Digital Innovation and South-South Cooperation: Driving Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific

Summary of Proceedings

1. The Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum for South-South and Triangular Cooperation (Asia-Pacific DG 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. Mr. Arken Arystanov, Chairman of the Board, Kazakhstan Agency for International Development chaired the meeting. The meeting was attended by 108 participants from 34 ESCAP member States and 8 observers, including Directors General or higher representatives from 16 countries. 10 participants attended the meeting online.

3. The objectives of the Forum 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 welcomed participants to the Fifth Asia Pacific DG Forum. Noting the event's annual recurrence with concrete deliverables and actions, she underscored the Forum’s significance as a regional platform where emerging countries actively share best practices. She added that the Asia and the Pacific is the only region convening a dedicated DG Forum, a reflection of the many emerging countries in the region that have taken up the strategic role of becoming development partners. Given the global stagnation in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Executive Secretary referred to six transformative entry points to catalyse and multiply effects across SDGs for accelerated progress, encompassing critical sectors like food systems, energy access,
digital transformation, education, jobs, and climate action. With a timely focus on digital innovation for SDGs for this year's forum, the representative highlighted the Asia-Pacific region's pivotal role in digital initiatives as solutions to its multifaceted challenges, including the acceleration of SDGs. Acknowledging the persistent issues and challenges related to the digital divide, Ms. Alisjahbana expressed optimism that South-South and Triangular Cooperation could effectively address both digital initiatives and divides. Looking ahead, the Executive Secretary noted that the theme of the upcoming 80th session of the ESCAP Commission in Bangkok in April 2023, was on "Digital Innovation to Accelerate the Implementation of SDGs." She further called for active participation and contributions during this session. In closing, Ms. Alisjahbana emphasized the importance for the continued strengthening of South-South and triangular cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, highlighting the collective commitment to addressing regional challenges and fostering innovation for sustainable development.

5. Ms. Ureerat Chareontoh, Director-General of Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA) welcomed participants to the Fifth Asia-Pacific DG Forum, emphasizing the timeliness of the theme. Amidst the midway point in implementation of the 2030 Agenda, she stressed the need to accelerate progress, highlighting digital technology and innovation as key components for overcoming global challenges and achieving the SDGs. In line with Thailand's "Digital Thailand," vision, the government aimed to leverage digital technologies for socio-economic transformation, public service enhancement, and future competitiveness. She outlined three crucial factors for embracing digital technology's potential in development programs: willingness to adopt, ability to adapt, and opportunity to access. Drawing on Thailand's experience, she shared examples of successful collaborations, including promoting climate resilience in farming communities and building resilient micro, small and medium enterprises for the digital economy. Ongoing projects were highlighted for their use of advanced technologies to address urban living challenges. Furthermore, the Director-General emphasized the importance of capacity building and showcased initiatives under the Annual International Training Course program, promoting technology and innovation solutions for challenges like waste management and energy efficiency. Delegates were invited to a field visit to the KUBOTA Farm on the second day of the Forum, offering insights into Thailand's innovative farming practices and models aligned with the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy and Bio-Circular-Green Economic principles. TICA's commitment to SDG 17, Partnership for the Goals, was reiterated, emphasizing the collective responsibility of the Global South and Global North to support the attainment of all SDGs.

6. 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. He highlighted the pivotal role played by ESCAP in fostering collaboration and sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region. Emphasizing the phenomenal impact of ESCAP, he underscored its role as a platform for knowledge-sharing, addressing common challenges, and supporting the development of digital infrastructure. Reflecting on recent global discussions at the 21st Session of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation and the Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) Summit in Havana, H.E. Mr. Pieris stressed the importance of scaling up digital transformation through South-South and triangular cooperation. Acknowledging the persistent digital divide, especially in developing countries, he highlighted the immense potential of synergizing digital innovation with South-South Cooperation for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific. H.E. Mr. Pieris presented examples of digital transformation in the region, from smart agriculture in Viet Nam to digital platforms promoting financial inclusion for women
entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. However, the stark digital divide, particularly in internet accessibility, raised concerns, emphasizing the need for targeted efforts to increase digital literacy and accessibility, especially for marginalized groups. South-South Cooperation emerged as a crucial strategy to overcome obstacles collectively, emphasizing mutual benefit and equal partnerships. Mr. Pieris urged a holistic approach to digitization, considering ethical, social, economic, and environmental dimensions for a sustainable future trajectory. In the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, fostering innovation and investing in education were deemed crucial. Sustainability was highlighted as a central theme in digital strategies, with a call to address the impact on people and the environment. He emphasized the role of South-South cooperation in fighting climate change, amplifying efforts in renewable energy, smart agriculture, and disaster risk management. Facilitating the waiver of intellectual property rights to adapt technologies locally, harmonizing policies, and leveraging digital platforms were deemed vital for maximizing opportunities. He encouraged concrete actions and collaborative efforts, urging the conference to explore innovative solutions and commit to their implementation. Acknowledging ESCAP’s commitment to fostering collaboration and sustainable development, the representative expressed hope for continued progress and innovation. H.E. Mr. Pieris concluded with a wish for a flourishing collaboration between ESCAP and South-South cooperation partners, empowering nations and leaving a positive imprint on the well-being and progress of communities in the South.

7. 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”

8. Ms. Tiziana Bonapace, the Director of the ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction Division of ESCAP provided an overview presentation on challenges and opportunities to bridge the digital divide in the Asia-Pacific region through South-South Cooperation. The introductory presentation elucidated the digital and disaster-related dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region, delineating a complex landscape of disparities and opportunities. The digital divide, highlighted as a multifaceted challenge, showcased stark contrasts between leading innovators and nations grappling with digital innovation. Supply-side issues, notably insufficient infrastructure investments and affordability concerns, were identified as key contributors. On the demand side, varying digital literacy levels underscored the breadth of the divide. The discourse extended beyond digital disparities to the intersection of technology and disaster resilience. A geographical map revealed emerging disaster risk hotspots, emphasizing the need for proactive policies leveraging technology to address slow-onset disasters such as drought and monitor air pollution. Amid challenges, the presentation accentuated collaboration opportunities. Initiatives like shared Internet exchange points and regulatory sandboxes were proposed to enhance connectivity, reduce costs, and address regulatory challenges. The potential of collaborative efforts in utilizing data for disaster resilience, integrating satellite data with ground data, and offering online training courses for disaster hotspots were explored. The presentation also touched upon a global executive action plan for early warnings by 2027, emphasizing the technological backbone reliant on satellite data and intergovernmental cooperation. Case studies, including the ESCAP Trust Fund for Tsunami Disaster and Climate Preparedness, illustrated the fusion of technology and disaster preparedness. Concluding with three regional cooperation mechanisms, the presentation positioned technology as a vital driver for positive change, offering tangible pathways for South-South and triangular cooperation.
9. 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 H.E. Mr. Korm Ribaun, Secretary-General, National Committee for ESCAP Royal Government of Cambodia, Mr. Hwang Jae Sang, General Director, Development Strategy and Portfolio Management Department, Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Republic of Korea (ROK), Mr. Supakorn Siddhichai, Executive Vice President, Digital Technology and Innovation Development Unit, Digital Economy Promotion Agency (DEPA), Thailand, Ms. Bich Thuy Tran, Country Director, HelpAge International, Viet Nam.

