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SOUTH ASIA
SDG
UPDATE



COVER ARTICLE: SIXTH SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA FORUM ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS COMMITS TO STRONGER REGIONAL COOPERATION TO OVERCOME GLOBAL CHALLENGES



The Sixth South and South-West Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals was held from 5 to 7 December 2022, in Islamabad, Pakistan, in conjunction with the Government of Pakistan and the Sustainable Development Policy Institute.

This year's theme, "Accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels" provided ample ground to facilitate discussions on overcoming global challenges within the subregion that were aggravated by the 3 Cs – climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and conflict.

Opening the Forum, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana drew attention to the multiple crises Governments in the subregion are currently juggling with while endeavouring to build back better. She underscored, "The Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development remain as relevant as ever, especially as challenges become greater and more complex than before."

Ahsan Iqbal Chaudhary, Federal Minister Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan further highlighted, "As the world undergoes unusual times, innovative forms of knowledge exchange, technology transfer, emergency response and the recovery of livelihood and economies among the nations in the global South, particularly South and South-West-Asia, are of immense importance than ever."

"As nations and the world recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, platforms such as the Forum are useful to identify and devise collective regional action to address the various caveats that weigh down on our SDG progress," added Shehan Semasinghe, Minister of State for Finance, Sri Lanka.

Goals.”

Esala Ruwan Weerakoon, Secretary-General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation also observed that, “Enhanced regional connectivity in terms of transport, digital and people-to-people connectivity will substantially improve our chances of achieving the 2030 Agenda.” United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, noted that “the Sustainable Development Goals remain as relevant as ever, especially as challenges become greater and more complex than before”.

Throughout the forum, delegates noted with concern that at the current slow pace, South and South-West Asia may only achieve the Sustainable Development Goals decades after the original 2030 goalpost. Despite significant reductions in income poverty, the subregion still has the highest multi-dimensional poverty ratio among all subregions, at almost 30 per cent. Meanwhile, the subregion is also regressing on three Goals, namely, Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities), Goal 12 (responsible consumption and production), and Goal 13 (climate action).

Delegates also emphasised that closer regional cooperation was critical for accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – and that evidence-based policies, advisory and technical assistance, capacity building, knowledge sharing, and sharing of good practices should be the foundation for such cooperation.



More than 1000 officials and key stakeholders from 10 countries participated in the Forum (in person and on-line) and further shared their recommendations on how to accelerate the progress towards SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals).

Organised annually by UNESCAP as one of the five subregional preparatory meetings for the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and the global UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the SDG Forum facilitates dialogue and deliberations among government officials, stakeholder groups and development partners. It also provides a unique platform for peer learning and knowledge sharing on subregional efforts, for understanding subregional priorities and for identifying opportunities for regional cooperation.

Policy Dialogue on Regional Cooperation for Sustainable Development in South and South West Asia – Role of the South Asia Network on the Sustainable Development Goals

Organised in tandem with the Sixth South and South-West Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals, the policy dialogue acted as a platform for members of the South Asia Network on the Sustainable Development Goals (SANS) to reflect on what had been identified during the forum as recommendations for accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in South and South-West Asia. The dialogue also discussed possible pathways for SANS and other networks of think tanks and academia to support regional cooperation and progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. Strong research, sharing of data and knowledge, and intra-regional collaboration were listed as necessary drivers for the promotion of regional collaboration. The meeting also echoed the priority areas for the subregion, where further work and cooperation initiatives must be taken in areas of climate change, disaster risk reduction; cross-border connectivity; economic diversification; digital inclusion etc. Notably, the panel recommended establishing parliamentary committees and commissions to facilitate knowledge sharing between governments and other actors, as well as the organising of more policy dialogues between governments. Read more [here](#).



I. KEY ACTIVITIES ORGANIZED BY ESCAP ON SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA



1. High-Level Policy Dialogue on E-Commerce and Digital Marketing: Challenges and Opportunities for Women-led SMEs in South Asia



New Delhi, India, 15-16 December 2022. With an aim to facilitate and support women entrepreneurs, United Nations ESCAP and the Enhanced Integrated Framework, Geneva under the project “E-Commerce Capacity Building for Women-led MSMEs in South Asia” undertook a multifaceted approach towards empowering women entrepreneurs in South Asia in becoming part of new local, regional and international supply chains through the use of e-commerce and digital marketing tools. As a culmination of the project, the two-day event brought together stakeholders with varied expertise for thought-provoking dialogue and policy advocacy on aspects impacting women entrepreneurs and the way forward in empowering women economically through e-commerce and digital marketing. Read more [here](#).



2. National Training for Women Entrepreneurs on Promoting Business through E-commerce and Digital Marketing



Thimphu, Bhutan, 23-25 November 2022. As part of the “E-Commerce Capacity Building for Women-led MSMEs in South Asia” Project undertaken by ESCAP with an aim to facilitate and support women entrepreneurs through the use of e-commerce and digital marketing tools, this training event in Bhutan was attended by over 45 participants. Welcome remarks of the inaugural session were made by Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head, ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia; Dr Ratnakar Adhikari, Executive Director, Enhanced Integrated Framework, Geneva; and Ms. Karla Robin Hershey, UN Resident Coordinator in Bhutan. Mr. Sonam Tenzin, Director General, Department of Trade, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Government of Bhutan, gave the inaugural address. Read more [here](#).



3. Dialogue on Strategies for Accelerating Achievement of the SDGs in Bhutan and Building Back Better in support of the 13th Five-Year Plan

Thimphu, Bhutan, 22 November 2022. In continuation of ESCAP’s capacity building support to the Government of Bhutan and development organisations for accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, ESCAP organised a brainstorming session with stakeholders to identify critical opportunities, enablers, challenges and barriers to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Bhutan. The dialogue also aimed to identify core areas of policy research that the think tanks could undertake to support the development and initial implementation of Bhutan’s upcoming 13th Five-Year Plan. Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head, ESCAP SSWA Office, and Aum Chime P Wangdi, Secretary General Tarayana Foundation, Bhutan, gave welcome remarks. Others in attendance included Ms. Sonam Pem, Executive Director, Tarayana Foundation, Mr. K. Dorji, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Bhutan, Mr. Chencho Lhamu, Executive Director, Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, and other representatives of civil society organisations. Read more [here](#).



4. Policy Dialogue on Deepening Linkages between South Asia and Southeast Asia



New Delhi, India, 14 November 2022. The policy dialogue, jointly organised by ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (ESCAP-SSWA) and the World Bank, explored new approaches to revitalise trade and economic links between the two subregions, focusing on areas such as digital economy, environmental goods, and services. Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Director and Head, ESCAP-SSWA and Ms. Cecile Fruman, Director, Regional Integration and Engagement in South Asia, World Bank, opened the dialogue. Panellists include Ms. Indu Nair, Joint Secretary (ASEAN), Ministry of Commerce, India; Ambassador Jayant Dasgupta, Former Representative of India to the WTO; and Prof. Amita Batra, Chairperson, Centre for South Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. Read more [here](#).



5. Experts Group Meeting on Enhancing the Role of foreign Investment for Structural Economic Transformation in LLDCs

New Delhi, India, 10-11 November 2022. Organised by the ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (ESCAP-SSWA) and the UN-OHRLLS, the meeting sought to review how LLDCs can best attract and utilise foreign investment for supporting structural transformation of their economies and to provide recommendations in this area that can advance the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and support the achievement of the SDGs by the LLDCs. The meeting discussed experiences and effective practices from LLDCs and other developing countries. The meeting was opened by Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Director and Head, ESCAP-SSWA, and Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg, Chief, OHRLLS. Major General Vetsop Namgyel, Ambassador of Bhutan to India and Dr. Shankar Prasad Sharma, Ambassador of Nepal to India addressed the meeting. Read more [here](#).



6. National Training for Women Entrepreneurs on Promoting Business through E-commerce and Digital Marketing

Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1-3 November 2022. The ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (ESCAP-SSWA) organized a national training for women entrepreneurs in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in partnership with the Government of Sri Lanka and the Enhanced Integrated Framework, Geneva. This training was organized to equip women entrepreneurs from Sri Lanka to use e-commerce and digital marketing platforms for enhanced access to supply chains well as contribute towards the global economic development. Additionally, this training helped to establish a network amongst the women entrepreneurs by providing an opportunity to showcase their products, and services and share their entrepreneurial journey with an aim to inspire and motivate fellow women entrepreneurs. H.E. Dr. Ramesh Pathirana, Minister of Plantation Industries and Minister of Industries of Sri Lanka gave the inaugural address, while Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Director and Head, ESCAP-SSWA, and Ms. Hanaa Singer-Hamdy, UN Resident Coordinator for Sri Lanka provided welcome remarks. Read more [here](#).



Malé, Maldives, 30 October 2022. Organized by the ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West, in partnership with the Government of the Republic of the Maldives, the United Nations Resident Coordinator for the Maldives, United Nations Development Programme, and the International Parliamentary Union, the conference aimed to offer parliamentarians in the Maldives an overview of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 SDGs. SDG progress and challenges in the Asia-Pacific region and the Maldives were also discussed, with a focus on the role of the parliament in advancing the SDGs. Opening remarks were made by H.E. President Mohamed Nasheed MP, Speaker of the People's Majlis; H.E. Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, UN Under-Secretary-General & ESCAP Executive Secretary; H.E. Ms. Aishath Mohamed Didi, Minister, Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services; H.E. Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General, Inter-Parliamentary Union; and Ms. Catherine Haswell, UN Resident Coordinator for the Maldives. Read more [here](#).



