Eighty-first Session of UNESCAP

Statement by India

Agenda 2 (a): Current and emerging policy issues for inclusive and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific: general debate

Madam/Mr. Chair,

I would also like to congratulate the Chair and the Vice-Chairs of the 81st Session of the Commission on their election, and reiterate my delegation's full support to their work during the session. I would also take this opportunity to thank the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Secretariat for the excellent arrangements for this meeting.

At the outset, I would like to convey our deepest condolences to those who have lost their lives in the devastating earthquake in Myanmar and Thailand. India has provided urgent humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar in the aftermath of this catastrophe. We remain ready to support both countries in their efforts to recover from this disaster.

Excellencies,

Almost ten years after the adoption of SDGs, it is now well established that at the current rate of implementation, Asia-Pacific will miss the target year of 2030 by several decades. This compels us to think differently, and strengthen partnerships across the region and beyond.

As the countries in Asia-Pacific region strive to recover from global economic shocks, and navigate developmental challenges, inclusive and sustainable development must remain at the heart of national and regional strategies.

Urbanization is a key driver of SDG implementation as it offers opportunities for growth and innovation. India is experiencing a steady shift from rural to urban living. By 2047, nearly 50% of India’s population will live in urban areas, which are expected to contribute over 80% of the GDP. Effectively managing this urban transition is therefore crucial.

India's urbanization journey is progressively becoming more and more decentralized, driven not only by the metropolitan

cities but also by smaller towns, and the transformation of villages into urban centers.

To address the unique challenges associated to rapid urbanization, the Smart Cities Mission was launched in India in 2015 to enhance the functionality of cities through emerging innovations by making them more livable by improving service delivery, transportation and environment.

Through concerted efforts, significant progress has also been achieved in providing universal water supply and improved sanitation, while also focusing on rejuvenation of water bodies, groundwater management, and improving water recycling capacities.

This year's theme of the Commission is timely and vital. We look forward to learning from experiences of others.

Madam Chair,

For India, the 2030 Agenda remains the cornerstone our development policies, reflecting our abiding commitment to leave no one behind.

In a diverse country like India, with multiplicity of challenges at local levels, progress in achieving the SDGs has been possible through effective localization. Today, there is a framework in place at local level, to leverage data-driven monitoring across various thematic areas, and for evidence-based decision making suited to local conditions.

Over the last decade, 250 million people in India has been able to escape multi-dimensional poverty, demonstrating that Sustainable Development can indeed be successful, much of this can be attributed to effective localization. We are ready to share our experiences from this journey with our partners in the region.

Digital innovation has proven to be a powerful tool for the implementation the 2030 Agenda. Recognizing its transformative potential, India is actively employing digital innovations across sectors encompassing governance, finance, urban development, healthcare, and education, and thereby fostering inclusion, transparency, and efficiency in service delivery, and reducing inequality.

The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has revolutionized financial access. Due to increasing digital penetration in rural areas, in Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance sector, over 95% of banking payment transactions are now digital.

We are creating digital templates that are replicable elsewhere; and we stand ready to share our learnings from these population-scale digital public infrastructure with the world.

India is sharing some Digital Public Infrastructure solutions and undertaking various other development projects through South-South cooperation, many of these, through grants. The India-UN Development Partnership Fund is one of the many platforms through which we are forging our partnerships with other developing countries.

Another aspect of India's development journey is its focus on unlocking women's leadership potential to drive progress. There is has been significant focus on gender-based budgeting in recent years. With sustained efforts, women's participation in labour force has risen considerably. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have become a key tool for empowering

rural women in India, providing access to savings and credit for income-generating activities. Narrowing gender gap in financial access through digitation innovations has helped in sustaining this trend.

In the urban sector, innovative government schemes have prioritized women's ownership of houses thereby giving them assets and financial security.

Post-pandemic, India has prioritized the needs of informal workers and those engaged in micro, small and medium enterprises, by extending interest-free loans, helping them to stabilize and grow their businesses. Most of the beneficiaries are women and live in urban areas, making cities more inclusive and resilient.

Madam Chair,

While we remain focused on inclusive and sustainable development India, we are committed to fulfil our responsibilities to address the global challenges.

On climate action, India has fulfilled its Paris Agreement commitments on green energy nine years ahead of the 2030

target. India has launched initiatives like International Solar Alliance, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, and Global Biofuels Alliance, fostering climate cooperation at regional and global scale.

~~There is a large gap to fulfil vis-à-vis commitment by developed countries to provide necessary financing for climate action. This needs to be addressed. The notion of "Common but differentiated responsibilities" is at the heart of climate justice; and the principle of equity must guide our climate policies.~~

Our cities are increasingly vulnerable to disasters many of these are climate induced. Regional cooperation is vital for developing effective strategies for urban climate adaptation and resilience. Given the region's vulnerabilities, India prioritizes disaster risk reduction. In July 2024, India assumed the chairmanship of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, an intergovernmental organization focused on disaster resilience in the Asia-Pacific. Under India's presidency, G20 developed a time-bound road map to catalyze action on: early warning systems, resilient infrastructure, integrated financing frameworks, global disaster recovery systems and ecosystem-based approaches.

As a participant in the Urban-Act project, India supports low-carbon, resilient and just urban development in the Asia-Pacific.

Solidarity is key for our efforts to succeed.

India, on its part, has taken initiative through the Voice of Global South Summit to amplify the voices and aspirations of the developing world. In a significant step towards strengthening the collaboration, India has proposed creation of a comprehensive "Global Development Compact" to foster human-centric, multi-dimensional, and multi-sectoral development across the Global South. It seeks to focus on trade for development, capacity building for sustainable growth, technology sharing, and concessional finance that avoids burdening developing countries with debt.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that SDGs can be achieved by collective efforts at local, national and regional levels in a cohesive manner. India, for its part will continue to work in the spirit of solidarity, to translate our collective aspirations into tangible progress for all.

I thank you madam chair.