10. The representative of Cambodia highlighted significant barriers faced by marginalized communities in Cambodia regarding digital technology access. These challenges include a lack of understanding of digital services, poor internet connectivity, limited access to devices, and insufficient digital literacy skills. The government is working on Cambodia's digital infrastructure, but stakeholders, including civil society organizations, must collaborate to bridge gaps, improve infrastructure, enhance digital literacy, and ensure digital safety practices. The language barrier hindering online education for young learners was also acknowledged. Moving to insights into successful projects addressing the digital divide, the representative shared the "Digital Cambodia for Inclusive Development" project by the Asian Development Bank. This initiative employs a one-stop-shop model for service delivery, integrating a digital platform with relevant information systems. Key success factors include addressing barriers to digital transformation, focusing on infrastructure and governance, and supporting operational priorities aligned with poverty reduction and strengthening governance. Concerning ESCAP's role in providing digital access to marginalized communities, the representative outlined several ways. ESCAP can advocate for digital infrastructure investment, support local organizations, encourage inclusive business practices, provide assistance for digital literacy and skills development, promote South-South cooperation, and support the Asia-Pacific telecentre network. Leveraging its resources, expertise, and regional influence, ESCAP is seen as crucial in addressing the digital divide and providing access to marginalized communities in Cambodia and the broader Asia-Pacific region. The representative emphasized the importance of ESCAP's role in promoting collaboration, sharing best practices, and leveraging knowledge networks to empower disadvantaged communities.

11. The representative of KOICA outlined the challenges and strategies in applying digital technology to marginalized communities. Acknowledging the potential of digital technology to accelerate progress, he emphasized the need for an inclusive approach to prevent technology from widening inequality gaps. Practical challenges include a lack of infrastructure, unstable power supply, and ongoing costs affecting project sustainability. The digital literacy gap, influenced by diverse factors, was identified as a significant obstacle. To address these challenges, ROK established a digital mainstreaming strategy, aiming to incorporate digital components across sectors. The representative shared ROK's experiences in various sectors under the digital mainstream strategy. In health, technology is used to improve healthcare accessibility, enhance digital conversion of health information, and increase data collection capacity. In education, projects focus on creating a digital-based educational environment, innovative classrooms, and platforms for out-of-school children. In rural development, digital technologies support productivity improvement across the agricultural value chain, climate adaptation for farmers, and market accessibility through online platforms. Notable achievements include successful e-government projects and advancements in e-procurement systems. Regarding triangular cooperation's role in bridging the digital divide, the representative emphasized that partnerships with competent people familiar with the beneficiary
country’s reality can enhance project effectiveness. Triangular cooperation with pivotal partner countries, based on regional or cultural homogeneity, facilitates mutual learning and sharing of successful practices. Examples included Tunisia acting as a pivotal country for neighbouring countries and Nigeria inviting Cameroon to share ICT policy-making experiences. Diversifying partnerships, active engagement with the private sector, and strengthening local-level partnerships were deemed essential for addressing the digital gap within and between countries. The representative highlighted the critical role of sustainability and the need for innovative ideas and resources from the private sector. Lastly, he emphasized the importance of addressing the digital gap within local communities based on reasons like gender, generation, and region.

12. The representative of DEPA, Thailand, addressed the challenges and experiences faced by marginalized communities in accessing digital technologies. Besides the lack of internet infrastructure, challenges include digital illiteracy, poverty, an aging society, disabilities, and language barriers. These obstacles hinder marginalized communities from accessing essential services and opportunities, such as education, jobs, banking, and healthcare. The representative emphasized the need for a preventive and holistic approach to digital inclusion, focusing on access, affordability, adoption, digital skills, and creating supportive environments. In terms of innovative solutions, the representative highlighted Thailand’s promotion of smart city development since 2017. The initiative involves a three-phase approach, including promoting awareness, creating an ecosystem to support local governments, and implementing public-private partnerships. The government provides incentives, such as tax incentives, for service providers engaging in partnerships with local governments. Over 100 proposals from different cities have been received, with 40 approved so far, aiming to reach 100 cities by the end of the next year. Regarding the role of South-South cooperation in bridging the digital divide in Thailand, the representative stressed the need for partnerships and collaboration. He emphasized the importance of working with service providers, technology providers, local systems integrators, and financial institutions to implement digital transformation successfully. The representative shared an example from Estonia, where a collaborative approach involving banks, service providers, and equipment providers, backed by government guarantees, facilitated widespread adoption of e-government services among older citizens. This collaborative model resulted in a win-win situation for all involved parties.

13. The representative of HelpAge Viet Nam highlighted the unique digital challenges faced by the aging population, citing the Vietnamese experience as a valuable learning opportunity. The discussion emphasized the need for comprehensive digital inclusion, focusing on access, affordability, and adoption for marginalized communities. In Viet Nam, the rapid aging population, coupled with barriers like low income and digital illiteracy, created a significant digital divide among older individuals. To address these challenges, Viet Nam implemented an intergenerational setup help club model, promoting mutual support and learning. With over 6,000 clubs nationwide, the program aimed to integrate digital literacy into the lifelong learning activities of these clubs. Training sessions covered various aspects, including smartphone use, video creation, and online communication, fostering connections between older and younger generations. The achievements of the program included raising awareness among older individuals about the benefits of technology, addressing initial scepticism, and providing ongoing support through the intergenerational buddy system. The initiative showcased promising outcomes, such as increased confidence in using digital devices, decreased loneliness, and improved access to information, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the project’s success, resource limitations restricted its coverage to a few intergenerational setup help clubs, emphasizing the need for more support to expand the initiative to all 6,000 clubs in the future.
14. The representative of Pakistan highlighted the continuous improvement in the country's digital landscape, witnessing increased penetration of digital technologies. With substantial growth in internet connectivity and mobile phone usage, challenges persist in rural areas, hindering the benefits of digital transformation for marginalized populations. The tele-density stands at 80 per cent, with 193+ million mobile subscribers and 127 million mobile broadband subscribers. Despite this, a lack of awareness and localized digital literacy programs pose barriers, requiring innovative approaches for effective integration. Mitigating the digital divide necessitates accessible infrastructure, content in local languages, and broad-scale digital literacy initiatives. Collaborative research and innovation are vital for social inclusion, emphasizing the need for concerted efforts to ensure a digitally empowered and inclusive society in Pakistan.

15. The representative of Thailand highlighted TICA's commitment to international development cooperation, focusing on narrowing the digital divide. Putting human resources at the forefront, Thailand prioritizes policies that address food, job, health, environmental security, and energy, emphasizing the role of agents of change for sustainable development. The nation leverages homegrown digital technology as a model for South-South cooperation, sharing innovations through Annual International Training Courses in areas like agricultural product quality improvement and climate-smart agriculture. Acknowledging capacity limitations, Thailand collaborates with traditional partners to mobilize resources, extending cooperation to more countries and incorporating traditional technology to accelerate progress towards implementation of the SDGs. The representative affirmed South-South cooperation as crucial for narrowing the digital divide, advocating for trilateral cooperation to effectively accelerate SDGs and foster inclusive sustainable development.