8. Stakeholder Consultation for the Joint Programme on Strengthening National and Subregional Capacity for Sustainable Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation in the Maldives

Malé, Maldives, 16-21 October 2022. ESCAP and UNDP are jointly implementing a two-year project to strengthen the integration of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in the Maldives. As part of the project, the ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (ESCAP-SSWA) organized a series of stakeholder consultations facilitated by Ms. Leila Salarpour Goodarzi, Associate Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP-SSWA, and attended by policymakers and experts from the National Disaster Management Authority; Maldives Meteorological Service; Ministry of National Planning, Housing & Infrastructure; Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology; and the Special Envoy for Climate Change from The President's Office. Read more [here](#).



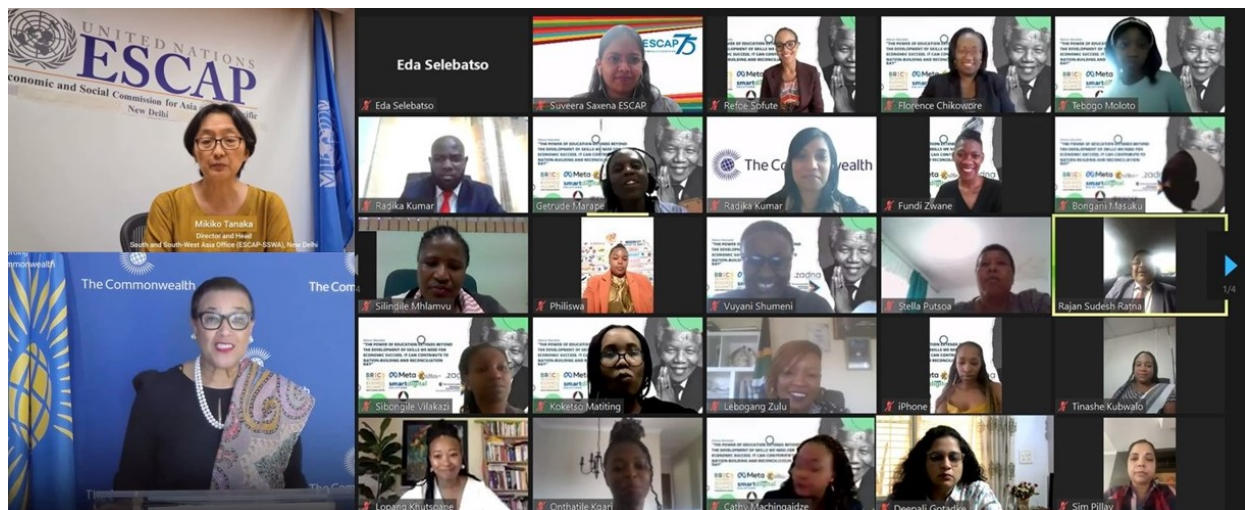
9. Third Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific 2022 Side Event - Policy Dialogue “Towards a Forward-Looking Agenda for Sustainable Transport Linkages across Subregions of Asia”

Hybrid mode, 30 September 2022. The ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (ESCAP-SSWA) and the ESCAP Transport Division jointly organized a policy dialogue that discussed subregional transport connectivity between Southern and Central Asia. Participating stakeholders explored key opportunities for sustaining and promoting regional transport connectivity initiatives and reforms of transport facilitation in the current scenario, as well as the scope and potential of transport connectivity in North and Central Asia, South and Southwest Asia and South-East Asia subregions. Opening remarks were made by Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head of Office, ESCAP-SSWA. Read more [here](#)



10. Online Training of Women Entrepreneurs on Leveraging Digital Infrastructure for Promoting Business through E-commerce and Digital Marketing

Virtual mode, 28 September 2022. The ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (ESCAP-SSWA) organized an online training of women entrepreneurs on leveraging digital infrastructure for promoting business through e-commerce and digital marketing for entrepreneurs from South Asia and Africa. This training helped connect entrepreneurs from both regions, thereby contributing to the transforming of regional value chains to inter-continental ones. More than 60 participants attended the training. Opening remarks were made by Dr Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Deputy Head and Senior Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP-SSWA. A special address was made by the Rt. Hon. Patricia Scotland, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Read more [here](#).



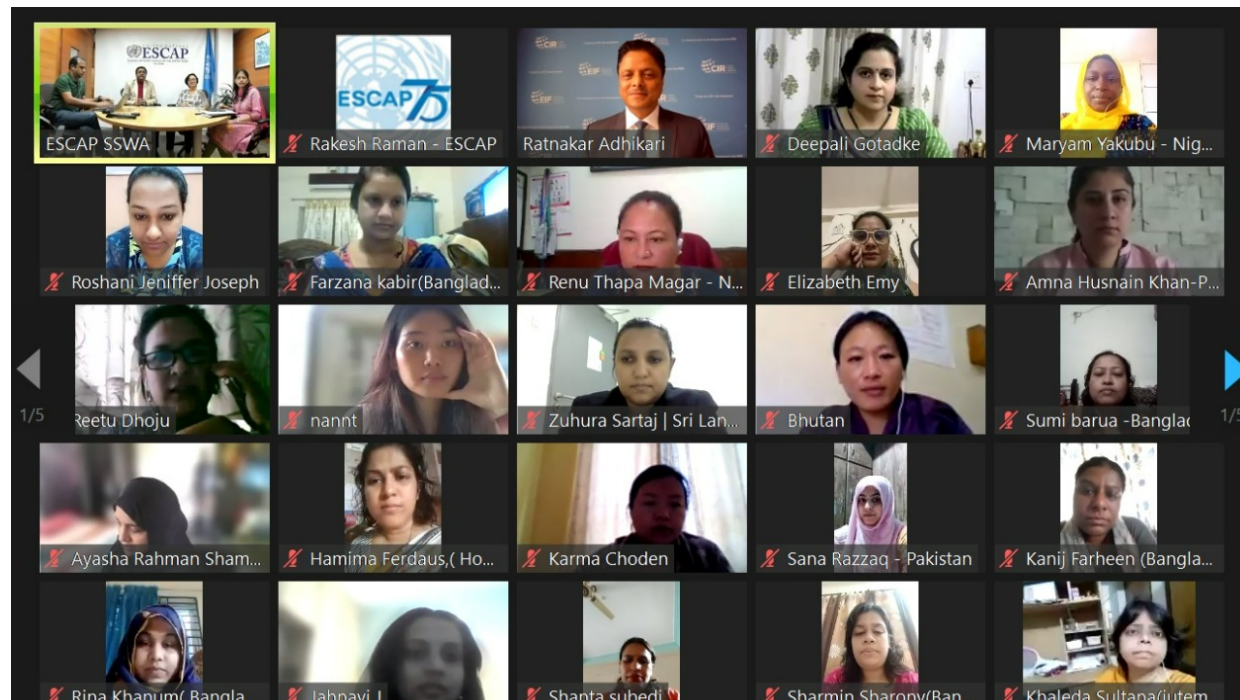
11. Subregional Consultation: Mapping of social protection schemes and support services for and inclusion of persons with disabilities in South Asia

Virtual mode, 22 September 2022. The International Disability Alliance, the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (UNICEF-ROSA) and the ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (ESCAP-SSWA) organized a subregional consultation with representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities, to inform an ongoing mapping exercise of cash transfer programmes and publicly-funded support services for persons with disabilities in South Asia, jointly commissioned by UNICEF-ROSA and ESCAP-SSWA. Ms. Li Stephanie Choo, Social Affairs Officer, ESCAP-SSWA made opening remarks, alongside Ms. Jessica Owns, Regional Advisor for Social Policy, UNICEF-ROSA. Read more [here](#).



12. Online Training of Women Entrepreneurs on Expanding Online Business through E-commerce Platform and Digital Marketing

Virtual mode, 16 September 2022. The ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, in collaboration with Enhanced Integrated Framework, Geneva, organized an online training to enhance the knowledge and capacity of women entrepreneurs to use e-commerce platforms to expand their business exports and participate in local, regional and global supply chains, in response to several requests received for capacity building on the subject, More than 160 women attended the event. Read more [here](#).



13. Advancing Subregional Cooperation for Sustainable, Climate-smart and Integrated Management of Crop Residues

Hybrid mode, 15 September 2022. The ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (ESCAP-SSWA) and the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization (CSAM) organized a meeting on Crop Residue Management in South Asia Advancing Subregional Cooperation for Sustainable, Climate-smart and Integrated Management of Crop Residues. ESCAP-SSWA and CSAM, in collaboration with its network of institutions, have carried out national studies for Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan to better understand the status of crop residue management in these countries, identify gaps and opportunities,

meeting saw the participation of more than 100 stakeholders, including government officials from agriculture and environment ministries/agencies from the subregion, experts from think tanks, academia and civil society organizations and representatives of interested UN Agencies, regional and subregional organizations. Read more [here](#)



14. Regional Training of Women Entrepreneurs on Utilizing E-commerce and Digital Marketing Platforms for Enhanced Access to Supply Chains

Dhaka, Bangladesh, 6-8 September 2022. The ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (ESCAP-SSWA) organized a training for women entrepreneurs in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh; Enhanced Integrated Framework, Geneva; South Asia Network on the SDGs; South Asian Women Development Forum; Women Entrepreneur Association of Bangladesh; and Women & E-commerce, Bangladesh. This training was organized to equip women entrepreneurs from South Asia to use e-commerce and digital marketing platforms for enhanced access to supply chains well as contribute towards the global economic development. Additionally, this training helped to establish a network amongst the women entrepreneurs by providing an opportunity to showcase their products, and services and share their entrepreneurial journey with an aim to inspire and motivate fellow women entrepreneurs. H.E. Mr. Mustafa Jabbar, Minister, Posts and Telecommunication Division, Government of Bangladesh gave the inaugural address for the event. This training was attended by about 100 participants from South-Asian countries. Read more [here](#).



