# Green Growth, Resources and Resilience

**Environmental Sustainability** in Asia and the Pacific









ESCAP promotes regional cooperation for inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific, a dynamic region characterized by growing wealth, diversity and change, but also challenged with persistent poverty, environmental degradation, inequality and insecurity. ESCAP supports member States with sound strategic analysis, policy options and technical cooperation activities to address key development challenges and to implement innovative solutions for region-wide economic prosperity, social progress and environmental sustainability. ESCAP, through its conference structure, assists member States in forging a stronger, coordinated regional voice on global issues by building capacities to dialogue, negotiate and shape the development agenda in an age of globalization, decentralization and problems that transcend borders. A key modality for this strategy is the promotion of intraregional connectivity and regional integration.

ADB's vision is an Asia and Pacific region free of poverty. Its mission is to help its developing member countries reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of their people. ADB is committed to reducing poverty through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. Based in Manila, ADB is owned by 67 members, including 48 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance. More information can be found at http://www.adb.org.

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#### **Foreword**

The Asia and Pacific region faces a new economic reality, a development context that is increasingly influenced by resource constraints and growing risks. In recent years, convergent economic and environmental challenges have had dramatic impacts on millions of people, threatening continued progress toward reduction of poverty and hunger. High food, energy and commodity prices, persistent income inequality, and climate and environmental changes overshadow the regional outlook.

These storm clouds come with a tantalizing silver lining. Asian and Pacific countries have made "green" policy commitments and investments that just five years ago would have been unimaginable. This nascent transformation is marked by perceptible changes in awareness, attitudes, markets and technologies, making green growth and transition to a green economy more economically and politically feasible than ever before.

Green growth strategies can help economies and societies become more resilient as they work to meet demands for food production, transport, housing, energy and water. Strategies can help mitigate the impacts of adverse shocks by reducing the intensity of resource consumption and environmental impacts, while alleviating pressure on commodity prices. Green growth also offers competitive advantages to those countries that commit to policy innovations. The global market for green goods and services is vast and growing fast, offering countries the dual benefit of prosperity and job creation.

To take advantage of these opportunities, long-term solutions require policy initiatives to transform economies, building on already important initiatives in many countries. Economies must be recalibrated so that economic growth is directly aligned with sustainable development objectives. The need for new infrastructure investment in the region presents opportunities for planners and policymakers to design, build, and operate infrastructure on principles of sustainability, including accessibility and social inclusiveness.

Governments must play their part, enabling the private sector to seize emerging opportunities while also engaging the public in finding effective and equitable solutions that are adapted to the special circumstances and needs of each country and community. Governance approaches that emphasize inclusiveness and adaptability, as well as regional cooperation, are critical requirements for any transition.

Reflecting a common view that action is urgently needed, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme have joined forces to produce this report on *Green Growth, Resources and Resilience*. Each institution has its own mandates and the three find common ground in working together to help catalyze action for sustainable and inclusive economic growth—a future where all people have an opportunity for a better life.

Decision makers at the sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (MCED), held in 2010 in Astana, Kazakhstan, have discussed the key findings and recommendations of a preview of this report. Looking beyond MCED, this report provides a wealth of information to facilitate the regional and global preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. This report will help all stakeholders take urgent action to chart our way to a more sustainable future.

Noeleen Heyzer Executive Secretary ESCAP Haruhiko Kuroda President ADB

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Executive Director
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## **About the report**

#### **Background**

This report—*Green Growth, Resources, and Resilience*—is the product of a combined effort by three institutions: the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It is the sixth in a series of reports published every five years since 1985 by ESCAP (formerly known as the State of the Environment in Asia and the Pacific series). It is also the third in ADB's *Asian Environment Outlook* series, funded by a Technical Assistance project – Preparation of the 2010 Asian Environment Outlook – for which financing was approved in May 2009 through the Technical Assistance Special Fund. It is also in line with UNEP's mandate to keep the state of the environment under review.

A Preview<sup>1</sup> of this report was distributed during the sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (MCED 6), held in Astana, Kazakhstan, in September 2010. This full report comes at a key time as governments and other stakeholders prepare for the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assess progress to date and the remaining gaps in implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development, and address new and emerging challenges, 20 years after the 1992 Earth Summit.

In 2005, the need to "shift the development orientation from a 'grow first, clean up later' approach to one of green growth," was a key message of MCED 5.<sup>2</sup> Then, the term "green growth" was relatively new to the international arena, but since then, green growth and related concepts have increasingly become an important part of the sustainable development agenda. This is underscored by the fact that one of the two themes of UNCSD is a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

#### Organization

The report is organized into six chapters:

The first chapter describes an evolving policy landscape in which rising demand for resources, along with increasingly apparent impacts from climate change, are bringing together economic, social and environmental crises, providing new opportunities and giving rise to new governance challenges.

The second chapter provides a detailed examination of resource use and efficiency trends, showing the complex nature of resource risks posed by the scale and speed of the economic transition and resource-intensive patterns of growth.

The third chapter outlines key policy actions for bringing economic growth strategies in closer alignment with the objective of sustainable development.

The fourth chapter describes how new governance challenges can be addressed at a number of levels, from international and regional governance structures down to national and local levels.

The fifth chapter focuses on illustrative strategies to promote improved resilience, a concept that centers on the capacity of societies and economies to resist and adapt to shocks and, whenever possible, turn crisis into opportunity.

The concluding chapter highlights some of the important findings of the report and comments on the implications for the two themes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

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