16. The representative of Sweden expressed pleasure in joining the important meeting, presenting insights on Sweden's regional development cooperation with Asia and the Pacific. Emphasizing their five-year strategy, key priorities include environment, climate change, energy, human rights, gender equality, and democracy. Sweden aims to integrate rights and environmental perspectives into all grants, emphasizing innovative approaches and leveraging digitalization, including artificial intelligence (AI). Sweden values triangular cooperation for building broader relations in the region and seeks discussions on expanding opportunities for sustainable, inclusive development. Examples of ongoing partnerships were highlighted, spanning research capacity strengthening, South-South initiatives, and private sector engagement. The representative welcomed collaboration with like-minded funders to enhance South-South and Triangular cooperation in Asia and the Pacific.

17. The representative of Bangladesh addressed the common challenges faced by countries in the Asia-Pacific region, emphasizing the collective investment in digital public infrastructures. However, he noted existing gaps in areas such as digital inclusion, literacy, and security. The representative highlighted three key points during the presentation. Firstly, he discussed the role of the agency responsible for digital cooperation in Bangladesh, known as a2i. Originally conceived as "access to information," it has evolved into "aspired to innovate," reflecting a shift in focus from delivering public services to doorstep innovation. The #IamtheSolution initiative aims to empower citizens at the grassroots to devise solutions to local challenges. The second point focused on the launch of the E-Quality Center for Inclusive Innovation, aiming for a #zerodigitaldivide. The representative expressed the desire to promote a culture of innovation, particularly in developing countries, and
invited partners in the Asia-Pacific region to join this initiative. Lastly, the representative discussed the issue of technology transfer in the developing South and proposed exploring South-South and triangular cooperation to enhance networks for technology transfer and innovation. He suggested that ESCAP could play a role in building sustainable networks among academics, researchers, entrepreneurs, startups, and incubators. The representative expressed gratitude to the Indian Government for highlighting these priorities during the G20 Summit and looked forward to cooperating with ESCAP and other partners in the Asia-Pacific region.

Launch of the South-South Cooperation Connector and speed thinking session

1. Ms. Ureerat Chareontoh the Director-General of TICA noted the importance of the South-South Cooperation Connector as a pivotal moment in the collective regional pursuit of international development cooperation. This initiative, supported by TICA from its inception, stands as a tangible example of harnessing technology and innovation to elevate the efficiency and impact of development collaboration. In response to the evolving digital landscape, TICA has embraced online courses, addressing digital literacy and technology application in traditional programs. 20 upcoming online short courses with special emphasis on climate-smart agriculture and another on cutting-edge technologies in post-harvest, food processing, and waste utilization are accessible through the South-South Cooperation Connector platform, and these courses are set to play a pivotal role in knowledge dissemination. Acknowledging ESCAP’s instrumental role in bringing the South-South Cooperation Connector to fruition, the Director-General emphasized the platform’s significance and urged development stakeholders to actively engage, viewing the Connector as a catalyst for exchanging vital knowledge, experiences, and best practices in the realm of development cooperation. The launch marks a transformative step forward, empowering development partners to maximize collaboration for more impactful and sustainable outcomes in the region.

2. Ms. Siti Nugraha Mauludiah, Director-General of Information and Public Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia emphasized the significance of the South-South Cooperation Connector as a transformative step in fostering collaboration among countries from the Global South. The platform, leveraging digital tools, embodies a collective commitment to harnessing technology’s potential for the greater good. Functioning as a digital network, the South-South Cooperation Connector facilitates collaboration among stakeholders, connecting countries in need with donors, fostering mutual development and cooperative learning. Indonesia sees this platform as beneficial for both donors and recipients, aiming to contribute effectively and forge enduring partnerships for sustainable development, including triangular cooperation. Ms. Mauludiah encouraged the participation of more Asia-Pacific countries, highlighting the platform’s strength in inclusivity. The South-South Cooperation Connector was portrayed as a tool for collaboration and a digital bridge, uniting nations in the pursuit of co-prosperity and addressing common challenges more effectively.

3. The South-South Cooperation Connector was officially launched by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, inviting participants to connect by joining the platform.

4. During the Speed Thinking Session, delegates conducted moderated discussions in three groups addressing the topics of the communities of practice endorse 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. The outcomes of this session were summarized in a presentation by the secretariat in the Closing Session.

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

5. A panel discussion moderated by Mr. Faiyaz Murshid Kazi, Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, reviewed how innovative digital solutions can help the region meet its sustainable development challenges and shared examples of recent best practices. Panelists were Mr. Kazuya Suzuki, Chief Representative, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Thailand Office; Mr. Ulziisaikhan Ganbold, Director-General, Foreign Trade and Economic Development Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia; Mr. Mohamed Imad, Chief Project Executive, National Planning Department, Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Maldives; Ms. Gemma Edgar, Counsellor, Embassy of Australia; and Mr. Tobias Breunig, Advisor Agricultural Finance Thailand Agriculture & Food Cluster, GIZ (representing Ms. Ms. Nana Kuenkel, Director, Agriculture and Food Cluster, GIZ).

6. The representative of JICA outlined Japan's DX (digital transformation) approach, emphasizing collaboration with diverse partners such as the private sector, academia, United Nations organizations, and local governments. This inclusive approach involves knowledge sharing, technology proof of concepts, and provision of satellite data, with a vision to create a quality digital society promoting well-being and reducing disparities and cybersecurity risks across all sectors and SDGs. Notable interventions include Japan's provision of telemedicine ICU support to 12 countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, establishing a practitioner network. Furthermore, JICA supported the Metropolitan Water Authority of Thailand in addressing infrastructure maintenance challenges. A proof of concept for water pipeline diagnosis using AI in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area aimed at reducing operational costs by 15-20 per cent. Additionally, JICA assisted the Government of India in enhancing agriculture planning and precision through integrated agriculture mapping and AI verification. Collaborative efforts with TICA focused on offering nine courses, primarily following a triangular cooperation model with a focus on Asian countries. Notably, one course targeted African countries, and two courses centred on smart technology. Examples included practical applications for sustainable water management in collaboration with the Metropolitan Water Authority in Thailand and modernization of power distribution systems in ASEAN countries with the Metropolitan Electricity Authority in Thailand, TICA, and USAID. Moreover, JICA has engaged in a capacity-building project for cybersecurity and trusted digital services with the ASEAN Secretariat. The Thailand Smart City Expo 2023, co-organized with DEPA and the Department of Local Administration, facilitated the exchange of good practices among participants from various countries and organizations. In conclusion, the representative underscored the significance of promoting face-to-face opinion exchanges among communities for fostering digital advancements.

7. The representative of Mongolia discussed the country's journey towards a digital economy and sustainable development. He highlighted the E-Mongolia government strategy, introducing laws and amendments to support digital transformation. The E-Mongolia platform, focusing on E-business, transparency, and anti-corruption, exemplifies the public-private partnership. The digital nation strategy emphasizes infrastructure readiness, cybersecurity, digital literacy, and innovation. Regarding the impact, Mongolia's digital ecosystem faced challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, but previously flourished, ranking high in the Digital Ecosystem and Innovation Index. The representative stressed the importance of public-private partnerships, evident in the newly effective law on tech innovation and digital technology PPP. In response to a question about good
practices, the representative discussed Mongolia’s E-trade readiness assessment, emphasizing the significance of infrastructure, legal frameworks, skills development, and payment solutions for digital trade. He highlighted the role of Chinese platforms in supporting connectivity and cooperation. The representative also underscored the importance of think tanks, specifically mentioning Mongolia’s international think tank for landlocked developing countries, emphasizing collaboration and mutual understanding in developing and developed nations to create opportunities for all.