15. National Online Training Course for Women Entrepreneurs on use of IT and IT enabled Tools for Expanding Markets

to use digital and online platforms for promoting business through e-commerce and creating awareness about the existing opportunities. Read more [here](#).



16. Annual Strategic Meeting of the South Asia Network on the Sustainable Development Goals (SANS)

Virtual mode, 28 July 2022. The ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (ESCAP-SSWA) organized a virtual brainstorming meeting of South Asia Network on the Sustainable Development Goals (SANS) member organizations on 28 July 2022. The session began with Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head of ESCAP-SSWA, introducing herself and highlighting steps taken towards the advancement of SANS. Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Deputy Head, ESCAP-SSWA then facilitated an introduction of two new SANS members, namely, the Institute for Studies in industrial Development, and the Consumer Unity and Trust Society International. Subsequently, the meeting discussed the theme for the Sixth South and South-West Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals, to be held in Islamabad, Pakistan from 4-6 December 2022. The distinguished participants of the meeting included Prof. Nagesh Kumar, Director, Institute for Studies in Industrial Development; Dr. Fahmida Khatun, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh; Ms. Sonam Pem, Executive Director, Tarayana Foundation Center, Bhutan; Dr. Sabyasachi Saha, Associate Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries; Ms. Dikshya Singh, Programme Coordinator, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics & Environment; Dr. Dushni Weerakoon, Executive Director, Institute of Policy Studies, Sri Lanka; Professor Selim Raihan, Executive Director, South Asia Network on Economic Modeling; Dr. Arvind Kumar, President, India Water Foundation; Mr. George Cheriyan, Director, Consumer Unity and Trust Society International, and Mr. Junaid Zahid, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan. Read more [here](#).



Marketing

Bandos Island, Maldives, 6-9 June 2022. The ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (ESCAP-SSWA) organized a training in Bandos Island, Maldives, in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat, London, the Enhanced Integrated Framework, Geneva, the South Asia Network on the SDGs, and the Maldives Women's Chamber of Commerce. H.E. Ms. Fathimath Niuma, Deputy Minister, Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Maldives, gave the inaugural address. The second advanced hands-on training programme organized in physical form for ESCAP-SSWA since the COVID-19 pandemic, the training was attended by around 50 participants from Asia (6 South Asian countries) and Africa, many of whom had the opportunity to display their products during the networking sessions. The training involved sectoral discussions with leading experts and trade consultants who shared experiences on digitally diversifying their enterprises during the COVID-19 pandemic and discussed the recent innovations, trends and challenges encountered, and solutions adopted to overcome challenges created by the pandemic. The training also involved sessions on using online platforms to leverage digital infrastructure and become part of the global supply chain. There were dedicated hands-on sessions on registering and creating products and services catalogues and on uploading entrepreneur profiles on one-market platforms, including ESCAP's training platform. Read more [here](#)



18. Regional Policy Dialogue on Transforming the Logistics Sector



Hybrid mode, 31 May 2022. The ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (ESCAP-SSWA) and the ESCAP Transport Division, in collaboration with Asian Institute of Transport Development (AITD), organized a Regional Policy Dialogue on Transforming the Logistics Sector. The introductory remarks were given by Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Director and Head, ESCAP

(Virtual). The session on National strategic development plan to enhance transport and logistics connectivity was moderated by Dr. Rajan S. Ratna, Deputy Head, ESCAP-SSWA and the session on Priorities for transforming the logistics sector: Stakeholder Perspectives was moderated by Mr. B. N. Puri, Director (Research & International Relations), AITD. The Regional Policy Dialogue aimed to bring together stakeholders to facilitate capacity building from country experiences and to collect feedbacks from various stakeholders of the logistics industry. It distilled lessons on logistics reforms shared by government and private sector stakeholders. Read more [here](#).



19. South Asia Policy Dialogue on the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2022 – Building Forward Fairer: Economic Policies for an Inclusive Recovery and Development

Hybrid mode, 31 May 2022. The Policy Dialogue provided a forum for discussion of the key messages of the 2022 edition of the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific, ESCAP's flagship publication. Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head, Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, ESCAP, delivered the opening remarks and moderated the panel discussion. Mr. Michal M. Podolski, Economic Affairs Officer, Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division, ESCAP, gave the keynote presentation. Eminent panelists included Prof. Nagesh Kumar, Director, Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, New Delhi; Prof. Shaleen Singhal, Dean (Research and Relationships), TERI School of Advanced Studies, New Delhi; Prof. Shahid Ahmed, Professor, Department of Economics, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi; Dr. Fahmida Khatun, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh; Prof. Selim Raihan, Executive Director, South Asian Network on Economic Modeling, Bangladesh; and Dr. Vaqar Ahmed, Joint Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan. Read more [here](#).



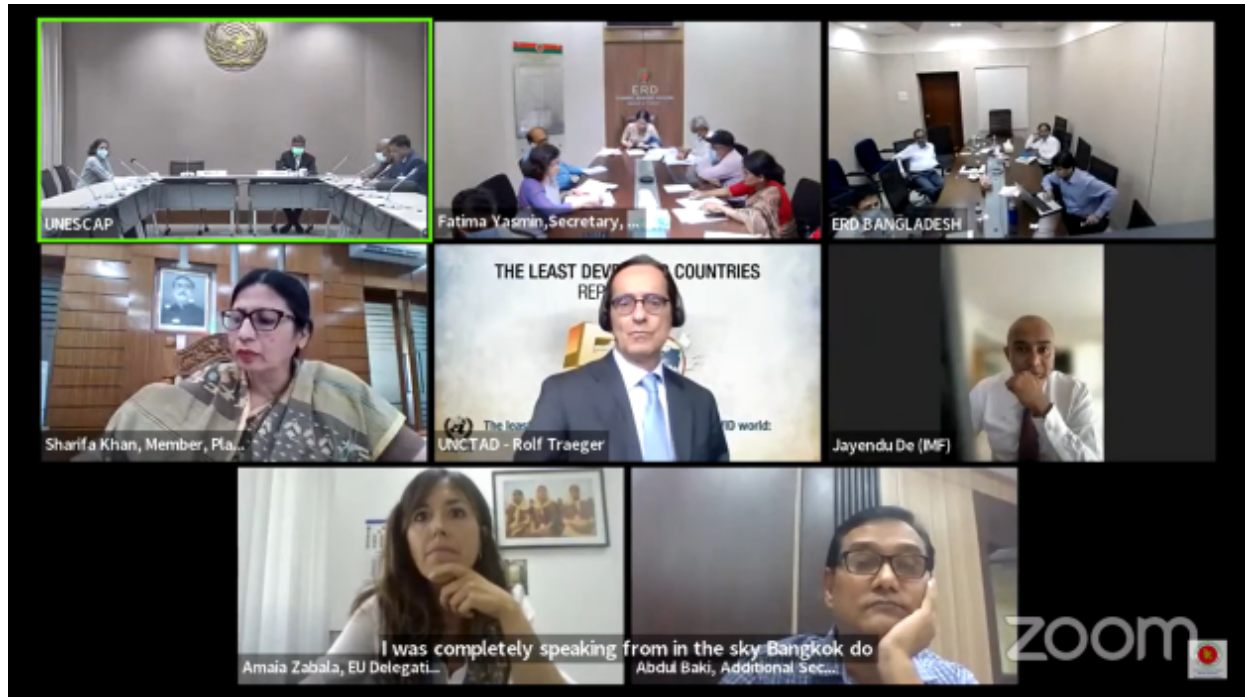
20. 78th Commission Session 2022 Side Event – Asia-Pacific Riskscape@1.50C: Subregional pathways for Adaptation and Resilience

Bangkok, Thailand, 25 May 2022. Organized jointly by the Government of Maldives and ESCAP, the side event showcased various pathways to build systemic resilience to address multi-hazard risks in each ESCAP subregion. H.E. Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile, President of The Economic and Social Council, and H.E. Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, UN Under-Secretary-General & ESCAP Executive Secretary delivered the opening remarks, followed by a statement from H.E. Ms. Khadeeja Naseem, Minister of State for Environment, Climate Change and Technology, Maldives. The closing remarks were given by the Additional Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Maldives. Read more [here](#).



