

1. ASIA-PACIFIC FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, 3 – 5 APRIL
2016

Session 1. Regional priorities for implementation: Overview

Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellency the Under-Secretary General of the UN Systems and Executive Secretary of UNESCAP Dr. Shamshad Akhtar;

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Mr. Chairman,

As I am taking the floor for the first time, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, for efficiently chairing the session. We assure of our full support in bringing the session to its fruitful conclusion. Through you, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the Panelist for their excellent presentations.

Mr. Chairman,

It has been approximately half a year since we adopted the ambitious but necessary aspirations embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals. The goals are comprehensive as is necessitated by an approach that seeks to integrate the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development. Such a holistic approach is

indispensable if we are to achieve the balance that has eluded development paradigms of the past.

If I may share the experiences of my country, Bhutan's socio-economic development framework continues to be guided by the development philosophy of Gross National Happiness which seeks to strike a balance between the socio-economic, environmental, cultural and spiritual needs of society. The ongoing 11th Five Year Plan aimed towards achieving "Self-reliance, Inclusive and green socio-economic development" is a Result Based Planning framework. To translate aspirations into measurable targets and actions, we have identified 16 National Key Result Areas (NKRA) formulated based on the four pillars of GNH with corresponding key performance indicators. The District Key Result Areas support achievement of Sectoral Key Result Areas which in turn contribute towards achievement of the NKRAs. All policies are subject to Policy Formulation Protocol including assessment of policies using GNH screening tool to ensure that all policies are GNH compatible.

For Bhutan, it has been fortuitous that the SDGs are inherently aligned with our overarching development philosophy of GNH. All SDGs except SDG 14 on Oceans are aligned with our 16 National Key Result Areas of the 11th FYP. A rapid mapping assessment between the targets of the 11th Five Year Plan and the 169 targets of the SDGs also revealed that out of 143 SDG targets relevant to Bhutan, 134 SDG targets are already integrated. However, it is critical to establish and ascertain clear linkages between targets and the type of programmes and strategies that we formulate to realize them.

It is encouraging that the global community has also adopted similar parameters of development because the issues that confront all of us can be effectively addressed through collective efforts of the international community.

We have already embarked on the preparation of the 12th FYP which will commence in July 2018. While we have already achieved a high level of alignment between SDGs and our national development framework, we will ensure that SDGs continue to remain an integral part of our development planning framework.

At the regional level, it is also critical that we sharpen our focus and emphasize certain priority areas of shared aspirations and common interest. Hence, I would like to commend the UNESCAP for convening this forum and also express my country's gratitude for extending invitation to deliberate on the regional priorities for implementation of the Post 2015 development agenda.

A discussion of the regional priorities will have to be underpinned by an identification of the issues that confront us as a region today, be they existing or emerging. Furthermore a bifurcation of the issues into 2 distinct categories is necessary to design the corresponding strategies. Issues can be bifurcated depending on whether they are 'socio-economic development oriented' or 'implementation oriented'. This is because the former will determine the type of strategic thrust or priority areas that we identify whereas the latter will determine the type of systemic refinements and innovations that we will need to undertake to ensure effective implementation, coordination and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals.

As highlighted by the UNESCAP, a range of megatrends characterize the Asia-Pacific region, including regional inequalities and vulnerabilities, urbanization, climate change, changing consumption patterns and resource use, trade and economic regional integration. These trends are going to change the economic and social landscape of the region in the coming years. To ensure that no one is left behind in the implementation of the sustainable development agenda in Asia and Pacific Region, these challenges needs to be urgently and adequately addressed.

Further strengthening of regional economic cooperation as a form of partnership for development offers a valuable opportunity. Regional arrangements will have to transcend the previous elements of focus on economic aspects and emphasize equally on the social and environmental dimensions if we are to realize the SDGs.

The Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development can be instrumental in supporting member countries in responding to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by serving as a platform for sharing information, experiences, best practices, identifying emerging issues and collective responses, and facilitating coordination and networking among the member countries in the implementation of SDGs.

In order to address the challenges through appropriate interventions and also to validate achievements, high-quality, accessible, timely and reliable and disaggregated data is of paramount importance. The support of ESCAP in building national capacities on statistics and data on SDGs including advisory services, training, technical assistance would go a long way in facilitating member countries in the implementation of SDGs.

Lastly, my delegation would like to express our appreciation to the Secretariat for the excellent documentation and arrangements for this meeting.

I thank you very much for your kind attention.

