

Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, Agenda Item 2  
23 March 2021, UNCC, Bangkok

India – Statement  
**“Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in  
Asia and the Pacific”**

*Mr/Madam Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Thank you for giving me the floor to speak on the topic on Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unforeseen and unprecedented, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a massive disruption in the progress towards realisation of SDGs around the world. It is variously estimated that a large number of people are likely to be pushed into extreme poverty due to the pandemic. Apart from the impact on the global economy, the pandemic has posed difficult challenges for all countries in Asia and the Pacific region in the domains of health, education, labour and employment and climate action initiatives, among others.

India has grappled with a host of challenges on account of the pandemic. A four-pillar strategy of “containment, fiscal, financial, and long-term structural reforms” was implemented. An early, intense lockdown provided a win-win strategy to save lives, and preserve livelihoods via economic recovery in the medium to long-term. However, the prolonged lockdown also constrained economic activities and precipitated a slowdown and contraction of the economy. The systems of health, education and livelihoods, more particularly those in the unorganised sectors faced severe pressure. Lockdowns and restrictions on movement of people brought sectors such as travel, tourism, and hospitality to a virtual standstill and inflicted severe job losses.

A systematic pandemic management plan was put forward which included system-wide measures and initiatives focused on specific groups. A core system-wide initiative was to constitute six High Level Empowered Groups (EG) headed by top policy makers and experts to deal with critical aspects like COVID-19 management plan, medical infrastructure and essential equipment, augmenting human resources,

response coordination with the private sector, NGOs and international organisations, economic and welfare measures, public awareness, information and communication, supply chain and logistics management, etc.

Combating the loss of livelihoods was an important element of India's COVID-19 response management. Emergency financial support and food security was provided. Special initiatives were implemented for migrant workers and frontline health workers. In order to build back better, sector-specific initiatives have been implemented in agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, manufacturing and industries, etc. Customized interventions have been rolled out for women and children. Special emphasis has been laid on health and education. For instance, superior health infrastructure, including integrated public health labs in all districts, has been planned. Secondary and higher education infrastructure has been planned in addition to investments in Special Education Zones and medical colleges.

The Government of India has rolled out a host of measures under *Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan* (Self-reliant India campaign), with the aim of strengthening India's competitiveness on the global stage and to help empower the poor, labourers, migrants and others who have been adversely affected. India is probably the only country to have focused on structural reforms as a part of the pandemic-response strategy to expand supply in the medium-long term and avoid long-term damage to productive capacities. The Central Government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) which is the Central Bank have together provided significant fiscal and economic stimulus packages amounting to around 13% of India's GDP.

The national response to the COVID-19 crisis is a tale of partnerships. One of the Empowered Groups was especially tasked with coordination of three groups of responders: civil society organisations (CSOs), private sector and international development organisations. Around 92,000 CSOs/NGOs partnered with the government and contributed to response efforts. International organisations, such as WHO, UNICEF, UNDP and other UN agencies executed joint response initiatives leveraging their existing presence across the country. Industry sector networks joined the effort, brought in resources, matched problems with

solutions, facilitated innovations and ramped up domestic production capabilities for essential goods and equipment like ventilators.

Even though there is a recent surge in COVID-19 cases in parts of the country, a V-shaped recovery is underway, as demonstrated by a sustained resurgence in high frequency indicators such as power demand, e-way bills, GST (Goods & Services Tax) collection, steel consumption, etc. The economy's homecoming to normalcy has been brought closer by the initiation of a mega vaccination drive, which began on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2021. India became the fastest country to roll-out a million vaccines in 6 days and also emerged as a leading vaccine supplier to various countries (about 70 countries) around the world including some in the neighbourhood. India also supplied essential medicines to around 150 countries during the pandemic.

Madam Chair, India is aware that this pandemic can only be successfully fought in partnership with other countries in the region and outside. From the outset, at every leg of the response to pandemic India has made common cause with other affected countries and looks forward to successful conclusion of this campaign against COVID-19.

I thank you once again, Mr/Madam Chair, for giving me this opportunity.

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