Region in light of the Doha Programme of Action (DPoA)

Bangkok, Thailand, 23 May 2022. The Government of Bangladesh, in association with ESCAP, hosted the strategic dialogue on the side lines of the 78th ESCAP Session for the Least Developed Countries group. H.E. Mr. Mohammed Abdul Hye, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to ESCAP, gave the opening remarks, followed by statements and presentations by H.E. Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile, President of the Economic and Social Council; H.E. Ms. Sharifa Khan, Member (Secretary), Planning Commission of Bangladesh; and H.E. Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, UN Under-Secretary-General & ESCAP Executive Secretary. The panel discussion, moderated by Ms. Rupa Chanda, Director, Trade, Investment, and Innovation Division, ESCAP, consisted of Dr. Biswo Nath Poudel, Vice-Chairman, National Planning Commission, Singha Durbar, Kathmandu, Nepal; Mr. Kim Veara, Deputy Secretary-General, National Committee for ESCAP, Royal Government of Cambodia; Mr. Olivier Cattaneo, Head of Policy Analysis and Strategy Unit, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development; Mr. Rolf Traeger, Chief of the Least Developed Countries Section, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; Mr. Maurizio Cian, Head of Cooperation, European Union in Bangladesh; and Mr. Jayendu De, International Monetary Fund Country Representative in Bangladesh. The closing remarks were delivered by Ms. Fatima Yasmin, Permanent Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance Bangladesh, who also chaired the event. Read more [here](#).



22. Thirteenth South Asia Economic Summit: Session on Trade Cooperation and Localizing Value Chains

Hybrid mode, 20 April 2022. The Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (ESCAP-SSWA) co-sponsored the plenary session “Trade Cooperation and Localizing Value Chains” on Day 2 of the Thirteenth South Asia Economic Summit, which was organized by ESCAP’s SANS member, the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India. The session was chaired by Mr. Rajeev Kher, Distinguished Fellow, RIS, and co-chaired by Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Deputy Head and Senior Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP-SSWA. Eminent panelists included Professor Mustafizur Rahman, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh; Professor S K Mohanty, RIS; Professor Bishwambher Pyakuryal, Chairman, Institute for Strategic and Socio-Economic Research, Nepal; Professor Nisha Taneja, Project-in-Charge, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, New Delhi; Dr. Ganesan Wignaraja, Executive Director, Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies, Sri Lanka; and Dr. Pritam Banerjee, Logistics Specialist Consultant, Asian Development Bank, New Delhi. Their discussion explored the way forward in creating new value chains, addressing non-tariff measures, reduction in trade costs and competitiveness with special reference to MSMEs, and promoting



II. Select Outreach Activities



1. Reimagine and Reconnect: Indo-Pacific Synergies Through the Lens of Culture



Kolkata, India, 21-22 November 2022. Asian Confluence, in collaboration with the US Consulate in Kolkata, organised a series of discussions with a unique approach to Indo-Pacific dialogues that will leverage culture as a tool to trigger policy discussions, to help promote a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. The conclave was designed with an interweaving of dialogues and conversations with performances, installations, and film screenings to create an interface that will allow participants to look, feel and touch beyond the usual spaces that policymakers engage with. Ms. Leila Salarpour Goodarzi of the ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia spoke at the event, along with representatives from the Governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Japan, Nepal and the USA, as well as Asian Confluence and stakeholders from academia and think tanks. Read more [here](#).



2. High Level Policy Dialogue on Accelerating SDG 6 Through Multi-stakeholder Partnerships

Ratna, Deputy Head, ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, participated on the panel alongside the Minister of Jal Shakti and State Minister for Agriculture, Government of India, representatives from UNEP, India Water Foundation, and World Water Council.



3. Webinar and Release of the Report on Digital Financial Inclusion of Women in MSMEs: G20 and India

Virtual mode, (India) 23 September 2022. Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Deputy Head and Senior Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, participated in a panel discussion 'Digital Financial Inclusion and Women Empowerment' at the webinar and release of the report "Digital Financial Inclusion of Women in MSME's: G20 and India", organized by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER). The report was jointly published by ICRIER and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, and authored by Dr. Souvik Dutta, Dr. Arpita Mukherjee, Ms. Eshana Mukherjee, and Ms. Srishti Pal. Read more [here](#).



4. International Federation of Training and Development Organizations (IFTDO) 49th International Conference and Exhibitions

New Delhi, India 21 May 2022. Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Deputy Head and Senior Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, participated in IFTDO's 49th International Conference and Exhibition as a speaker in the session 'Getting Tangible About Intangibles', moderated by Mr. Ashish Kaul, Director (Knowledge and Advisory & Business Head), PSE Business, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) India. The panelists, including Dr. Alexander Alonso, Chief Knowledge Officer, SHRM, and Dr. Sanjay Kumar, Director-Personnel, Western Coalfield Ltd., discussed how investment in intangible assets could breathe new life into productivity growth.



III. ESCAP-SSWA KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS 2022



- [Strategies to Promote Regional Power Grid Connectivity and Cross-Border Electricity Trade \(CBET\) in South and South-West Asia \(January 2022\)](#)
- [Resource Mobilization for Sustainable LDC Graduation of Bhutan in the Context of Emerging Challenges to Development Financing \(February 2022\)](#)
- [Resource Mobilization for Sustainable LDC Graduation of Nepal in the Context of Emerging Challenges to Development Financing \(February 2022\)](#)
- [Enhancing Global Market Competitiveness of Textile and Garment Exports of South Asia \(March 2022\)](#)
- [Beginner's Manual on Digital Marketing and E-commerce \(April 2022\)](#)
- [Pathways to Adaptation and Resilience in South and South-West Asia \(June 2022\)](#)



IV. COUNTRIES OF SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA AT THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 77th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2022

Disclaimer: The following summaries do not represent the full speeches made by the representatives. To read the full version of each speech, please refer to the links below.



Bangladesh

Mr. Mohammad Masud Rana Chowdhury, Joint Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh, noted that Bangladesh had submitted its first and second VNRs in 2017 and 2020, respectively. Poverty in Bangladesh has declined from 40% in 2005 to 20.5% in 2019 and life expectancy at birth has increased from 65 to 72.6 years within the same period. The VNR process helped Bangladesh to identify some of the key challenges for achieving the Goals. Reducing income inequality, reducing the absolute number of poor people, ensuring food security, ensuring universal health coverage and ensuring quality education at multilevel educational streams, inadequate infrastructure to meet the demand of urban amenities, facilities, primary healthcare, wastewater treatment, collection and disposal of urban solid waste, transportation services, still remain as areas of concern. As a climatically vulnerable country, Bangladesh needs to reduce its exposure to the climate change impacts by applying adaptation and mitigation measures, which will be challenging. In addition, increasing domestic resource mobilisation, particularly increasing the tax to GDP ratio at the desired level, will be challenging. Bangladesh has incorporated strategies into its Eighth Five-Year Plan to overcome COVID-19 challenges. Following the guidelines of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the government undertook a comprehensive economic recovery program containing 28 fiscal and stimulus packages worth around US\$ 22.08 billion to facilitate the implementation of these strategies. In closing, it was felt that international cooperation, multilateralism, and international solidarity is the best way for the world to effectively overcome and recover from COVID-19 pandemic, prevent future pandemics, and address urgent global challenges.



Bhutan

Mr. Phurba, Senior Planning Officer, Office of the Cabinet Affairs and Strategic Coordination, Strategic Planning Division, Government of Bhutan, began by highlighting that, the guiding development philosophy of Bhutan is Gross National Happiness (GNH), which is tied to a harmonised balance between the material well-being that is being pursued and also the spiritual, emotional, and cultural needs of their society. The Sustainable Development Goals are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. As such, there is a strong alignment between the GNH, and SDGs and the ongoing Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2018-2023). Bhutan first carried out its VNR in 2018 and a second round was conducted in 2021. The second round of the VNR took place during the peak of COVID-19; nevertheless, efforts were made to make the process as participatory and inclusive as possible. Around 65 agencies, including the private sector, CSOs and academia, were engaged, which greatly improved participation compared to the first VNR exercise. Bhutan had an in-depth analysis of the Goals that were the thematic areas for the 2021 HLPF and also analysed the impact of COVID 19 and key learnings from how the country responded to the pandemic during that time. An effort was made to also analyse the goals that were not included in the 2021 HLPF thematic areas. The current Twelfth Five Year Plan has 17 national key result areas closely aligned to the 17 SDGs, and the report in 2021 found broad-based progress in all SDGs. As a result of the success over the past few decades, Bhutan is due to graduate from the LDC category by the end of 2023. The COVID-19 pandemic has had immediate effects on many SDGs, especially on livelihoods, education, and mental well-being, in addition to the revenue and economy of the country. While all Goals, except SDG 17, were assessed to be on track during the 2018 VNR, it was likely that the progress of SDGs 1, 4, 8, 10, and 17 were "at risk" during the 2021 VNR. Due to the COVID restrictions, Bhutan sealed its international borders in March 2020 and reopened only after two and a half years. At that point, the economy recorded a growth rate of -10%, which was a 15% drop compared to the previous year. This was a historic low for Bhutan in recent history. Except for the agriculture and hydropower sector, all other sectors experienced negative growth during that year because of COVID. Many people were also displaced from their jobs; unemployment rates also increased compared to the previous year to the highest level of 5% in 2020. To minimise the impact of COVID, many actions were taken such as switching to online education and a Welfare Scheme under His Majesty's Relief Kidu which ensured that around 37,000 people from the most vulnerable population, including children, were supported with minimum income, cash transfers, loan deferrals, and interest payments by the government until June 2022. Bhutan is currently conducting the Living Standards Survey, which is expected to be completed in 2023. The Survey results will allow for the quantification of the positive impacts of Bhutan's measures taken over the last couple of years. Bhutan highlighted that the VNR and international forums have helped deepen societal awareness and strengthen ownership of the Goals. Bhutan sees the VNRs as an opportunity to understand how the country is progressing in implementing the Goals as well as their alignment with Bhutan's national programmes. VNRs serve as



