Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Seventh Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development
Bangkok, 20 May 2020
Item 2 of the provisional agenda
Regional perspectives on accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Five years on, where do we stand?

Note by the secretariat

Summary

As the world moves into the fifth year of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Asia and the Pacific has shown a mixed picture of progress: for example, the region is progressing well with quality education (Goal 4) but continues to struggle to advance responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) and climate action (Goal 13). Development efforts in the region have resulted in significant gains with respect to eliminating poverty (Goal 1) and achieving zero hunger (Goal 2), as well as with respect to good health and well-being (Goal 3), gender equality (Goal 5), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), affordable and clean energy (Goal 7), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), life on land (Goal 15), peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16), and partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17).

Overall, Asia and the Pacific cannot expect to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 without accelerated action. This includes enhancing data availability of the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators for assessing progress in Asia and the Pacific. Data availability has vastly improved, jumping from 25 per cent in 2017 to 42 per cent in 2019, but it remains a major challenge.

Member States are invited to discuss the outcomes of the 2020 assessment of Asia and the Pacific’s progress towards implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and agree on priorities and mechanisms for accelerating actions, including to fill the data gaps and to leave no one behind.
I. Introduction

1. The year 2020 heralds the fifth year of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the start of a second triennium. The year 2020 and second triennium also see the commencement of a Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals\(^1\) and a United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.\(^2\) So at the outset of the decade of accelerated action, how is Asia and the Pacific faring?

2. To answer this question, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) issues the *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report*.\(^3\) First released in 2016, the 2020 report will be the fourth in a series of reports using a progress methodology developed by ESCAP and based on data from the global Sustainable Development Goal database to answer two questions:

- Question 1: Where does Asia and the Pacific stand on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals?
- Question 2: How far away will Asia and the Pacific be from achieving the 169 Sustainable Development Goal targets if it keeps the same pace of progress?

II. Asia and the Pacific’s progress is a glass half full

Five years on, Asia and the Pacific’s glass is half full (figure I).

3. With respect to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the most remarkable progress since 2000 has been made on quality education (Goal 4) and some elements of affordable and clean energy (Goal 7). Achieving these two Goals could be within reach if the region maintains progress towards targets such as an increase in the number of qualified teachers (target 4.c) and access to energy services (target 7.1), accelerating progress on equal access to education for all (target 4.5), and reversing current trends in the share of renewable energy (target 7.2).

4. Development efforts in the region have resulted in significant gains with respect to eliminating poverty (Goal 1) and achieving zero hunger (Goal 2), as well as with respect to good health and well-being (Goal 3), gender equality (Goal 5), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), life on land (Goal 15), peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16) and partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17).

---


\(^2\) See www.oceandecade.org/.

\(^3\) To be launched at the Seventh Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development in Bangkok, 20 May 2020.
Figure 1
Where does Asia and the Pacific stand on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Progress since 2000</th>
<th>Regress since 2000</th>
<th>Insufficient indicators</th>
<th>Evidence strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 No poverty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Zero hunger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Good health and well-being</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Quality education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Gender equality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Clean water and sanitation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Affordable and clean energy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Decent work and economic growth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Reduced inequalities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Sustainable cities and communities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Responsible consumption and production</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Climate action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Life below water</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Life on land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Peace, justice and strong institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Partnerships for the goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


5. The Asia-Pacific region has struggled the most in advancing responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) and climate action (Goal 13). In fact, the region is not even moving in the right direction (figure I). Greatly accelerated progress is also needed to urgently foster sustainable use of natural resources (target 12.2), improve the management of chemicals and wastes (target 12.4), increase its resilience against and capacity to reduce the risk of natural disasters (target 13.1), and adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change through integrated policies (target 13.2) (figure II). These findings sound the alarm for the Asia-Pacific community, which must urgently accelerate its progress if the region is to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

6. For instance, if the region continues business as usual, by 2030 it will not succeed in providing enough social protection for its most vulnerable population groups (target 1.3), it will be home to more people without any health coverage (target 3.8), there will not be enough decent jobs, unemployment and informal and vulnerable employment will remain at their high levels (target 8.5), and the number of human trafficking cases, refugees and displaced persons will likely increase (target 16.2) (figure II).
7. There has been very little progress on industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9), reduced inequalities (Goal 10), sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), and life below water (Goal 14). To achieve these Goals, the region needs to scale up its progress in diversifying its economy (targets 9.2, 9.5 and 9.b), improving transportation infrastructure (target 9.1), reducing inequalities of income and opportunities (targets 10.1 and 10.2), and preserving marine and coastal ecosystem (targets 14.1 and 14.5) (figure II).

