowledge Transfer on Sustainable Agricultural Technologies and Improved Market Linkages in South and South-east Asia (SATNET).

ESCAP monitors progress and analyses critical challenges in achieving MDGs to support member States, in particular Least Development Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. The Istanbul and Almaty Programmes of Action and the Mauritius Strategy provide important frameworks for ESCAP to work closely with countries to build capacities in priority areas. Through wide-reaching consultations, ESCAP works to ensure that regional perspectives are reflected in the post-2015 development agenda.

Promoting Social Inclusion for All

Despite Asia and the Pacific's unprecedented economic growth, inequalities in wealth, opportunities and access to services have increased in much of the region. Women, youth, persons with disabilities and older persons experience significant labour market disadvantages, participate less in the economy, have limited access to education and health services, and are disproportionately poorer. Social protection coverage is also often limited and only available in the formal sector, leaving the vast majority of these groups exposed to higher social risks and vulnerabilities. Finding solutions to these rising inequalities remains a mounting challenge.

ESCAP helps governments close these divides. We promote rights-based policies and programmes to strengthen social protection systems, develop human capacities, mainstream gender, and enhance access to economic opportunities and social services.



ESCAP in Action

ESCAP promotes policy options and tools to support governments in building comprehensive social protection systems grounded on the principles of universality and rights. We also advocate for effective tax-benefit schemes to support the most vulnerable groups as part of the good governance and social equity agenda.

To provide governments with the information and tools they need to make the right policies and budget decisions, ESCAP also tracks population dynamics—such as population growth, migration and ageing—that can have long-term impacts on a country's economic, social and environmental development.

Delivering results

Closing the gender gap, particularly regarding women's economic participation, is also an ESCAP priority. We conduct research and provide technical support to aid governments in creating policy and legal environments to support women's entrepreneurship.

The Rio+20 Summit stresses the importance of actions to pull social groups that are marginalized into the mainstream. ESCAP encourages countries to invest more in youth and integrate their perspectives into national development processes, including advocating for full and productive employment.

ESCAP also provides technical support to governments to promote laws that uphold and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. And we promote universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, and enhancing national capacity to provide elderly care services for the growing number of older persons in the region. Including all in development is essential to ensuring the region's sustainable future.

Leading the Region towards Environmental Sustainability

ESCAP supports green economy policies as one of the important tools available for achieving a more sustainable future. Low-carbon, green growth manages the natural resources underpinning our socio-economic systems, mitigates emissions responsible for climate change, and improves the resource efficiency of economic growth necessary to cope with the looming resource crisis and planetary boundary, providing green jobs and savings that can be invested to better people's lives.

Green growth in the context of sustainable development is the Asia-Pacific regional strategy to promote green economy by shifting away from industrialization and urbanization based on "brown-growth" exploitation of natural capital such as water and high-carbon energy resources that have led to depletion of natural resources and environmental degradation that threaten development gains. ESCAP works to set in motion a virtuous and greener cycle of investing in—and not exploiting—human and natural capital to reinforce economic dynamism and reduce poverty. By pursuing this goal we are helping our member States balance and integrate the social, environmental and economic pillars of sustainable development.

ESCAP in Action

ESCAP works to integrate environmental sustainability into socio-economic development planning. Our focus includes urban development, water resource management, sanitation, energy security and efficiency, renewables and access for all.

ESCAP promotes low-carbon green growth as a regional approach for applying Rio+20 driven green economy policies. We offer policymakers the practical policy options, success stories and case studies needed to make a difference on the ground. Our capacity building features an open, online, e-learning tool that is used by hundreds of registered members worldwide.

Delivering results

Our "Low Carbon Green Growth Roadmap" launched in 2012 offers a blueprint for policymakers that includes more than 100 fact sheets and case studies. It features a toolbox of policy options that turn resource constraints and climate crisis into economic growth opportunities as a follow-up on Rio+20 recommendations. ESCAP is already helping the governments of Cambodia and Mongolia build their national roadmaps. While Brunei Darussalam, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam are benefiting from ESCAP green-growth capacity-building support.