India

Dr. Sabyasachi Saha, Research and Information System for Developing Countries, India, started his intervention with a discussion on the G20 and the importance of the youth. India has taken up the presidency of the G20 starting in December, and in order to draw more attention to the youth of the region, 75 universities across the country will be connected; over the next few months several G20 related events would take place across the country to mainstream the role of the youth and students in the process. India has proposed to place accelerating the Goals as a key priority area for the G20 next year, focusing on the large-scale transformations taking place and the use of digital and other forms of technologies. There will also be a focus on women-led development and green transition. India has called for a strong focus on climate action and climate justice which is also a concern in South Asia. India is taking the lead in setting the agenda on climate finance and adaptation beyond the normal mitigation narrative. India presented its first VNR in 2017 and its second in 2020. The first VNR was mostly around reporting on the status of the various indicators and what India was doing in its national initiatives, but a key focus was also on bringing in sub-national initiatives in the form of cooperative federalism. Indian states also took the lead in coming up with their SDG vision document and these were reflected in the first VNR. The VNR 2020 was still a process of assessing what has happened in terms of goals, targets and indicators, but more focus was placed on what can be done in terms of localisation. The framework for the localisation of SDGs was more clearly identified in the second VNR and some new policies corresponding to that were put in action in different levels. As SDG 17 is a cross-cutting Goal, countries have to pay more attention to what is required and what is done in the region in terms of strengthening systems and capacities as part of delivering SDG 17.



Islamic Republic of Iran

Dr. Ali Gholampour, Head, Department of Development Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, noted that during the negotiation and adoption process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the General Assembly, the country had raised concerns on some parts of the Agenda that conflicted with national priorities or national policies, including Sharia rules and regulations, and stated that it would not be affiliated to such parts of the SDGs. A first VNR had been prepared in 2018 but not presented at the HLPF due to some sensitivities in Iran regarding parts of the Agenda where the government had reservations. However, Iran plans to prepare and submit a VNR in 2024. Iran has made some progress in the SDGs, but international sanctions have made it extremely difficult to gain access to necessary financing and technologies to support SDG achievement. Iran has thus had to rely on its own domestic resources to work towards the achievement of the SDGs. During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Iran was unable to pay for vaccines due to sanctions on international financial transactions but managed to initially import vaccines through UN agencies. Since then, Iran has developed its own COVID-19 vaccines. With regard to social development aspects of SDGs, it was mentioned that in the field of education, the percentage of women in the universities is more than males. All rural and urban areas are covered by schools and infrastructure has been developed so that everybody can have to the internet.



Maldives

Ms. Fathimath Shazly, Senior Planning Analyst, Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Government of Maldives, noted that out of 17 goals, Maldives has achieved SDG 1 (No poverty) and SDG 4 (Quality education) while having major challenges with goal 2 (Zero hunger), 5 (Gender equality) and 14 (Life below water). Much still needs to be done in the areas of gender equality, climate action and environment sustainability and access to timely data is needed to make effective policy decisions. While moderately improving, eight goals still have significant challenges and Goal 15 reported a decreasing trend, as it was in 2021. Maldives conducted its first VNR in 2017 and work is ongoing for submission of a second VNR in 2023. For the first time an Economic Census has been carried out together with the Population Census and this is expected to provide a very robust data set for the VNR analysis. A third of Maldives' population is identified of being dimensionally poor and COVID-19 has also affected the food security situation in the country with its heavy reliance on food imports. Efforts are being made to strengthen local food production, supply and distribution chains in order to reduce food wastage. Increases in sexual exploitation and abuse, gender-based violence, mental health issues and non-covid health issues are also being seen. In order to reduce disparities that exist in access to safe drinking water and sanitation between Malé City and the outer islands, efforts are being made to improve water and sewerage systems in the outer islands. COVID-19 has accelerated the use of digital technologies for the provision of various services. ICT also offers solutions to bridge the geographic divide between islands and bring services closer to people. However, a lot of inequalities have been created in acquiring affordable internet and the ability to use digital technologies differ between knowledge workers and manual workers. Maldives has developed a National Strategy

made to work with the stakeholders to formulate mechanisms to collect the missing data. Improving connectivity of Maldivian citizens to the country's economy, infrastructure and social services has started with the development of an Integrated National Public Ferry Network. Once completed, the existence of an efficient, reliable, convenient and sustainable national ferry network will help to develop the economy. The government is also focusing on diversifying the economy; creating job opportunities and re-integrating the redundant workforce back into the labour force and support the MSMEs and providing fiscal stimulus through a National Resilient and Recovery Plan.



Nepal

Mr. Kewal Prasad Bhandari, Secretary, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal, provided a brief overview of the various steps the country has taken to integrate the Goals into national development planning processes. Nepal's first VNR was submitted in 2017, a second VNR in 2020 and a third VNR will be prepared for the HLPF in 2023. Initially Nepal had prepared 479 indicators to measure progress on SDGs, but this has now been reduced to 300 indicators due to difficulties in data availability. The Fifteenth Plan (2019-2024) has been aligned with the SDGs and planning guidelines have been developed to facilitate SDG localisation. A medium-term expenditure framework incorporating SDGs for all ministries and departments as well as a national evaluation action plan for evaluating SDGs have also been prepared. Localisation of SDGs has been challenging as newly elected officials at the local, provincial and federal levels of government need to be oriented on the SDGs. Weaknesses exist in available databases and efforts are being made to improve the situation. Funding for SDGs is shared between government (54.7%), private sector (36.6%), households (4.4%), and cooperatives/NGOs (4.3%). However, there remains an annual financing gap of NPR 585 million and the need to mobilise funding is a major challenge.



Pakistan

Mr. M. Ali Kemal, Chief SDGs, SDG Support Unit, Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan, noted that their first VNR and second VNRs were presented in 2019 and 2022, respectively. It was emphasised that Pakistan views the Goals as a national obligation and has established a parliamentary task force and other acting bodies such as SDG support units at the provincial level. The National Economic Forum, headed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan and attended by all the chief ministers, have sub-committees, which provide guidance on what to do and how to move forward as far as the SDGs are concerned. Mr Kemal explained that Pakistan has also developed a framework and integration priorities, completed in 2018, with 42 leverage points connected to all 169 targets. If Pakistan engages in these 42 leverage points, it will achieve most of the targets included in the 17 SDGs. He also discussed on a SDGs Achievement Programme, a cabinet programme carried out through the members of national and provincial assemblies. While the programme does not have much funding, it is a demand-driven project at the local level covering water and sanitation, health, education, and electricity. In Pakistan, the main focus of the 2022 VNR were the COVID-19 strategies that were developed to overcome pandemic-related problems. Even though Pakistan had 31,000 deaths during COVID-19, it recovered very quickly from the COVID-19 crisis. Regarding some of the other Goals, Pakistan reduced its maternal mortality rate (MMR) from 276 in 2006-2007 to 186 in 2018-2019 and poverty was reduced by 2.4%. A key lesson learned from the VNRs were that issues such as inclusivity and equity were key to ensure sustainability. It was noted that during COVID-19, developed countries were assisting developing countries, but this support has disappeared after the Ukrainian-Russia conflict which has created a new super shock of high inflation and a balance of payment crisis. Pakistan initiated a series of reforms in August 2022 to turn around social and economic threats facing the country. Green financing, debt swaps, green bonds and various social bonds, even gender bonds and climate bonds, are areas that need to be exploited by Pakistan. Despite efforts made to report on all targets, 50 indicators are left unreported and needs to be resolved. In closing, participation in the HLPF was felt to be useful as it provided an opportunity to interact and receive feedback from other countries.



Sri Lanka

Prof. Hemanthi Ranasinghe, Member, Sustainable Development Council, Government of Sri Lanka, carried out its first and second VNRs in 2018 and 2022, which encompassed almost all the sectors and all the Goals. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Easter attacks in 2019, which took place between the two VNRs, greatly damaged the tourism industry. The country is also still struggling with the recent financial crisis that has affected the economy and devalued their currency. The importance of partnerships in leveraging innovations and strategic joint ventures to untap potential international markets were emphasised. Issues related to transportation were also discussed, including the long waiting time that exists for the transfer of goods between countries such as Bangladesh, India and Pakistan despite being on the same continent. In 2021, Sri Lanka was ranked 95th among 132 countries in the global innovation index of the World Intellectual Property Organization. Sri Lanka's

impacted by the crisis. Unlike many large industries, it is harder for these MSMEs to return to where they were. Some new policy frameworks have been introduced to promote high-potential SMEs and improve their business opportunities. National vocational training programmes have also been started to support improvements in the technical skills of these companies. It was also noted that the SDG goals are multi-dimensional and the country's policies have to align with them to provide a successful transformation into a blue-green economy that addresses the sustainable management of land and ocean resources. Sri Lanka has submitted its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) which includes nine adaptation sectors and five mitigation sectors. Sri Lanka has pledged to become net zero in carbon emissions by 2050, and for renewable energy share to be 70% by 2030. Even though achieving these targets does not seem possible, Sri Lanka hopes to increase its renewable energy share. There are many plans in action, such as increasing the share of renewable energy in electricity generation, improvement of public transport systems, promoting e-mobility, introducing carbon pricing instruments, introducing policies for increasing parking fees, improving asset management and also promoting online and work from home to reduce emissions and save the environment. In Sri Lanka, access to safe drinking water is 89%, and safe sanitation is 97%. Sri Lanka promotes climate-resilient integrated water management to strengthen climate resilience in communities, and SDG 13 is in action in the country's national policies and programmes. An investor map has been prepared, which tries to enhance the operationalisation of the Goals in the country as well as with the neighbours. It was hoped that through the strengthening of partnerships and fostering of international cooperation that Sri Lanka's recovery could be accelerated and achieve the country's vision for an inclusive, transformative nation through the realisation of the 2030 Agenda.