8. It is important to keep in mind that these results are based on limited information (little over half of the targets are measurable). More data are required to show a full picture of the progress on the 17 Goals. In some Goals, progress may be skewed by very few indicators available (such as Goals 13 and 14). In some others, the availability of data is unbalanced across targets and therefore the results do not reflect the full picture of progress in all dimensions (refer to section III for analysis of data availability).
Figure II

How far away will Asia and the Pacific be from achieving the 169 Sustainable Development Goal targets if it keeps the same pace of progress?

GOAL 1
1.1 International poverty
1.2 National poverty
1.3 Social protection
1.4 Access to basic services
1.5.1 Resources for poverty programmes
1.6 Poverty eradication policies

GOAL 2
2.1 Underemployment and food security
2.2 Malnutrition
2.3 Small-scale food producers
2.4 Sustainable agriculture
2.5 Investment in agriculture
2.6 Genetic resources for agriculture
2.7 Agricultural export subsidies
2.8 Food price anomalies

GOAL 3
3.1 Maternal mortality
3.2 Child mortality
3.3 Health impact of pollution
3.4 Research and development for health
3.5 Management of health risks
3.6 Communicable diseases
3.7 Non-communicable diseases and mental health
3.8 Road traffic accidents
3.9 Sexual and reproductive health
3.10 Universal health coverage
3.11 Tobacco control
3.12 Health financing and workforce
3.13 Substance abuse

GOAL 4
4.1 Effective learning outcomes
4.2 Early childhood development
4.3 Technical and vocational education and training and tertiary education
4.4 Skills for employment
4.5 Equal access to education
4.6 Adult literacy and numeracy
4.7 Sustainable development education
4.8 Education facilities

GOAL 5
5.1 Discrimination against women and girls
5.2 Women in leadership
5.3 Violence against women and girls
5.4 Early marriage
5.5 Unpaid care and domestic work
5.6 Reproductive health access and rights
5.7 Equal economic rights
5.8 Technology for women’s empowerment
5.9 Gender equality policies

GOAL 6
6.1 Safe drinking water
6.2 Access to sanitation and hygiene
6.3 Water-related ecosystems
6.4 International cooperation on water and sanitation
6.5 Water quality
6.6 Water-use efficiency
6.7 Transboundary water cooperation

GOAL 7
7.1 Access to energy services
7.2 International cooperation on energy
7.3 Energy efficiency
7.4 Investing in energy infrastructure
7.5 Share of renewable energy

GOAL 8
8.1 Per capita economic growth
8.2 Economic productivity and innovation
8.3 Formalization of small and medium-sized enterprises
8.4 Material resource efficiency
8.5 Youths not in employment, education or training
8.6 Access to financial services
8.7 Child and forced labour
8.8 Labour rights and social working environment
8.9 Sustainable tourism
8.10 Aid for trade
8.11 Strategy for youth employment

GOAL 9
9.4 Sustainable and clean industries
9.5 Access to ICT and the Internet
9.6 Research and development
9.7 Domestic technology development
9.8 Infrastructure development
9.9 Sustainable and inclusive industrialization
9.10 Small-scale industries access to finance
9.a Resilient infrastructure

GOAL 10
10.1 Income growth (bottom 40%)
10.2 Inclusion (social, economic and political)
10.3 Resource flows for development
10.c Remittance costs
10.d Inclusive discrimination
10.e Fiscal and social protection policies
10.f Regulation of financial markets
10.g Inclusive global governance
10.h Safe migration and mobility
10.l Special and differential treatment (WTO)

GOAL 11
11.1 Housing and basic services
11.2 Public transport systems
11.3 Urban air quality and waste management
11.4 Resilience to disasters
11.5 Sustainable urbanization
11.6 Cultural and natural heritage
11.7 Urban green and public spaces
11.8 Urban planning
11.b Disaster risk management policies
11.c Sustainable and resilient buildings

GOAL 12
12.c Fossil fuel subsidies
12.d Sustainable use of natural resources
12.e Managing chemicals and waste
12.f Programmes on sustainable consumption and production
12.g Food waste and losses
12.h Reduction in waste generation
12.i Corporate sustainable practices
12.j Public procurement practices
12.k Sustainable development awareness
12.l Support for research and development capacity
12.m Sustainable tourism monitoring

GOAL 13
13.1 Resilience and adaptive capacity
13.2 Climate change policies
13.3 Climate change awareness
13.a UNFCCC commitments
13.b Climate change planing and management

GOAL 14
14.1 Marine pollution
14.2 Conservation of coastal areas
14.3 Ocean acidification
14.4 Sustainable fishing
14.5 Fisheries subsidies
14.6 Marine resources for small island developing States and LDCs
14.a Research capacity and marine technology
14.b Small-scale artisanal fishing
14.c Implementing UNCLOS

