For Dr Madhumita Puri, the inspiration to found Trash to Cash came from an everyday conversation she had while training persons with disabilities. She asked a young man in her class what he wanted out of his life. His pensive answer was, “Everyday, I want to wake up in the morning, eat breakfast and leave for work. In the evenings, when I get back home, I want to relax and drink a cup of tea, then watch a bit of TV before dinner and sleep early to be fresh for the next morning”. His answer elevated the yearning for an ordinary life to an aspirational goal, indicating how much he longed for what others would refer to as the everyday-ness of an ordinary person. Seeing this as his longing to feel included in society, Dr. Madhumita Puri set out to found Trash to Cash, a disability-inclusive business which breathes life to the ardent desire of persons with disabilities to live a life of purpose and dignity. Born as a social enterprise, today, it is a thriving business that transforms trash to consumer products such as weaving old fabric into rugs. 65 per cent of its employees are persons with disabilities who, by way of this job, feel empowered. Trash to Cash is the recipient of the 2013 UNESCAP- Sasikawa award for Entrepreneurial Business. The award recognises the leadership of disability-inclusive businesses which provide enabling work environments and delivers disability-inclusive products and services, and shows that businesses could be an avenue through which persons with disabilities can be made to feel valued and respected in society. Through the cash endowment from the award, Trash to Cash is expected to expand its business model across ten new cities in India. The UNESCAP- Sasikawa award was developed in partnership by United Nations
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Nippon Foundation, and the Asia-Pacific Development Centre on Disability.