8. The representative of the Maldives highlighted the transformative power of digital innovation in shaping sustainable development paths for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share best practices and examples from the Maldives, emphasizing the unique challenges faced by SIDS. In addressing the question on how digital innovations can spearhead SDGs in SIDS, the representative shared examples. The Maldives, being a dispersed island nation, faced challenges in access to banking services, prompting the establishment of digital payment systems. This initiative increased digital transactions by 35 per cent, with a remarkable 50 per cent surge in mobile banking transactions over two years, facilitating financial inclusivity, especially in remote islands. The representative highlighted the growth of internet banking, ecommerce, and the oneGov initiative, streamlining public services and boosting citizen satisfaction by 25 per cent. Government investments in digital infrastructure, including a submarine cable for international connectivity, contributed to socio-economic progress. The representative emphasized the importance of affordability in internet connectivity. Regarding examples from the region, the representative discussed two crucial areas. Firstly, in digital health, the Maldives has a robust ecosystem for health innovation, including telemedicine, digitization of patient information, and remote healthcare services. Secondly, the country successfully distributed tablets to 99 per cent of the population before COVID, enabling continued education during the pandemic and emphasizing the importance of digital literacy. Overall, the examples presented by the Maldives underscored the potential of digital innovation in addressing unique challenges faced by SIDS and fostering sustainable development.

9. The representative of Australia highlighted valuable insights and contributions to sustainable development through digital innovation. Emphasizing the significance of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, especially the importance of SDG 17, the representative focused on global partnership revitalization. The representative underlined the interconnected challenges of demographic and technological changes and the existing digital divide, emphasizing the need for knowledge sharing and cooperation. Two impactful examples were shared. In Mongolia, Australia partnered with the World Bank on a program for managing groundwater resources in the South Gobi. This initiative utilized automated readings of wells to provide real-time data on water levels, crucial for a region with limited rainfall. In Thailand, collaboration between Australia’s Bureau of Meteorology and Thailand’s Office of National Water Resources enhanced flood forecasting efficiency, a critical element in emergency responses. The representative stressed that Australia’s expertise in managing water resources made such partnerships effective. The importance of understanding local contexts and supporting locally led solutions was highlighted, citing examples of cooperation in the Mekong region and the Pacific. The approach involves getting behind locally led institutions, supporting frameworks like Ayeyawady - Chao Phraya - Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), and avoiding prescriptive development from partners. In addressing the second question on strategies for effective adaptation and implementation of best practices in digital innovation, the representative acknowledged challenges arising from diverse country contexts. The representative further emphasized the importance of good development outcomes and the value
of understanding local contexts to support and promote locally led solutions and concluded by highlighting the significance of partnerships based on shared interests, cultural understanding, and existing networks, citing examples from the Mekong region and the Pacific.

10. The representative of GIZ provided insights into the organization's digital solutions, emphasizing its internal digital transformation before extending support to partner countries. He introduced GIZ's two main strategies for data-driven and innovative digitalisation in development cooperation, namely "Digital at Heart" and "Digital for Development," outlining the journey to becoming a credible digital service provider. Examples were shared, including challenges faced in implementing over 100 separate digital learning platforms, leading to the need for synergy and harmonization. Regarding solutions in agriculture, a specific example from Thailand was highlighted. The Sustainable Palm Oil project tackled challenges in the palm oil industry, where farmers' lack of robust farm records posed a problem for global supply chain traceability. GIZ developed a mobile application enabling farmers to adopt sustainable practices, attain certification, and coordinate with extension officers. The representative stressed the increasing importance of digital tools in addressing climate change concerns related to greenhouse gas emissions in agriculture. In response to the second question about GIZ's role in South-South and triangular cooperation, the representative discussed how GIZ, as a participant from the Global North, can contribute. Triangular cooperation, especially in Asia, was deemed crucial, and GIZ has been involved in various projects, including the Triangular Cooperation Fund. Concrete examples were given, such as a project in China and India, facilitating knowledge sharing on e-commerce in Lao PDR, and initiatives in Thailand focused on climate change treaties and international transfer of mitigation outcomes under the Paris Agreement. The representative emphasized the increasing importance of triangular cooperation for GIZ and highlighted ongoing and upcoming projects as illustrative examples.

Country statements – Session 3

11. The representative of Singapore emphasized the global concern for sustainable development and climate change. Acknowledging Singapore's vulnerability due to its small island size, low elevation, and significant reclaimed land, the Singapore Cooperation Program (SCP) has shifted focus to the global sustainability agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, promoting the 17 SDGs. A recent three-year Sustainability Action Package (SAP) led by the Foreign Minister aims at aiding developing countries in decarbonization, sustainability, resilience, and green projects. The SAP includes courses on sustainable financing, climate change strategies, and other topics, benefiting over 200 participants from 60 countries. Noteworthy initiatives involve drone mapping for flood monitoring in Indonesia. The SCP, active for 30 years, has seen over 150,000 foreign officials from 180 countries participate. Specialized programmes like SPARKS and Digital Forum of Small States focus on climate resilience, cybersecurity, and digital transformation. Over 40 SCP courses this year targeted 900 officials across 90 countries, emphasizing big data engineering for smarter infrastructure and clean energy. The representative expressed hope for collaborative progress in digital transformation, emphasizing the importance of partnership for a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable future.

12. The representative of Kazakhstan extended an invitation to the Digital Ministerial Conference in 2024 in Astana and introduced the proposal for the creation of a Centre for Digital Solutions for Sustainable Development, hosted by Kazakhstan. This centre would aim to serve as a hub for engineers and policymakers to provide practical digital solutions and share Kazakhstan’s experience and technologies. Kazakhstan formulated a proposal for 23 digital solutions, which include public
services, cloud document management, taxation, customs procedures, etc. These solutions, with a successful track record, would be available to benefit Central Asian countries and beyond. The representative invited participation of member States and organizations in this initiative, encouraging suggestions and involvement in the Task Force. He reiterated Kazakhstan’s readiness to provide premises for the proposed Centre and noted the government’s interest in sponsoring a resolution addressing the context of digital solutions in sustainable development at the 80th Session of the ESCAP Commission in April 2024, inviting others member States to consider co-sponsoring this resolution.

13. The representative of India highlighted the pivotal role of digitalization in achieving the SDGs and emphasized the importance of accessible digital infrastructures. India’s Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) initiative, based on open-sourcing government platforms, offered transformative solutions for public service delivery. India’s successful digital inclusion efforts, including the India Stack programme that helped promote financial and social inclusion, India’s digital identity platform AADHAAR, the Unified Payment Interface, the CoWIN COVID-19 vaccination platform, and the Open Network for Digital Commerce, were recognized. During India’s G20 Presidency, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi announced two initiatives: the Global Digital Public Infrastructure Repository (GDPIR) and a Social Impact Fund (SIF). The GDPIR served as a comprehensive resource hub, showcasing 54 DPIs from 16 countries, addressing the knowledge gap in DPI design and governance. The SIF, with an initial pledge of 25 million USD from India, aimed to accelerate DPI implementation in the global South, providing financial support for achieving SDGs. India emphasized digital skilling and South-South cooperation, focusing on transparency, independence, and sustained growth in developing countries within an open and rules-based global order.