GOAL 15
15.1 Resources for forest management
15.2 Sustainable forests management
15.3 Conservation of mountain ecosystems
15.4 Terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems
15.5 Loss of biodiversity
15.6 Desertification and land degradation
15.7 Utilization of genetic resources
15.8 Protected species trafficking
15.9 Invasive alien species
15.10 Biodiversity in national and local planning
15.a Resources for biodiversity and ecosystems
15.b Protected species trafficking (global)

GOAL 16
16.1 Reduction of violence and related deaths
16.2 Human trafficking
16.3 Justice for all
16.4 Illicit financial and arms flows
16.5 Corruption and bribery
16.6 Inclusive decision-making
16.7 Inclusive global governance
16.8 Legal identity
16.9 Public access to information
16.a Capacity to prevent violence

GOAL 17
17.1 Tax and other revenue collection
17.2 Additional financial resources
17.3 Debt sustainability
17.4 Science and technology international cooperation
17.5 Capacity-building for ICT
17.6 Capacity-building for Sustainable Development Goals
17.7 Multilateral trading system (WTO)
17.8 Exports of developing countries
17.9 Duty-free market access for LDCs
17.a Statistical capacity
17.b GDA commitment by developed countries
17.e Investment promotion for LDCs
17.f Transfer of technologies
17.g Global macroeconomic stability
17.h Poverty eradication policies
17.i Respect for a country’s policy space
17.j Global partnerships
17.k Partnerships (public, private, civil society)
17.l National statistics availability

Source: ESCAP, Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020 (see figure I).

Abbreviations: ICT, information and communications technology; LDC, least developed country; ODA, official development assistance; UNCLOS, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea; UNFCCC, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; WTO, World Trade Organization.
III. Diversity of countries, diversity of progress

9. From industrial powerhouses and trading hubs to remote island States, the Asia-Pacific region is home to an unparalleled diversity of countries. Progress, likewise, has not been equal across the five subregions of ESCAP.

Progress patterns

10. Goal-by-goal results reveal that some subregions have made remarkable progress on certain Goals, while others have stagnated or regressed. The assessments of Goal 10 on reduced inequalities, Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production, and Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions show the most diverse patterns of progress across Asia-Pacific subregions (figure III).

11. All subregions have made significant progress with respect to eliminating poverty (Goal 1) and achieving zero hunger (Goal 2), as well as with respect to good health and well-being (Goal 3), quality education (Goal 4), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), affordable and clean energy (Goal 7), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), and industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9). However, to achieve 2030 targets, every subregion needs to sustain or accelerate progress on these Goals.

12. Progress across all subregions has been stagnant or regressing on gender equality (Goal 5), sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), climate action (Goal 13), life below water (Goal 14), life on land (Goal 15), and partnership for the Goals (Goal 17).

Subregional overview

13. East and North-East Asia is on track to achieve the Goals on zero hunger (Goal 2), quality education (Goal 4), and clean water and sanitation (Goal 6). Good progress has been made on eliminating poverty (Goal 1), good health and well-being (Goal 3), quality education (Goal 4), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), affordable and clean energy (Goal 7), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), and industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9). Insufficient progress is noted for the remaining Goals.

14. North and Central Asia is on track on quality education (Goal 4), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), reduced inequalities (Goal 10) and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16). Progress on the remaining Goals has been insufficient, in particular on sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), where the subregion is regressing, and with very slow progress on gender equality (Goal 5), climate action (Goal 13) and life on land (Goal 15).

15. The Pacific is on track on responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) and is making significant progress on good health and well-being (Goal 3), and industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9). The subregion needs, however, to reverse trends in peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16) and accelerate progress on several Goals, such as quality education (Goal 4), climate action (Goal 13) as well as life below water and life on land (Goals 14 and 15).

16. With the current pace of progress, South-East Asia is on track on quality education (Goal 4) and industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9). It is also making good progress on other Goals, such as zero hunger (Goal 2) and good health and well-being (Goal 3). It needs, however, to strengthen efforts for the

---

For a full list of Asia-Pacific subregions, see annex.
remaining Goals to accelerate progress, and in particular reverse negative trends on reduced inequalities (Goal 10), and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16).

17. **South and South-West Asia** has made good progress on good health and well-being (Goal 3), as well as zero hunger (Goal 2), and affordable and clean energy (Goal 7). Limited progress has been achieved on the other Goals. In particular, negative trends in responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16) need to be reversed.