Türkiye

Mr. Veysel Sarici, Expert, Strategy and Budget Office, Presidency of Türkiye, Government of Türkiye, noted that they conducted VNRs in 2016 and 2019 and the next VNR is planned for 2024. The SDGs have been integrated into national long-term development plans, annual programmes, annual investment programmes and sectoral action plans. To monitor the implementation of the SDGs, 131 indicators have been identified out of 231 unique SDG indicators and these have been annually published by the National Statistical Institute. For Türkiye, Goals 1 and 10 are considered to be important as they aim to end poverty and inequality across the country. Various measures have been taken to address these Goals, including the implementation of support systems for children and people with special needs. Türkiye has also made significant progress on SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure). SMSE-oriented industrial policies have been developed that include the provision of grants and loans. Efforts have been made to strengthen organisational capacity of local management systems so that development strategies can be better adapted to the local contexts and develop locally tailored solutions that efficiently and effectively respond to national priorities. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the capacity of the health system and disrupted primary health and mental health services. It is felt that people with income below a certain level should be provided with free primary health care services. Research and development in the field of health should be strengthened by developing production capacity for technology-based products such as vaccines, drugs, medical equipment and devices. The TURKOVAC vaccine for COVID-19 was developed by Turkish scientists and sent to many countries in Africa to strengthen global partnerships. With regard to Goals 11 and 13, Türkiye has ratified the Paris Agreement and announced a 2053 net zero target. To this end, Türkiye has been striving to transform its economic sectors and production dynamics. For example, an electric car production factory has been opened by Togg which is the first domestically built electric car of Türkiye and will facilitate electromobility and green mobility transformation of Türkiye.



V. NEWS EXCERPTS ON SDG IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

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A. Economic Dimension

AFGHANISTAN

Ten years of Afghan economic growth, reversed in just 12 months: UNDP 6 October 2022. A year on from the Taliban takeover in Kabul, Afghanistan is gripped by "cascading crises", including a crippled economy that humanitarian aid alone cannot address, according to a new report from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) on Wednesday. Read more [here](#).

NEPAL

Government goes the ordinance way to allow private sector in electricity trade 3 October 2022. The government has initiated the process of introducing an ordinance to allow the private sector to engage in power trade. The government's move comes amid confusion about granting trading licences

October 2022. Experts have suggested taking prudent steps to control pollution and accelerate efforts to mitigate climate change (CC) impacts, as a recent global report said Bangladesh is losing about US\$6.0 billion due to lower labour productivity. Read more [here](#).

Bangladesh plans to import over 5 million tonnes of fuel in 2023 20 October 2022. Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation is planning to purchase 5.46 million tonnes of fuel from the international market to meet the country's needs in 2023. Read more [here](#).

Bangladesh forex reserves sink below \$36 billion despite spending restrictions 24 October 2022. Bangladesh's foreign currency reserves have dropped below \$36 billion, 28 months after crossing the mark, despite the government's austerity measures to save dollars. Read more [here](#).

Trade with Russia: BD out to find payment option amid SWIFT ban 31 October 2022. Dhaka is desperately exploring alternative payment systems amid multiple sanctions, including SWIFT ban, against Russia as bilateral trade will suffer a setback sans a free and safe transaction mechanism. Read more [here](#).

Visiting IMF team queries about Bangladesh's post-LDC preparation: Ghosh 2 November 2022. The visiting team of the IMF Wednesday wanted to know how prepared Bangladesh is for the country's graduation to a developing nation in 2026. Read more [here](#).

INDIA

RBI plans to extensively use artificial intelligence, machine learning to improve regulatory supervision 6 October 2022. The Reserve Bank is planning to extensively use advanced analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning to analyse its huge database and improve regulatory supervision on banks and NBFCs. Read more [here](#).

India's space economy expected to be worth USD 12.8 billion by 2025: Report 11 October 2022. India's space economy is likely to be worth nearly USD 13 billion by 2025, with the satellite launch services segment set to witness the fastest growth spurred by increasing private participation, according to a report released on Monday. Read more [here](#).

India's economy faces significant external headwinds, IMF says 14 October 2022. India's economy faces notable risks from global developments, including aggressive central bank actions and the fallout of the prolonged war in Ukraine, according to the International Monetary Fund. Read more [here](#).

Centre allows trade settlement for export promotion schemes in Indian rupee 10 November 2022. In a bid to facilitate and ease international trade in Indian rupees, the government of India on Wednesday allowed trade settlement in the Indian currency for export promotion schemes. With the amendment to the Foreign Trade Policy, invoicing, payment, and settlement of trade can now take place in Indian rupee. Read more [here](#).

India seeing fall in demand for rural job programme: FM Nirmala Sitharaman 15 December 2022. India is seeing a fall in demand for jobs under a rural employment guarantee programme, the finance minister told Parliament on Wednesday. Read more [here](#).

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Iran to become energy hub in region: Oil minister 7 October 2022. Iran's oil minister said on Thursday that oil and gas swap between Iran and Russia would make Iran the hub of energy in the region. Read more [here](#).

Iran seeking to increase activity in key northern port 1 December 2022. Iranian authorities are planning to increase activity in a major northern port on the Caspian Sea coast amid efforts to boost trade ties with Russia through the INSTC, an international corridor that passes through Iran. Read more [here](#).

High interest rates delight depositors, but give businesses a hard time 11 October 2022. The central bank's decision to raise interest rates has hit interest-sensitive businesses as the cost of borrowing has gone up, insiders say. Read more [here](#).

Minimum foreign investment amount cut to Rs20 million 17 October 2022. The government has sharply lowered the minimum threshold for foreign direct investment (FDI) in a bid to lure capital as a funding shortage holds up infrastructure projects. Read more [here](#).

PAKISTAN

MoF seeks implementation status of EFF commitments 5 October 2022. Ministry of Finance (MoF) has sought update from all the Ministries on the status of the communicated structural benchmarks, other actions, quantitative performance criteria and indicative targets under IMF's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) for Pakistan by October 4, 2022, official sources told Business Recorder. Read more [here](#).

Emergency operations in flood-hit areas: World Bank says allocating \$2bn from existing financed projects 8 October 2022. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Saturday, briefed the World Bank (WB) about the economic challenges being faced by the country, as well as the devastations caused by the recent floods. Read more [here](#).

Dar optimistic of Pakistan's exit from FATF's grey-list 18 October 2022. Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Ishaq Dar on Monday expressed optimism that the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), scheduled to hold a Plenary meeting this week, will remove Pakistan from the grey list. Read more [here](#).

Countercyclical support facility loans: Project risks identified by ADB 26 October 2022. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has identified several risks to "Countercyclical Support Facility Loans For Islamic Republic of Pakistan: Building Resilience with Active Countercyclical Expenditures Programme" worth \$1.5 billion including prolonged economic slowdown and political tensions and compounded crises, including the recent floods, strain government capacity for timely implementation of its programmes. Read more [here](#).

Two financing agreements signed with World Bank 4 November 2022. The Government of Pakistan has signed two financing agreements of \$500 million with the World Bank including "Punjab Resilient and Inclusive Agriculture Transformation Project" worth \$200 million and "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Accessibility Project" worth \$300 million. Read more [here](#).

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka begins crucial debt restructuring talks with China 7 October 2022. Sri Lanka's president said Thursday his government has started debt restructuring discussions with China, an important step toward finalising an International Monetary Fund rescue of the island nation from a severe economic crisis. Read more [here](#).

Sri Lanka to be downgraded from middle-income to low-income country 12 October 2022. Sri Lanka is to be downgraded from a middle-income to low-income country, the Government said today. Read more [here](#).

New tax policies escalate migration of professionals: GMOA 26 October 2022. Through the implementation of the new tax policies by the government, migration of professionals from the country has increased and it could plunge the health and other sectors into precipice, the Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA) said. Read more [here](#).

Paris Club proposes 10-year moratorium for Sri Lanka 6 December 2022. The Paris Club creditor nations are proposing a 10-year moratorium on Sri Lankan debt and another 15 years of debt restructuring as a formula to resolve the current financial crisis in the Island nation. Read more [here](#).

IMF not expected to discuss Sri Lanka before year-end –sources 15 December 2022. The executive board of the International Monetary Fund is not expected to formally approve Sri Lanka's \$2.9 billion bailout before year-end, a key step required for

B. Social Dimension

AFGHANISTAN

Taliban bar women from university education in Afghanistan 21 December 2022. Afghanistan's Taliban rulers on Tuesday banned female students from attending universities effective immediately in the latest edict cracking down on women's rights and freedoms. Read more [here](#).