14. The representative of Pakistan emphasized the country’s commitment to enhancing connectivity in underserved regions through initiatives like telecommunication infrastructure, broadband deployment, and digital literacy programs. The Universal Service Fund (USF) played a pivotal role in extending 3G and 4G services to rural areas, fostering inclusive socio-economic development. Compulsory contributions from telecom operators fuelled the USF, expanding mobile telephony and internet access in remote locations. Ignite’s DigiSkills Program enabled around a million youths to acquire digital skills, facilitating employment and freelancing opportunities. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Pakistan witnessed a surge in digital solutions, including financial inclusion programs like Easypaisa and JazzCash, telehealth services such as Sehat Kahani, and gender-inclusive initiatives for digital literacy and skills training. Special tariff packages for women and digital bootcamps for female entrepreneurs contributed to advancing digital inclusivity. Acknowledging challenges in reaching remote communities, Pakistan actively pursued enhanced South-South cooperation to expedite learning from partner countries’ experiences. This collaborative approach accelerates the adoption of successful strategies, ensuring the benefits of technological advancements reach every corner of the nation and leaving no one behind in the digital journey.

15. The representative of Timor-Leste highlighted the significance of the event in discussing the role of South-South and Triangular Cooperation in advancing the 2030 agenda in the Asia-Pacific region. Acknowledging the pivotal role of digital innovation, Timor-Leste emphasized its strategic plan for digital development, aiming for an inclusive, fully digitized economy to empower its people. Timor-Leste and Australia collaborated on connecting Timor-Leste to the North-West Cable system, a crucial step for robust connectivity infrastructure. Ongoing negotiations with a local company focused on providing fibre optic services to neighbouring countries to ensure equitable access to digital resources. Affirming its commitment to the 2030 Agenda, Timor-Leste stressed the
importance of South-South and Triangular Cooperation in achieving sustainable development goals. The representative expressed gratitude to development partners, TICA, and UN agencies for supporting key sectors like agriculture, education, tourism, and digital technology through these cooperative channels. Timor-Leste recognized the role of cooperation in fostering economic, social, and environmental development, contributing to the global partnership for sustainable development.

Session 4. “Digital innovation for technical assistance providers”

16. A panel discussion on the role of digital innovation for technical assistance providers was moderated by Ms. Mary Anne Padua, Head of the Technical Cooperation Council of the Philippines. Panellists were Ms. Siti Nugraha Mauludiah, Director-General of Information and Public Diplomacy, Indonesia; Mr. Arken Arystanov, Chairman of the Board, Kazakhstan Agency for International Development (KazAID); Mr. Tian Lin, Director General, Department of Supervision and Evaluation China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA); Mr. Steven G. Olive, Mission Director, United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

17. The representative of Indonesia highlighted the country's dynamic digital landscape and its commitment to advancing digital innovation. Indonesia’s priorities include enhancing connectivity, fostering a robust startup ecosystem, and developing digital infrastructure for inclusivity. The national digital ecosystem, with over 73 per cent internet penetration, supports various sectors such as education, digital payments, and e-commerce, contributing significantly to the economy. In the context of South-South and triangular cooperation, Indonesia emphasizes equal access to digital development for global South countries. The country is dedicated to narrowing the digital gap and enhancing the capacities of developing nations in achieving global development objectives. Regarding the critical needs and challenges faced by emerging technical cooperation agencies in establishing institutional frameworks, Indonesia discussed the importance of a strong legal framework and enhanced coordination mechanisms. Challenges include resource allocation, regulatory frameworks that are both accountable and flexible, and ensuring seamless collaboration among government bodies, non-government sectors, and international partners. Indonesia encourages collaboration with the private sector, including startups, and is open to partnerships with traditional donors for learning and sharing experiences in technology and digital advancement. The representative shared Indonesia's success stories, including the implementation of an e-government system, digital applications for transparency and accountability, and capacity-building programs in disaster management, customs automation, digital literacy, and more. Indonesia is committed to incorporating technology into its priority programs for South-South cooperation in the coming years.

18. The representative of Kazakhstan highlighted the country's priorities in digital innovation, with 70 per cent of new products linked to digital industry innovation. Kazakhstan sees digitalization as part of strategic economic development and has set five priorities, including solving digital issues for the people and creating human capital by training 100,000 IT specialists in the next three years. The nation aims to increase IT exports fivefold within the same timeframe. In terms of regional engagement for digital innovation, Kazakhstan focuses on identifying its competitive expertise and technologies. For instance, he shared experiences in implementing e-government systems and providing innovative solutions for internet access in remote areas using satellite services. Regarding challenges faced by new technical cooperation agencies, Kazakhstan stressed the importance of achievable goals, political decisions, and sharing best practices among countries. He proposed
collaborative efforts, joint funds, and emphasizing the need for high-quality human resources, including training IT professionals, and fostering collaboration with non-governmental agencies and the private sector. In conclusion, the challenges involve balancing the priorities of governmental and non-governmental entities, addressing the psychological aspects of managing projects, and finding effective solutions through collaboration across different sectors.

19. The representative of China highlighted China's priorities in digital innovation, emphasizing the comprehensive approach to prioritizing various aspects like e-government, e-commerce, and technological advancements. China's commitment to digitalizing public services, promoting digital transformation, and bridging the digital divide was emphasized. President Xi's remarks stressed the importance of an open, fair, and equitable environment for scientific and technological progress in the Asia-Pacific region. Regarding China's engagement in digital innovation in the region, the speaker, representing the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), outlined three main areas: infrastructure development, public service digitalization, and people-to-people exchanges. Examples included building 5G infrastructure, supporting rural e-commerce projects, and implementing initiatives to improve customs management in partner countries. On critical needs and challenges faced by emerging technical cooperation agencies, the speaker acknowledged that China, too, faces challenges in adapting its foreign aid model. CIDCA has transformed its aid approach to include market-oriented elements and collaboration with private enterprises. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI) were highlighted as important frameworks, with a focus on digital interconnectivity and support for the realization of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. CIDCA has established a global development promotion centre, a network, and funding pools. The representative noted the establishment of a global development and corporation fund totalling four billion USD. Additionally, approximately 12 billion USD have been mobilized from three national and international financial institutions to implement the GDI. The funds will be allocated to two pools: a project pool to showcase achievements and highlight successful projects, and an incubator pool to support promising projects in securing funding and connecting potential fund providers with viable projects. The GDI places significant emphasis on innovation, especially involving the youth to ensure sustainable development in the digital realm.