ESCAP also supports activities combining greener products with eco-efficient infrastructure. Typical is a sustainable-cities project in solid-waste management that unites waste pickers with composting mechanisms. Now used in eight cities, the project improved waste collection, resulting in cleaner environments; new jobs that bring informal waste pickers into better conditions; and income generation from waste, providing an economic model that sees waste as revenue.

Strengthening Trade and Investment

Trade and investment drive economic growth and prosperity. They bring people, firms and nations together. They open new markets, transfer ideas, knowledge and technologies and expose business to best practices. And, if appropriate complementary policies and institutions are in place, they can also protect the environment.

ESCAP helps strengthen regional cooperation and integration in trade and investment for region-wide sustainable development. We play a major role in assisting the region's developing countries to understand, improve and implement regional and multilateral trading and investment systems. This allows people and companies, as well as countries, to participate more effectively and equitably in the global and regional economy, and benefit from enhanced trade and investment flows.



ESCAP in Action

When used to give the poor equitable access to opportunities, trade can be an effective tool for poverty reduction. ESCAP's Inclusive Trade Initiative calls on governments to identify and promote the trade of goods and services, produced by the poor, that enjoy comparative advantage and guides them to reduce their trade costs in reaching consumers. This leads to a more equitable distribution of benefits from trade and enhances access to earnings of those involved in production.

Successful sustainable development requires private and public sectors to work together in corporate sustainability and responsibility partnerships. ESCAP's Asia-Pacific Sustainable Business Network will seek out regional business leaders from every industry to join in a network to find ways for businesses and governments to incorporate sustainable development principles into public and private sector policies and practices.

Delivering results

Supporting linkages between the three pillars of sustainable development, ESCAP's Asia-Pacific Green Trade and Investment Framework will aim to reduce regional trade barriers on green products and services and promote their production and trade in regional and global markets. This framework will advise on policies for promoting green technologies and local entrepreneurship and support research to enhance related production and trade capabilities.

Promoting Transport Links for People and Products

Sustainable transport plays a critical role in creating an enabling development environment. It drives growth, promotes trade, connects people and nations and by providing access to services and opportunity it helps reduce poverty. In many Asian and Pacific countries, however, the quality and reach of transport infrastructure is insufficient to meet demand. And where basic transport infrastructure is in place, inadequate intermodal facilities, inefficient organisation of services, and regulatory and procedural bottlenecks often limit transport potential.

ESCAP works with public and private sector stakeholders to promote multiple modes of safe and energy-efficient transport. We offer policies, strategies and capacity building activities to help policymakers overcome non-physical bottlenecks, adopt international infrastructural standards, and enhance transport's contribution to sustainable development. Our actions improve the competitiveness of regional commerce and help more countries participate in the global economy.

ESCAP in Action

With the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks in place, ESCAP is working towards an intergovernmental agreement on dry ports. These ports will let shippers consolidate freight and transfer cargoes between air, road and rail more efficiently. They will also allow countries to fully utilize existing infrastructure, reduce congestion at sea ports, and foster the development of inland areas for more inclusive growth.

To improve the efficiency of cross-border and transit road transport, ESCAP has developed a regional strategy on transport facilitation, which includes specific targets and steps to achieve them and also common approaches for facilitation modalities. Targeted areas include road transport permits; visas for drivers and crews; and vehicle insurance. ESCAP has also developed a set of tools to help countries analyse and expedite cross-border and transit transport, such as the secure cross-border model, which allows real-time monitoring of freight transport movements.

Delivering results

Economic growth brings benefits, but it also creates new challenges. The rise in vehicle ownership in the region, for example, has led to an increase in road accidents and air pollution.

ESCAP is working with countries to develop road safety strategies and improve road safety data collection.

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