Harnessing digital economy in Asia and the Pacific

Side Event: 4th International Conference on SIDS
Tuesday, 28 May 2024: 12:00-13:30 (Antigua and Barbuda time)
Room 7, American University of Antigua, University Park, Coolidge, Antigua
St John’s, Antigua and Barbuda

Organizer(s)
United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Commonwealth Secretariat

Co-organizer(s)
The Pacific Community (SPC)

Registration
To attend the side event, all registrants must also register through https://www.un.org/dgacm/en/content/protocol/meetings.

For further details of the event and related information, please visit: SIDS4ESCAP | ESCAP (unescap.org) https://thecommonwealth.org/events/side-event-harnessing-digital-economy-asia-and-pacific

Background
The fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) will be held from 27 to 30 May 2024 in St John's, Antigua and Barbuda, under the theme “Charting the course toward resilient prosperity”. It provides an opportunity to strengthen Pacific SIDS-wide cooperative action to achieve sustainable development, including the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. It will further inform the intergovernmentally agreed, focused, forward-looking and action-oriented political outcome document.

At the mid-point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the recovery from the pandemic in the context of climate change and geopolitical tensions have adversely impacted the lives and livelihoods of people and communities in the
Asia-Pacific. The countries are not on track to achieve any of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. In this regard, the upcoming Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in 2024, will provide another important stage for SIDS to meet the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In this backdrop, to accelerate SDGs advancement, foster resilient digital economies and transformation for sustainable development, it is critical for stakeholders to remain solutions focused. Governments recognize the importance of prioritizing digital technologies, harnessing innovation and establishing enabling legal frameworks to accelerate development outcomes with the broader objectives of the SDGs to improve synergies and effectiveness across the sectors, including digital trade, e-commerce and connectivity and regulatory reforms for spreading the content of digital public infrastructure for goods and services.

Importantly, members and policymakers need to invest more in digital transformation and work together to promote alignment and regulatory coherence in order to diffuse the outcomes of the prosperity and economic benefits in the Asia-Pacific region. The event will also hear perspectives from SIDS and development partners and call on the international community to support and cooperate on critical issues of digital transformation in line with spreading the partnership.

**Key Questions and Outcomes**

This side event will examine the following key guiding questions:

1. What are the main policy actions to ensure national development frameworks support the digital economy?
2. What are the essential legislative frameworks and regulatory building blocks that are necessary to come together to create an enabling environment to allow small island developing states to fully benefit from the digital economy?
3. How would you mainstream digital economy in national development priorities and strategies through digital finance and fintech to advance sustainable development goals across SIDS?
4. What can be done by Regional Organizations (such as ESCAP and the Pacific Community), international organisations (such as Commonwealth Secretariat) and other development partners to facilitate digital transformation for the people and prosperity?
Bringing together a diverse panel, this side event aims to draw attention to the emerging opportunity among multi-stakeholders to take action through the regional frameworks. The discussion will highlight issues that are critical to advance digital economy towards resilient prosperity for the Asia and the Pacific.

**Draft Programme**

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<th>Time (90 min)</th>
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| 10 min        | **Welcome and opening remarks**  
• Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP  
• Ms. Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, Secretary-General, Commonwealth Secretariat |
| 5 min         | **Signing of Memorandum of Understanding between ESCAP Secretariat and the Commonwealth Secretariat** |
| 30 min        | **Panel discussion**  
• H.E. Ms. Fekitamoeloa Útoikamanu, Minister for Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications  
• H.E. Dr Ali Haidar Ahmed, Minister for Housing, Land and Urban Development, Republic of Maldives  
• Ms. Anne-Claire Goarant, Project manager, Climate change and environmental sustainability programme, SPC  
**Moderator: Mr. Sudip Ranjan Basu**, Deputy Head, ESCAP Subregional Office for the Pacific |
| 40 min        | **Open discussion**  
• Interventions from audience  
**Facilitator: Ms. Vashti Maharaj**, Acting Head and Adviser, Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda, Commonwealth Secretariat |
| 5 min         | **Wrap up and closing remarks**  
• Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP |

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