Millions of Afghan children inoculated against measles, polio in 1st Statewide drive since 2021 transition 23 December 2022. Afghanistan has vaccinated 5.36 million nine- to 59-month old children against measles while 6.1 million infants to 59-month-olds received oral polio vaccine during the vaccination drive held from 26 November to 12 December. Read more [here](#).

BANGLADESH

UN asked to resolve Rohingya crisis: PM 7 October 2022. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said on Thursday that she urged the United Nations to take steps to resolve the Rohingya crisis. Read more [here](#).

Work together to save Bangladesh from possible famine, food crisis: PM 18 October 2022. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reiterated her call to work together in growing more food bringing every inch of land under cultivation to protect Bangladesh from the possible global famine or food crisis against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war. Read more [here](#).

Food security concerns prompt Bangladesh to mobilise efforts for enhanced output 30 November 2022. The global food security concerns, sparked by the supply uncertainties, prompted the government to set enhanced rice production target in the current fiscal, mobilising resources and extra efforts, officials said here today. Read more [here](#).

Boost food production to avert any crisis: PM Hasina 20 December 2022. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Monday reiterated her call to increase food production to save the country from any possible trouble amid the global economic recession due to the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war. Read more [here](#).

INDIA

India ranks 132 out of 191 on human development index 9 September 2022. With an HDI value of 0.633, India ranked 132 out of 191 countries in the 2021 human development index, according to a report released by the UNDP. Read more [here](#).

Number of poor people in India fell by about 415 million between 2005-06 and 2019-21, a 'historic change': UN 18 October 2022. The number of poor people in India fell by about 415 million between 2005-06 and 2019-21, a "historic change" and a demonstration that the Sustainable Development Goal target of reducing at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty by 2030 is possible to achieve, even at a large scale, according to the UN. Read more [here](#).

C. Environmental dimension

BANGLADESH

Momen at UN: Dhaka seeks increased funds for climate change mitigation, adaptation 3 October 2022. Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen has highlighted the importance of enhanced funds for climate change mitigation and adaptation. During his meeting with President of the 77th United Nations General Assembly, Csaba Kőrösi, at the UN headquarters in New York on Friday, Momen also mentioned that the pledge of providing USD 100 billion funds per year should be materialised at the earliest. Read more [here](#).

Bangladesh set to adopt \$230bn plan to mitigate impacts of climate change 8 October 2022. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is set to adopt a plan to spend \$230 billion over the next 27 years in an effort to save Bangladesh from the

Economic self-reliance empowers women, says President Murmu 16 November 2022. President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday said that making women economically independent is an effective way of empowering them. To make India a developed country, maximum participation of women is needed, she said while addressing a Women's Self-Help Groups conference here. Read more [here](#).

NEPAL

Earthquake rocks west Nepal, felt as far as New Delhi 10 November 2022. An earthquake in the mountains of west Nepal rocked the Himalayan nation in early Wednesday, killing at least six people while they were asleep in their houses, a government administrator said. Read more [here](#).

PAKISTAN

UN dramatically hikes Pakistan aid appeal amid 'second wave of death and destruction' 4 October 2022. The United Nations has revised up its humanitarian appeal for Pakistan five-fold to \$816 million from \$160 million as it seeks to control a surge in water-borne diseases following the country's worst floods in decades, an official said on Monday. Read more [here](#).

SRI LANKA

Over USD 6 million to be busted on Sri Lanka resolution 8 October 2022. The United Nations will be forced to bust over USD 6 million to implement the resolution on Sri Lanka which was adopted by the UN Human Right Council in Geneva. Read more [here](#).

UN warns situation in Sri Lanka likely to worsen 27 October 2022. The UN World Food Programme (WFP) has warned that the situation in Sri Lanka is likely to worsen. WFP said that the intensifying economic crisis in Sri Lanka continues to be a threat to food security. Read more [here](#).

TÜRKIYE

Gov't doing everything to prevent mine accidents: Erdoğan 17 Oct 2022. The government is doing everything to put an end to mine accidents, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said as he inspected and coordinated the rescue operation at the coal mine in Bartın province that claimed the lives of 41 workers and injured several dozens. Read more [here](#).

NEPAL

'Nepal could take a lead in hydrogen energy development' 12 October 2022. Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, Pampha Bhusal, has said Nepal has the potential of taking a lead in the development of green hydrogen in the world. Read more [here](#).

Call for favourable policy to raise share of solar power in energy mix 31 October 2022. Nepal participated in the assembly of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) for the first time last week with the country aiming to increase the share of solar power in its energy mix. Read more [here](#).

PAKISTAN

Pakistani FM says water receded 50% in flood-

Bangladesh left at least 24 people dead and about 8 million without power across the delta nation, officials and news reports said Tuesday. Read more [here](#).

Bangladesh could lose a third of agricultural GDP due to climate effects by 2050: WB 1 November 2022. One-third of agricultural GDP could be lost in Bangladesh due to climate variability and extreme events by 2050, the World Bank has said in a report. Read more [here](#).

Bangladesh urges developed nations to double adaptation finance by 2025 2 December 2022. Bangladesh urged the developed countries to double adaptation financing to developing countries by 2025. It also requested to establish a financing mechanism to avoid, reduce and address 'loss and damage' due to climate change. It also urged to finalise the definition of 'climate finance'; and requested to provide assistance in the implementation of the National Adaptation Plan. Read more [here](#).

INDIA

Environmentalists say more comprehensive plan needed to combat hazardous pollution in Delhi 7 October 2022. As the first stage of a revised Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) came into force in Delhi on Thursday, environmentalists said more comprehensive action is needed to curtail hazardous pollution levels in the city and that air pollution should not be treated as a "seasonal problem". Read more [here](#).

India's energy future is looking green, report says 14 October 2022. India's renewables sector is booming, with the country projected to add 35 to 40 gigawatts of renewable energy annually until 2030, enough to power up to 30 million more homes each year, a report said Thursday. Read more [here](#).

India to see biggest jump in energy demand globally: IEA 28 October 2022. India is likely to see the world's biggest rise in energy demand this decade, with demand climbing 3 per cent annually due to urbanisation and industrialisation, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said in its World Energy Outlook released on Thursday. Read more [here](#).

India's subsidies for renewable energy, electric vehicles doubled in FY 22 21 December 2022. India's subsidies for renewable energy and electric vehicles more than doubled in FY 2022, but it will be critical for the government to build this momentum over the coming years to reach the country's climate targets, a new study by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) said on Tuesday. Read more [here](#).

D. International Cooperation

INDIA

India to contribute \$500,000 to UN to counter terrorism 31 October 2022. India will contribute half a million dollars to the United Nations' efforts to counter global terrorism as new and emerging technologies used by terror groups pose fresh threats to governments around the world, the foreign minister said Saturday. Read more [here](#).

PM Modi leaves for Bali to attend G20 summit; to discuss key issues of global concern with other leaders 15 November 2022. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said he will hold extensive discussions with leaders of the G20 grouping in Bali on key challenges such as reviving global growth, ensuring food and energy security and addressing issues relating to health and digital transformation. Read more [here](#).

India to take over UNSC presidency at time of acute crisis 1 December 2022. India will take over the presidency of the Security Council on Thursday at a time of an acute international crisis that will call upon its diplomatic skills in the UN's highest decision-making body paralysed in the face of an invasion by a permanent member of a neighbour. Read more [here](#).

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Delegation from IAEA to visit Iran to continue talks: Spox 15 November 2022. The spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry announced on Monday

sow wheat in a first step toward returning to a normal life. Read more [here](#).

PM Shehbaz given vice-chairmanship of UN climate conference 11 October 2022. The 27th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP-27) has announced to give its vice presidency to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Read more [here](#).

Minister for raising tariffs to save water for future generation 27 October 2022. Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal Wednesday said that the government should have to raise water tariffs to preserve it for the future generations. Read more [here](#).

Pakistan urges steps towards sound management to ensure access to water for all 28 October 2022. Pakistan has called for strengthening cooperation and upholding eco-system approaches towards sound water management to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 6, which seeks to ensure access to water and sanitation for all. Read more [here](#).

SRI LANKA

US\$100mn from India for roof top solars on govt. Buildings 17 October 2022. India had extended their Credit Line to another US\$ 100 million for roof top solar on several government buildings, Power and Energy Minister Kanchana Wijesekera said. Read more [here](#).

TÜRKIYE

\$10 bln a year for Türkiye to achieve net zero by 2050: Report 17 November 2022. Türkiye can achieve net zero emissions by 2050 by increasing its capacity in solar, wind and storage technologies and reducing fossil fuel consumption with an annual investment of \$10 billion, according to a report by Sabancı University's Istanbul Policy Center (IPC). Read more [here](#).

SRI LANKA

EU wants tangible progress by Sri Lanka on GSP+ commitments 4 November 2022. The European Union (EU) has encouraged tangible progress by Sri Lanka on its GSP+ commitments, a joint statement issued by Sri Lanka and the EU said today. Read more [here](#).

India approves special 'vostro' account for Sri Lanka 19 December 2022. India has approved a special 'vostro' account for Sri Lanka, a means of using rupees instead of dollars for international transactions. Read more [here](#).

TÜRKIYE

Türkiye elected to IAEA Board of Governors 3 October 2022. Türkiye has been elected to the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for the term 2022-2024, the Turkish Foreign Ministry has announced. Read more [here](#).