Figure III
Where do Asia and the Pacific subregions stand on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On track</th>
<th>Regressing</th>
<th>Stagnant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>East and North-East Asia</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North and Central Asia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pacific</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South-East Asia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South and South-West Asia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Note:* The Goal icons in boxes indicate results based on insufficient indicators. “On track” assumes that, if progress is linear, the subregion has made expected progress to date. However, this is not an estimation that targets will be achieved by 2030.
IV. Five years on, data availability remains a challenge

18. In 2017, only 25 per cent of the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators had sufficient data for progress assessment in Asia and the Pacific. This figure has steadily increased, reaching 42 per cent in 2019 (figure IV). This increase demonstrates that the statistical community in the Asia-Pacific region is responding to the call to boost data to monitor the 2030 Agenda. Nevertheless, the number of indicators without data – currently 71 out of 232 – indicates that the statistical community still has challenges to overcome and further investment is required.

Figure IV
Sustainable Development Goal data availability by indicator for Asia and the Pacific

Source: ESCAP, Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020 (see figure I).

Note: Sufficient data: indicators with at least an underlying data series with two data points or more between 2000 and 2019 for at least half the countries in the region. To estimate a historical trend, two data points for at least half of the countries are deemed sufficient; insufficient data: indicators with an underlying data series with at least one data point (or two data points, but for less than half of the countries in the region). While indicators with such limited data availability may shed light on the current status of the region, no historical trend can be estimated; no data: indicators with no data for any of the 58 countries in the region.

19. The Goals where most progress has been made have the benefit of higher data availability when compared to the Goals where progress is limited. This highlights that policy prioritization and investment in data and statistics are very much interlinked (figure V).
Figure V
Asia and the Pacific data availability by Goal

Source: ESCAP, Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020 (see figure I).

Accelerating investment in data and statistics

20. The 2030 Agenda calls for follow-up and review processes to be guided by a set of principles, including “that the global review will be primarily based on national official data sources”\(^5\) and commits to “follow-up and review at the high-level political forum […] be informed […] based on the global indicator framework and data produced by national statistical systems and information collected at the regional level.”\(^6\)

21. Asia and the Pacific is accelerating investment in strengthening national statistical systems in support of the 2030 Agenda. In 2019, the Commission, at its seventy-fifth session, endorsed the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind\(^7\) which, among other things, focuses on strengthening national statistical systems to advance official statistics in support


\(^6\) General Assembly resolution 70/1.

\(^7\) Commission resolution 75/9.
of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Declaration calls on the Executive Secretary to report to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific at its eighty-first session, in 2025, on the outcomes of a midpoint review at the ninth session of the Committee on Statistics in 2024. A monitoring framework has been established to enable reporting in 2024 and will be considered by the ESCAP Committee on Statistics at its seventh session to be held in October 2020. Early results show that the region needs to improve communication with regards to statistics, strengthen statistical literacy and advocate for the expanded use of official statistics for evidence-based policymaking and transparent governance.

22. The *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020* is also a tool for advocacy, as it provides member States with an approach for assessing and communicating progress on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

V. **Issues for discussion**

23. Members are invited to:

(a) Discuss outcomes of the 2020 assessment of Asia and the Pacific’s progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as measured by the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators and data and ESCAP progress methodology;

(b) Discuss and propose concrete actions to increase Sustainable Development Goal data availability at the national, subregional, regional and global levels; and use national and global Sustainable Development Goal data for assessing progress and prioritization in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals nationally, subregionally, regionally and globally.
Annex

List of countries in the ESCAP region and subregions

The following table provides the country groupings that have been used in this analysis together with the corresponding countries under each of them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td>Afghanistan; American Samoa; Armenia; Australia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Cook Islands; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; Fiji; French Polynesia; Georgia; Guam; Hong Kong, China; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Kiribati; Kyrgyzstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Macao, China; Malaysia; Maldives; Marshall Islands; Micronesia (Federated States of); Mongolia; Myanmar; Nauru; Nepal; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Niue; Northern Mariana Islands; Pakistan; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Sri Lanka; Tajikistan; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Turkey; Turkmenistan; Tuvalu; Uzbekistan; Vanuatu; Viet Nam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East and North-East Asia</td>
<td>China; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; Hong Kong, China; Japan; Macao, China; Mongolia; Republic of Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North and Central Asia</td>
<td>Armenia; Azerbaijan; Georgia; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Russian Federation; Tajikistan; Turkmenistan; Uzbekistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>American Samoa; Australia; Cook Islands; Fiji; French Polynesia; Guam; Kiribati; Marshall Islands; Micronesia (Federated States of); Nauru; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Niue; Northern Mariana Islands; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Samoa; Solomon Islands; Tonga, Tuvalu; Vanuatu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
<td>Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; Indonesia; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Myanmar; Philippines; Singapore; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Viet Nam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South and South-West Asia</td>
<td>Afghanistan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Maldives; Nepal; Pakistan; Sri Lanka; Turkey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>