20. The representative of the United States of America emphasized the transformative power of digital technology in fostering economic growth and improving development outcomes, lifting millions out of poverty. Acknowledging the potential risks, the representative highlighted the importance of careful planning for digital technology integration. Answering the first question, the representative outlined USAID's priorities in supporting digital innovation, emphasizing the need for a digital strategy. USAID released its first-ever digital strategy in 2020, focusing on effective programming, evidence-based practices, and the development of secure digital ecosystems. He stressed the importance of incorporating digital technology into technical assistance and recommended the deliberate and holistic use of digital tools. Addressing the second question, the representative shared examples of USAID's results from its digital strategy, including the use of the Google platform worldwide, sophisticated information solutions for budget and data management, and innovative technologies for data collection. He emphasized the importance of human-centred design and sustainability in digital innovation. Additionally, the representative discussed USAID's efforts in cybersecurity, wildlife protection, disaster preparedness, epidemic control, and support for ASEAN's digital economy framework. In conclusion, the representative underscored the significance of strategy implementation, showcasing USAID's practical results in utilizing digital technology for positive development outcomes in various sectors across the Asia-Pacific region.
In summary, the panellists reflected on the role of the DG Forum emphasizing the importance of practical solutions, focused discussions on key issues, and collaborative efforts to enhance learning and efficiency in South-South and triangular cooperation within the Asia-Pacific region. The representative of Indonesia emphasized the DG Forum as a crucial platform for exchanging practical best practices and solutions, particularly in addressing challenges faced by developing and emerging donors. She proposed the idea of smaller group discussions in future forums to enhance practical takeaways and advocated for increased visibility of the South-South Cooperation Connector. The representative of Kazakhstan stressed the importance of inviting the right participants to discussions at the right time, focusing on crucial issues. He highlighted bilateral meetings that resulted in the creation of memorandums of understanding and a potential fund. Collaborative efforts with Azerbaijan were also discussed for real South-South and triangular cooperation. The representative of China expressed the Forum's timeliness and significance, suggesting its use to discuss key issues and seek common ground. China emphasized the need for ESCAP to play a coordinating role, avoiding duplication of efforts in triangular cooperation. China also advocated for forums like the Sunshine Forum, focusing on supervision, evaluation, statistics, and anti-corruption. The representative of the United States highlighted the purpose of the DG Forum as a platform for sharing experiences and good practices, particularly in digital development. Examples were provided, such as collaboration between USAID and Thailand International Cooperation Agency to transfer knowledge on digital economy development to Laos. The representative suggested a matchmaking exercise to facilitate knowledge exchange based on topics of interest.

Country statements – Session 4

22. The representative of Azerbaijan highlighted the recent SPECA Economic Forum dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the institution, held in Baku under Azerbaijan's chairmanship. The summit aimed to address post-pandemic realities, enhance regional partnerships, and accelerate the realization of sustainable development goals. Azerbaijan has been actively involved in international donorship, transforming itself from a recipient to a donor country. Azerbaijan's development agency, Azerbaijan International Development Agency (AIDA), established in 2011, has played a significant role in assisting poverty eradication and sustainable development globally. Despite challenges faced in the early years of independence, Azerbaijan has overcome obstacles and become an active participant in global development processes. During Azerbaijan's chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's donorship activities reached a peak. Azerbaijan provided humanitarian assistance to over 80 countries, both directly and through international partners. The government scholarship program and the international education grant program have awarded full higher educational scholarships to students from approximately 100 countries. Azerbaijan emphasized the importance of global cooperation and highlighted its commitment to supporting the recovery of Africa and small island development, as declared by the President of Azerbaijan at the Non-Aligned Movement summit. In conclusion, the representative reiterated Azerbaijan's strong commitment to international donorship, including support for schools, hospitals, and triangular cooperation, emphasizing the country's dedication to global progress.

23. The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran highlighted their country's achievements in economic growth and social welfare through extensive measures and internal capacities. He emphasized the importance of reading reports on their country's development available from domestic and international sources. ESCAP's Digital Innovation Conference was acknowledged for
its valuable insights. The representative outlined three crucial strategies for smart governance and
digital economy: digitalization of government services, development of a digital ecosystem, and
creating a platform for information technology applications. The implementation of these
strategies led to significant achievements, including a 90 per cent increase in mobile network
coverage, 90 per cent mobile phone ownership, and a 7.5 per cent share of the digital economy.
Key milestones included the establishment of an Iranian social network with over 40 million users,
a record 6.5 terabyte per second on the National Information Network, and the connection of 16
provinces and 3,000 cities with a fibre network. Plans for high-speed internet access for 3.5 million
Iranian families and launching a special internet service for children and teenagers were also
mentioned. In the seventh development plan, the Islamic Republic of Iran set extensive five-year
goals for digital technology and digital economy to enhance smart governance. He expressed
willingness to collaborate with ESCAP member States, proposing initiatives such as developing
trade and economic relations, utilizing Iranian corridor capacities, and exchanging information on
digital technology applications in areas like child protection, health, and the environment. The
representative emphasized the importance of sharing capacity, knowledge, and experience for the
mutual benefit of all countries.

24. The representative of Thailand emphasized the critical role of digital connectivity in the
contemporary world and acknowledged the importance of technology in achieving the SDGs. TICA
recognized the need for digital international cooperation and highlighted their efforts to transform
the organization before sharing lessons with other countries. One example of their digital
transformation was the use of data for monitoring and evaluation. TICA collaborated with UNFPA
Thailand to conduct a social return on investment evaluation, demonstrating the social, economic,
and environmental values of collaborative work. The aim was to convince partner governments to
sustain project outcomes for long-term sustainable development. TICA acknowledged the
significance of statistics for transparency and accountability and is working closely with the OECD
to enhance their official development assistance (ODA) database systems, aligning them with
international standards. Thailand is exploring the possibility of joining the OECD Total Official
Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD) as an international standard for measuring resources.
During the COVID-19 pandemic, TICA embraced digital platforms, leading to an evolution in
capacity-building initiatives and is currently considering further improvements in internal
procedures through digitalization, including E-submission, E-application, E-consultation, and a
Knowledge Bank. TICA believes that sharing these lessons on digital innovation, both inhouse
improvements and practical practices in international development cooperation, can accelerate
development outcomes, especially for emerging donors.

25. Noting its country’s own experience of transitioning from recipient to donor, the
representative of Japan highlighted the importance of leveraging both bilateral and multilateral
platforms for regional development. The forum was seen as a valuable opportunity to detect
mutual synergies among development partners and reduce potential duplication of efforts.
Coordination with multilateral development banks, development financial institutions, the private
sector, and other partners was emphasized as crucial to enable efficient and effective outcomes
that can further be scaled up. Given government limits in addressing all development challenges,
Japan’s recent development charter revisions call for pursuing synergies and active participation
among various actors, including civil society and the private sector, and the promotion of
transparent and fair international-rules based order in acknowledgment of recent debt
sustainability concerns. Digitalization was identified as a key driver for wider participation and
efficient problem-solving. The representative highlighted the value of digital collaboration,
especially involving startups, to identify innovative solutions for development challenges. Referring to the concept of data free flow with trust, the representative noted the value to ESCAP and development partners in the region to promote foundations for digitalization that benefit developing countries, while addressing security risks and disparities. The importance of capacity development and training of human resources was emphasized, considering ongoing international discussions on the need to ensure digital safety, governance, and interoperability. Japan recognizes human security as a guiding principle, emphasizing the importance of protecting and empowering individuals. This fully applies to development cooperation for digitalization, in an aim to create a society where all countries and citizens can benefit from digitalization safely and securely. Japan's basic stance is to support sustainable, local/country-driven efforts for long-term sustainable growth through active dialogues, knowledge exchanges, and cooperation based on UN principles of inclusiveness, transparency, and fairness. The representative expressed gratitude to the ESCAP secretariat and TICA for the valuable forum and the insights gained.