UN praises Türkiye-brokered grain deal's effect on food prices 5 October 2022. A U.N. chief who was part of the grain deal mediated by Türkiye to export Ukrainian grain hailed the agreement for bringing down food prices across the world. Read more [here](#).

Türkiye, Sweden vow to expand ties amid NATO talks 10 November 2022. Türkiye and Sweden have agreed to expand bilateral ties and increase the trade volume to \$5 billion in the coming period as the latter

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Your valuable feedback is welcome and greatly appreciated. Please send your comments or suggestions to: sswa.escap@un.org.

If you have missed them, here are the links to previous newsletter editions!

May 2022




Announcement

Appointment of Ms. Mikko Tanaka as Head, Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia from May 2, 2022

Ms. Tanaka brings with her over twenty-five years of experience within the United Nations system. She most recently served as the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Guyana after working as the UNDP Resident Representative. As Resident Coordinator, she led strategic dialogues with the Government and brought coherence to the work of the United Nations Country Team for the implementation of the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development. She furthermore supported the conduct of its Voluntary National Review and facilitated appointments of UNDP Resident Country Directors in response to COVID-19. Prior to Guyana, Ms. Tanaka served as the UNDP Country Director in Yemen and Timor-Leste, UNDP Deputy Country Director (Bangladesh, Pakistan, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Benin as well as in several other capacities with UNDP at its headquarters as well as in China and Lao People's Democratic Republic. Before joining the United Nations system, she worked as project coordinator for a non-governmental organization in Thailand as well as in the financial sector in Japan. Ms. Tanaka holds master's degrees in public policy and management from the University of London and in rural development management from the South Asia University, and a bachelor's degree from the International Christian University.



Mr. Achim Alavi, Director Strategy and Economic Management Division, ESCAP, has completed his assignment as Officer-in-Charge of ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia. During his tenure, he provided strategic leadership in expanding ESCAP's analytical, diagnostic and technical cooperation initiatives in economic, environment and social development dimensions of sustainable development in South and South-West Asia. He also contributed to strengthening relations with ESCAP member States, with United Nations Country Teams and with intergovernmental organizations, such as SAARC and BIMSTEC.



We would like to express our most sincere appreciation to Mr. Alavi for serving as the Officer-in-Charge of the SRO-SSWA over the past year.

May 2022

January 2022




I. Key Activities during Oct - Dec 2021

1. Fifth South Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals calls for building back better from COVID-19 while accelerating the implementation of the SDGs in South and South-West Asia



January 2022

October 2021




I. Key Activities during July - Sep 2021

1. ESCAP project "E-commerce capacity building program for women-led SMEs in South Asia" presented at the WTO Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender




Geneva, Switzerland, 16 July 2021. The ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia and the Enhanced Integrated Framework, Geneva (EIF) jointly presented and shared their experiences of implementing the project "E-commerce capacity building program for women-led SMEs in South Asia" at the WTO Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender. During the session, objectives, outputs, results, and impact made so far were presented to the WTO members. The meeting was informed about the e-commerce project for women-led micro, small and medium enterprises, its training programs conducted for 1000 women entrepreneurs to date, and how they have enhanced their knowledge about e-commerce, successfully registered with the e-commerce platform and used digital media to promote their businesses.

October 2021

April 2021




Announcement

Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director of UNESCAP SSWA Office moves on to a new position



After 12 years of dedicated service at the UNESCAP, Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director and Head of UNESCAP South and South-West Asia Office, since 15 March has decided to leave an early retirement from United Nations to head the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID), a New Delhi based public funded institute. Since 2009, Dr. Kumar has served UNESCAP in different senior management roles including as Chief Economist, Director, Macroeconomic Policy and Planning for Development, and Social Development Division, based at the UNESCAP headquarters in Bangkok. Before joining UNESCAP in 2009, Dr. Kumar was the Group General of the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RISD), a non-Governmental agency that acts as an instrument of study. He also served as the Head of UNESCAP in Mauritius, the Netherlands (1983-1988). A PhD from the Datta Sahakar of Commerce, Dr. Kumar is recipient of the East Bank for International Trade Research Award and SDG's Research Medal. He has researched extensively on different aspects of economic development, resulting in the publication of 18 books, over 26 feature reports of United Nations and ITC, and over 125 peer-reviewed papers, including nearly 7000 academic citations.

With his vast understanding of the development challenges and his own research in South Asia and beyond, he has helped to establish the UNESCAP Office as a leading regional development partner in the subregion, enhancing visibility and support of UNESCAP's work. The UNESCAP-SDG team wishes Dr. Kumar all the best in his future endeavour.



With the retirement of Mr. Nagesh Kumar on 30 April 2021, Mr. Achim Alavi, Director, Strategy and Programme Management Division, UNESCAP, Bangkok has been designated with additional responsibility as the Officer-in-Charge of UNESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia Office, New Delhi with effect from 1 May 2021.

April 2021

January 2021
(Combining October 2020 and January 2021 issues)

I. Key Activities during July-December 2020

1. The Fourth South Asia Forum on SDGs calls for Fostering Sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19 in South Asia



New Delhi, India, 24 December 2020 The Fourth South Asia Forum on the SDGs, supported by UNESCAP South and South-West Asia Office (UNESCAP-SSWA) jointly with the Government of Madhya Pradesh organized an online meeting and webinar from COVID-19 to build back better. A development program for the April Policy Forum on Sustainable Development (APFD) and the High-Level Political Forum, the opening session of the Forum was addressed by the Assistant Secretary-General of ESCAP, U.C. Mo. Maheshwari, Assistant Secretary-General for Regional Planning, Bina K. Ghosh, Assistant Secretary-General for Sustainable Development, Shyam Sundar Mishra, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Social Development, Shyam Sundar Mishra, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Social Development, Shyam Sundar Mishra, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Social Development, Shyam Sundar Mishra.

January 2021

SDG UPDATE

April and July 2020

1. South Asian Countries Participate in the 76th Commission Session of UNESCAP



BANGKOK, THAILAND, 21 MAY 2020 All the South Asian countries participated in the 76th Commission Session of UNESCAP under the theme "Promoting economic, social and environmental cooperation on recovery for sustainable development." Governments of Asia and the Pacific agreed to pursue coordinated and decisive actions, as well as reinforce regional and global cooperation in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and declared profound solidarity and resolved to provide unlimited support and technical assistance to those most affected, particularly in developing countries with weaker health systems and vulnerable populations. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh said while delivering her speech through a video message at the 76th Commission Session that although COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the economy along with public health, it has a silver lining in the form of changes in global affairs to deal with climate change and growing competition for natural resources. The Under Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), **Mr. Armita Alaghbanda**, underscored that when addressing this health crisis, countries face an unprecedented dilemma: the need to balance measures to contain the pandemic against those for socio-economic recovery. To support countries in building back better, refocusing our work is necessary. She further highlighted three priority areas – helping economic recovery, protecting people and enhancing resilience, and restoring supply chains and supporting small and medium enterprises, and urged countries to align policies with environmental protection and climate action. The highlights of the country statements made at the APFD by South Asian countries are reported later.

Read more [here](#) | [Read the Theme Study](#)

April and July 2020

UNESCAP SOUTH ASIA SDG UPDATE

JANUARY 2020

1. UNESCAP Executive Secretary visits Bangladesh



DHAKA, BANGLADESH, 11 December 2019 Dr Armita Sabah Alaghbanda, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) called on H.E. Mr. Sheikh Hasina Minister, Prime Minister of Bangladesh during her official visit to Bangladesh on Wednesday, 11, 2019. The Prime Minister outlined the Executive Secretary on the key priorities of her government and requested support of UNESCAP especially in respect of graduation of Bangladesh from LIC to LMIC. She expressed broad support and her appreciation to ESCAP. The Executive Secretary invited the Prime Minister to deliver a keynote address at the 76th Annual Session of the UNESCAP Commission to be held in Bangkok in May 2020. During her stay in Dhaka, the Executive Secretary also called on a number of dignitaries including the Ministers of Finance, Commerce, Planning, BIMSTEC Secretary-General, the United Nations Resident Coordinator and addressed the United Nations Country Team.

2. The Third South Asia Forum on SDGs calls to accelerate

January 2020

UNESCAP SOUTH ASIA SDG UPDATE

OCTOBER 2019

1. NINTH ASIA-PACIFIC TRADE FACILITATION FORUM HELD IN NEW DELHI



NEW DELHI, INDIA, 17-18 September 2019 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) held the ninth Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum (ATFF) on 17 and 18 September 2019 in New Delhi, India, in collaboration with the Asia Development Bank (ADB), the Commission of India (CCI) and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, under the theme of "Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation for Regional Prosperity". The forum was attended by 100+ participants from 15+ countries and over 500 delegates from 40+ countries. The forum was a high-level meeting of government officials, business leaders, and other stakeholders. The forum discussed the challenges and opportunities for trade facilitation for sustainable development of the region and challenges in maintaining their trade opportunities.

2. UNESCAP EXECUTIVE SECRETARY VISITS NEW DELHI



October 2019



South Asia Network on the Sustainable Development Goals (SANS)

The South Asia Network on the Sustainable Development Goals (SANS) has been developed by ESCAP to foster subregional cooperation by sharing good practices towards achievement of the SDGs amongst the government agencies, think-tanks, CSOs and other stakeholders in South Asia to build back better.

For further details click [here](#) and for details on SANS membership, click [here](#).

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