1. The Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum for South-South and Triangular Cooperation (Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum) held its fifth session on 27 and 28 November 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand. It was co-organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Thailand Development Cooperation Agency (TICA).

2. The meeting was attended by 108 participants from 34 ESCAP member States and 8 observers, combining the South-South cooperation (SSC) practitioners from the capitals and from the Permanent Missions in Bangkok in a hybrid format. 10 participants attended the meeting online.

3. The objectives of this meeting were to (i) discuss challenges and opportunities for advancing South-South cooperation in an increasingly digital world, especially for emerging technical assistance providers; (ii) promote replicable digital innovation solutions through South-South cooperation including a field visit; (iii) engage in an in-person networking
session and identify opportunities for partnership with diverse technical cooperation agencies to enhance sustainable development; and

(iv) showcase recent innovative development solutions and best practices through an exhibition.

**Opening session**

4. Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP and Ms. Ureerat Chareontoh, Director-General of TICA addressed the opening session. H.E. Mr. Peter Mohan Maithri Pieris, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations and the President of the High-Level Committee on South-South Cooperation delivered a keynote address. Mr. Adnan H. Aliani, Director of the Strategy and Programme Management Division of ESCAP presented the overview of the session.

**Session 2. “Bridging the digital divide through South-South Cooperation – challenges and opportunities”**

5. The ESCAP secretariat provided an overview presentation on challenges and opportunities to bridge the digital divide in the Asia-Pacific region through South-South Cooperation. A panel was moderated by the Chair and discussed the barriers and effects for marginalized communities in accessing and using digital technologies and how South-South cooperation can support bridging these, showcasing successful examples from across the region. Panellists were high-level officials from Cambodia, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, and Viet Nam. Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand, and Sweden made interventions.

**Launch of the South-South Cooperation Connector**

6. The South-South Cooperation Connector was launched by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP. Representatives of Thailand and Indonesia, two member States that have made data on their existing technical assistance offer available on the connector, delivered remarks calling for partners and other emerging providers to maximize the use of this platform as an important tool to further development cooperation.
Speed Thinking Session

7. During a Speed Thinking Session, delegates conducted moderated discussions in three groups addressing the topics of the communities of practice endorsed by the fourth Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum for South-South and Triangular Cooperation in 2022, namely (i) to streamline the matching of needs to available resources, (ii) to support the needs of new assistance providers, and (iii) to strengthen further the Asia-Pacific Directors General Forums for South-South and Triangular Cooperation, including by providing substantive guidance.

Session 3. “Best practices – Smart solutions to promote sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific”

8. A panel discussed how innovative digital solutions can help the region meet its sustainable development challenges and shared examples of recent best practices. The session was moderated by a representative of Bangladesh. Panellists were high-level officials from Japan, Mongolia, Maldives, Australia, Germany, Singapore, Kazakhstan, India, Pakistan, and Timor-Leste made interventions.

Session 4. “Digital innovation for technical assistance providers”

9. A panel discussed the role of digital innovation for technical assistance providers. The session was moderated by the representative of the Philippines. Panellists were high-level officials from Indonesia, Kazakhstan, China and the United States of America.

Closing

10. The ESCAP secretariat provided a presentation on the preparations for the 6th DG Forum, summarizing outcomes of the discussions held during the 5th session, highlighting concrete requests and recommendations expressed during the Speed Thinking Session.

11. The key messages and decisions of the Fifth Session of the Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum are the following:
(i) The Asia-Pacific region faces a wide digital divide, with leading technology innovators alongside countries lagging in digital innovation.

(ii) Digitalization, if used appropriately, can bridge gaps in achievement of the SDGs.

(iii) Marginalized communities face multiple challenges in accessing and benefiting from digital technologies, including digital illiteracy, poverty, aging society, disabilities and language barriers.

(iv) The Forum emphasized the need to make sure digital technology and innovation is accessible and affordable to all to reap its full benefits and ensure enhanced digital inclusion.

(v) The Forum noted the crucial role of partnerships, and in particular South-South cooperation, in narrowing the digital divide and accelerating the achievement of the SDGs progress and promoting inclusive sustainable development.

(vi) The Forum took note of the vision of Kazakhstan for a digital solutions centre for sustainable development, which is to provide practical digital solutions to transform the Central Asia region and beyond into a well-connected hub for the promotion of inclusive and sustainable development with a global outreach while facilitating the achievement of relevant SDGs and the proposed operational modalities.

(vii) The Secretariat, with support from the Governments of Indonesia and Thailand, launched the South-South Cooperation Connector, a one-stop-hub, addressing the need for a regional platform bridging the demand and supply gaps of technical cooperation, and promoting networking and collaboration through dedicated communities of practice. The South-South Cooperation Connector represents a step forward in this region in fostering collaboration among nations of the Global South.

(viii) Asia-Pacific countries were encouraged to join the South-South Cooperation Connector to facilitate the exchange of knowledge,
experiences, and best practices for effective and efficient technical cooperation.

(ix) The Forum participants discussed key questions on the topics of South-South Cooperation Connector and matchmaking; support to technical assistance providers and strengthening the Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum. The secretariat compiled and shared the inputs with the participants to inform the outlook and the preparations for the next session of the Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum.

(x) As the only region with a dedicated regional Directors General Forum for South-South and Triangular Cooperation, the Asia-Pacific DG Forum is a member States-driven annual platform for development practitioners and peer exchange among the leaders of technical cooperation in the region. The value of inter-country exchanges in the main sessions as well as through bilateral meetings was noted by numerous Forum participants. Member States are encouraged to continue their active engagement in driving the Forum through:

   a. Participating in and leading the discussions under the three communities of practice established by the Fourth Session of the Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum in between Forum sessions;

   b. Contributing to the selection of the theme of the sessions based on mandated topics and/or critical and emerging issues affecting development cooperation in the region;

   c. Hosting or to co-organizing annual sessions of the Forum;

   d. Taking active part in the delivery of the session programme by carrying out chairing, moderating, speaking roles.

(xi) The importance of the preparatory process between sessions to ensure the Asia-Pacific DG Forum addresses the most pressing
evolving issues in a structured, efficient, accountable and result-oriented approach was emphasized by participants.