26. The representative of Pakistan provided a written statement to the secretariat in which he suggested intensifying collaborative initiatives in digital technologies and services through the South-South Cooperation Connector, with the Asia-Pacific DG Forum taking a leadership role. Pakistan expressed interest in experience sharing, capacity building, and collaborative research, focusing on addressing unique challenges in the digital landscape for rural and marginalized communities. Emphasizing the impact of emerging technologies like generative AI, AR/VR/XR, and Internet of Things, Pakistan envisioned narrowing the digital divide within diverse populations and regions, fostering cooperation among South-South nations. Pakistan envisioned a dedicated, single window for technical cooperation at the national level to expedite the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and collaborative research. The representative suggested designating the Asia-Pacific DG Forum as a permanent focal platform for digital innovative solutions and knowledge sharing. This strategic move aimed to enhance technical cooperation, promote joint efforts in research and innovation, and collectively address the challenges and opportunities posed by the dynamic digital landscape. The establishment of a permanent platform would have underscored a collective commitment to advancing digital inclusion and socio-economic development across the South-South network.

Closing

27. Ms. Zeynep Orhun Girard, Chief of the Capacity Development and Partnerships Section ESCAP, provided a presentation on the preparations for the 6th DG Forum, summarizing outcomes of the discussions held during the 5th session. She highlighted concrete requests and recommendations expressed during the Speed Thinking Session, focusing on three key areas addressed in the group discussions: the South-South Cooperation Connector, support for technical assistance providers, and strengthening the Asia-Pacific DG Forum.

a. South-South Cooperation Connector:
   - Identified challenges included finding entry points for new providers, potential duplication with other tools, and the need for minimum recipient capacity.
   - Recommendations included improving data analysis/digital analytical tools, the tool's format and content, and coordination to avoid duplication with other platforms.
   - Encouraged interested countries to engage through the Community of Practice for matchmaking and South-South Cooperation Connector improvement.

b. Support for Technical Assistance Providers:
• Challenges for new providers included operational capacity, access to expertise, resource constraints, and coordination issues.
• Areas of support and knowledge transfer from experienced providers included identifying untapped expertise, incentivizing country ownership, and structuring funding for technical assistance.
• Modalities for learning and knowledge transfer suggested included study visits, sharing templates, guidelines, lessons learned, success stories, and diverse learning methods.

c. Strengthening the Asia-Pacific DG Forum:
• Proposed ways to enhance the Forum’s relevance included reporting elements for intersession exchanges, collaboration with subregional organizations, and more engagement from other UN agencies.
• Suggestions for selecting the annual theme included alignment with General Assembly key agendas/ ESCAP and UNGA mandates and exploring themes relevant to emerging donors. The prevailing approach aligns the theme of the DG Forum with that of the corresponding ESCAP Commission session, which is mandated by member States.
• Emphasized the importance of collaboration with subregional organizations, private sector involvement, and learning from other regions’ experiences.

The representative concluded by inviting feedback on the Forum’s format, duration, and sessions, and encouraged participation in the Community of Practice accessible through the South-South Cooperation Connector (link) to contribute to the organization of future sessions. Additionally, considerations for the next Forum, such as the theme, venue, and format, were discussed, with an open invitation for countries and agencies to propose hosting future sessions.

28. The representative of Japan requested clarifications on the communication of decisions and recommendations of the Forum as well as any possible action implications, as the text has not been circulated in paper at the Forum. She requested information on the next venue as well as on whether this was a Regular Budget event as she hopes future sessions to continue being organized in Bangkok and in hybrid mode.

29. In response, the secretariat confirmed that the summary of proceedings would be shared with all participants, giving delegations an opportunity to provide comments and writing. The secretariat clarified that this event was under Regular Budget programming and can be supplemented by extra-budgetary contributions, as necessary, and reiterated the invitation to interested member States to host future sessions of the DG Forum, noting that Bangkok would remain the alternative fallback option.

30. Mr. Arken Arystanov, the Chair of the fifth Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum delivered the key messages and decisions of the Fifth Session of the Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum which are captured in the Chair’s Summary:

(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 on establishment of 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) The Forum encouraged Asia-Pacific countries 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 also engaged in the three communities of practice and 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 State-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 hence encouraged to continue their active engagement in driving the Forum through:

1. 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;

2. 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;

3. Hosting or to co-organizing annual sessions of the Forum;
4. Taking active part in the delivery of the session programme by carrying out chairing, moderating, speaking roles.

(xi) The Forum emphasized 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.

31. The Chair further emphasized the importance of deciding on the arrangements of the sixth session of the Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum and encouraged countries to indicate their wish to host future sessions of the Forum.

32. Mrs. Arunee Hiam, Deputy Director-General of TICA, conveyed closing remarks, extending sincere gratitude to all delegations for their active participation. Highlighting the ambitious vision of sustainable development, the representative emphasized the pivotal role of global partnerships in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The centrality of South-South and triangular cooperation in advancing these goals was underscored. Acknowledging the incredible potential of digital technologies in addressing complex challenges, concerns were raised about the widening digital divide and social inequality. Insights shared by speakers illuminated how development actors can leverage digital technologies for sustainable and inclusive growth, overcoming barriers, and ensuring accessibility. Reflecting on the success of the Forum, the representative credited the collaborative efforts of participants and speakers, considering it a testament to collective endeavours in promoting progress and prosperity in the region. The hope was expressed for continued and deepened connections, fostering dynamic cooperation beyond the forum. Ms. Hiam encouraged all to carry the momentum forward, staying innovative in facing challenges in the digital era. The call to turn aspirations into impactful actions and collaborate for a more inclusive and sustainable future resonated as a concluding message from the 5th Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum.

33. Mr. Adnan H. Aliani, summarizing the contributions at the fifth Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum, expressed appreciation for an intense and engaging one-and-a-half days of discussions. The Forum, attended by over 100 participants (including 10 participants online), showcased a strong interest in advancing South-South and Triangular Cooperation for the 2030 Agenda. He reiterated ESCAP’s commitment to ensuring the DG Forum remains a substantive, stimulating, and relevant platform for peer exchange. Directors General of Technical Cooperation were urged to take the lead in shaping the Forum, engaging in communities of practice, and leading discussions within the South-South Connector.
Annex - List of Participants MEMBERS

Armenia

• H.E. Mr. Vahram Kazhoyan, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Armenia to ESCAP

Australia

• Ms. Gemma Edgar, Counsellor, Embassy of Australia

Azerbaijan

• Mr. Sarkhan Ismayilov, Deputy Director, Azerbaijan International Development Agency (AIDA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs
• Ms. Ulviya Karaca, Programm Director, AIDA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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• Mr. Faiyaz Murshid Kazi, Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
• Mr. S. M. Mahbub Alam, Joint Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance
• Mr. Saroar Ahmed Saleheen, Economic Counsellor and Alternate Permanent Representative to ESCAP, Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
• Mr. Md. Anwar Hossain, Senior Assistant Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance
• Mr. A K M, Sohel, Joint Secretary (UN Wing), Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance
• Mr. Abdul Jalil, Joint Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance

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Cambodia

• H.E. Mr. Korm Ribaun, Secretary-General, National Committee for ESCAP

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• Mr. Tian Lin, Director General, Department of Supervision and Evaluation, China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA)
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• Mr. Paul Boulet Desbareau, Agence Française de Développement (AFD) Group, Expertise France representative for South East Asia

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• Mr. Giorgi Dapkviashvili, Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development

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• Ms. Briliantina Putri, Deputy Director, Indonesia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia
• Ms. Mustika Hanum Widodo, First Secretary, Embassy of Indonesia
• Mr. Aji Nasution, Minister Counsellor, Embassy of Indonesia *Iran (Islamic Republic of)*
• Mr. Seyed Mahdi Niyazi, Deputy Head, Planning and Budget Organization (PBO)
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**Japan**

• Mr. Kazuya Suzuki, Chief Representative, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Thailand Office
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• Mr. Yudai Aoyagi, Researcher/Adviser for Economic Affairs, Embassy of Japan
• Mr. Kobchai Songsrisanga, Senior Program Officer, JICA
• Ms. Somsri Sukumpantanasan, Senior Program Officer, JICA
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- Mr. Mohamed Imad, Chief Project Executive, Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, National Planning Department

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- Mr. Tuguldur Galbadrakh, Senior Specialist, Ministry of Economy and Development

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- Mr. Prakash Adhikari, Chargé d'Affaires a.i., Embassy of Nepal
- Mr. Yasir Hussain, Chargé d’Affaires & Alternate Permanent Representative of Pakistan to ESCAP, Embassy of Pakistan
- Ms. Faiza Haseeb, Counsellor & Deputy Permanent Representative of Pakistan to ESCAP, Embassy of Pakistan
- Mr. Nasir Mahmood, Chief, Information & Communication Technology, Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives

Papua New Guinea

- Mr. Peter Mirino, Acting High Commissioner
- Ms. Mary Anne Padua, Head of the Technical Cooperation Council of the Philippines
- Ms. Beatriz Ines Herrera-Davila, Second Secretary and Consul, Alternate Permanent Representative to ESCAP, Embassy of the Philippines
- Ms. Rosette Razon, Attaché, Embassy of the Philippines

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- Mr. Hwang Jae Sang, Director-General of Development Strategy and Portfolio Management Department, Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)
- Ms. Youngsuk Jun, Country Director, KOICA
- Ms. Hee Heun Lee, Assistant Manager of Capacity Enhancement Program Department, Assistant Manager of Capacity Enhancement Program Department, KOICA
- Mr. Daeshik Jo, Secretary General, Korea NGO Council for Overseas Development Cooperation (KCOC)*
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Russian Federation

- Mr. Denis Degterev, Leading Researcher, Institute of Africa Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences*
- Mr. Andrei Sakharov, Research fellow, Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA)*
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• Ms. Jolene Tan, Director-General, Technical Cooperation Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
• Ms. Jing Han Wong, Deputy Director, International Programmes, Technical Cooperation Programme, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
• Mr. Ernest Tay, Technical Cooperation Officer, Technical Cooperation Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
• Ms. Celine Leo, Foreign Service Officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Sri Lanka

• H.E. Ms. Chaminda I. Colonne, Ambassador & Permanent Representative to ESCAP, Embassy of Sri Lanka
• H.E. Mr. Peter Mohan Maithri Pieris, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations (keynote address)
• Mrs. Vireshika Bandara, First Secretary & Deputy Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the ESCAP, Embassy of Sri Lanka

Tajikistan

• Mr. Habibov Tohir, Head of the Department of Foreign Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade

Thailand

• Mrs. Ureerat Chareontoh, Director-General of Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA)
• Mrs. Arunee Hiam, Deputy Director-General of TICA
• Ms. Chidchanok Malayawong, Director of Development Promotion and Coordination Division, TICA
• Ms. Natta Akapaiboon, First Secretary, TICA
• Mrs. Yada Hattatammanoon Grasso, First Secretary, TICA
• Mr. Supakorn Siddichai, Executive Vice President, Digital Technology and Innovation Development Unit, Digital Economy Promotion Agency (DEPA) (invited speaker)

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• H.E. Mr. Juvencio de Jesus Martins, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative to ESCAP, Embassy of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
• Mrs. Merina Ursula Xareal, First Secretary and Assistant Permanent Representative to ESCAP, Embassy of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

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• Ms. Nabila Suria, Permanent Representative to ESCAP, Embassy of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
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• Ms. Sophia Nayak-Luke, Deputy Permanent Representative to ESCAP, Embassy of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

United States of America

• Mr. Steven G. Olive, Mission Director, United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
• Mr. Steven Rynecki, Economic Growth Lead, USAID
• Ms. Karima Chaisaengchan, Project Management Specialist (Economic Growth), USAID
• Ms. Jennifer Carvalho, Program Officer, USAID
**Uzbekistan**
- Mr. Fakhriddin Sultanov, Consulate General of the Republic of Uzbekistan
- Mr. Nuriddin Mamakulov, Consul, Deputy Permanent Representative to ESCAP

**Viet Nam**
- Ms. Nguyen Thi Dieu Trinh, Deputy Director-General, Ministry of Planning and Investment
- Ms. Nong Thi Hong Hanh, Senior Official, Ministry of Planning and Investment
- Ms. Diep, Liaison Officer, Embassy of Viet Nam
- Ms. Tran Bich Thuy, Country Director, HelpAge International (invited speaker)

*Participants of the North-East Asia Development Cooperation Forum (2023)*

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- Mr. Fernando Rodrigo Berguño Counsellor, Deputy Head of Mission and Deputy Permanent Observer to ESCAP, Embassy of Chile

**Germany**
- Ms. Nana Kuenkel, Director, Agriculture and Food Cluster, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) (invited speaker), replaced by Mr. Tobias Breunig, Advisor Agricultural Finance Thailand Agriculture & Food Cluster, GIZ

**Guatemala**
- Mr. Mauro Esteban Guzmán Castillo, Minister Counsellor, Embassy of Guatemala

**Mexico**
- Mr. Miguel Angel George Cruz, Head of Cultural, Cooperation, Economic and Trade Promotion

**Morocco**
- Mr. Mohamed Amine Belghit, Third Secretary, Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco

**Peru**
- Ms. Cecilia Zunilda Galarreta Bazan, Ambassador of the Republic of Peru to Thailand

**Sweden**
- Ms. Anna Maria Oltorp, Head of Regional Development Cooperation Section, Embassy of Sweden
- Mr. Eren Zink, First Secretary/Senior Research Advisor, Embassy of Sweden

**UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES AND BODIES**

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)**
- Mr. Jiaoqun Shi, Special adviser South-South and Triangular Cooperation
- Ms. Xi Cao, Regional Innovative Finance Specialist United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
• Ms. Ahyeon LEE

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• Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP
• Mr. Adnan H. Aliani, Director, Strategy and Programme Management Division (SPMD)
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