Sixth North and Central Asia Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels

Hybrid Meeting Format, 6-7 October 2022

CONCEPT NOTE

Context

The Subregional Office for North and Central Asia of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is organizing the Sixth North and Central Asia¹ Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Forum is a unique platform for policymakers and other key stakeholders to share subregional perspectives, discuss collaborative measures to address subregional priorities and exchange good practices to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Its conclusions and recommendations will feed into the Tenth Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD) of ESCAP and the 2023 UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). The Forum will be conducted in English and Russian.

Impressive economic and social development are recorded for North and Central Asian countries in the past two decades, along with increased well-beings of citizens and reduced level of poverty. However, North and Central Asia is not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. ESCAP’s flagship publication “Asia Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022” highlighted the widening inequalities in the region amid COVID-19. Regressing trends have been observed for several environmental-related Goals in the subregion. Additionally, COVID-19 recovery efforts in North and Central Asia have been hampered by the volatile energy prices, inflations, reduction of remittance incomes, and shipping and transport disruptions due to the recent geopolitical crises and sanctions. International commitments made by countries to shift towards a decarbonized economy imply that innovation and investment will be required. To lead

¹ ESCAP’s North and Central Asia (NCA) subregion includes the following nine ESCAP member States: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.
sustainable recovery, policymakers need to identify challenges which are interlinking nature, and come up with feasible strategies.

Against this backdrop, the Forum will facilitate dialogues among different stakeholders in North and Central Asia on subregional SDG progress and concerted actions to fully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sessions of the Forum will correspond to the Goals in focus at the 2023 HLPF, namely, SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals).

Objectives

The main objective of the Forum is to facilitate an inclusive dialogue among multi-stakeholder groups in North and Central Asia on strengthening SDG implementation. The subregional perspectives expressed in the Forum will be considered in the discussions at the United Nations regional and global processes in 2023.

To achieve this, the Forum aims to:

- Enhance awareness and understanding of the key challenges and opportunities for implementing the 2030 Agenda in North and Central Asia through sharing of experiences and knowledge.
- Provide good practices in the national and subregional contexts on policies, actions, and partnerships for accelerating the progress of SDGs while recovering from COVID-19.
- Identify cross-border and subregional challenges and opportunities in implementing the SDGs and potential means of implementation.

Participants

Targeted participants of the Forum are the representatives from:

- Governments and public institutions in North and Central Asia responsible for various aspects of implementing the SDGs in the context of the 2030 Agenda, including Voluntary National Reviews and ESCAP focal points for sustainable development;
- Local government (e.g., mayors and representatives of the municipality);
- Various UN entities, financial institutions and development banks, regional and subregional organizations that support implementation of the SDGs;
- Civil society organizations, private sector organizations, experts from think tanks and academia.
Organization

The Forum will be organized by the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia in close collaboration with the member States in North and Central Asia and organizations inside and outside of the UN system.

Programme & Session Overview

Thursday, 6 October 2022

Morning

• Opening Session

• Session 1: “Accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”

Progress towards the SDGs was already stalled in North and Central Asia, and the COVID-19 pandemic has further compromised their full achievement by 2030. Efforts to contain the pandemic have exposed—and magnified—deeply rooted vulnerabilities and inequalities in Asia and the Pacific as well as in the subregion. There is increasing divergence in economic and social outcomes within and between countries.

The session will discuss, among other things:

- Subregional progress, good practices, and priorities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals;
- Efforts to accelerate inclusive COVID-19 recovery and how they could align with efforts to progress implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals;
- Protecting and investing in people and enhancing resilience, especially among women and vulnerable population groups.

Afternoon

• Session 2: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (SDG 6)

Accelerated actions are required to achieve clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) in North and Central Asia. More countries in the subregion are experiencing water stress. Increasing water pollution, climate change impact, drought and desertification are worsening these trends. The level of water stress - the withdrawal of fresh water as a proportion of available freshwater resources - stands at 87.6% in the subregion. Coupled with low levels of water use efficiency, this can lead to water scarcity if unmitigated. Central Asian countries has actively been searching for an acceptable form of integration to share water resources in interstate sources, such as through the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC) and the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS).
The session will discuss, among other things:

- Status, trends, emerging issues, and interlinkages of implementing SDG 6;
- Transboundary cooperation for ecologically sound management of freshwater resources and the impacts of climate change on the water sector;
- Peaceful regional cooperation on water issues and required capacity development interventions;
- Means to secure required investments to progress in clean water and sanitation supply in underserved regions;
- Innovative technologies and technology-based entrepreneurship for efficient water use;
- Good practices to facilitate inclusivity in access to clean water and sanitation.

- **Session 3: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all (SDG 7)**

Affordable and clean energy (SDG 7) has made limited progress in North and Central Asia. Although access to electricity is shown to have achieved full implementation, concerns remain for achieving the rest of the targets and indicators. The share of renewable energy in total energy supply remains very low for the subregion, accounting for only 3.4% of total energy supply. Among factors that affect the sustainable development of the energy sector include (i) regulatory framework, (ii) infrastructure, (iii) finances, (iv) expertise, and (v) data and information.

Countries in the subregion have put in place strategies for energy transition and initiated various programmes to increase deployment of renewable energy. Renewable energy development, along with enhanced energy efficiency, is being seen as an important aspect to facilitate achievement of the Paris Agreement targets. It is crucial that countries can integrate renewable energy into existing energy infrastructures to complement national energy security. The social nuances of energy policies in the subregion must not be ignored. Additionally, having a standardized and updated statistical database for energy data, such as the Asia Pacific Energy Portal, can better inform energy policies through adequate planning and monitoring.

The session will discuss, among other things:

- Status, trends, emerging issues, and interlinkages of implementing SDG;
- Potential areas for cross-border collaboration and multi-stakeholder participation for the development of the sustainable energy sector;
- Conditions and frameworks required to facilitate cross border collaboration in sustainable energy development;
- Options for public and private financing for sustainable energy infrastructure development.

**Friday, 7 October 2022**

**Morning**

- **Session 4: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation (SDG 9)**

Industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9) are recognised as drivers for economic development in the subregion. North and Central Asian countries are showing fair progress to achieve this goal.
There is almost full implementation of the indicator on population covered by a mobile network in the subregion. Manufacturing value added has increased over the years, while value added from the medium and high-tech industry has remained stagnant in North and Central Asia. Research and development expenditure has also remained low, at between 0.1-0.3% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) for most of the countries in the subregion. No measurable data is available for target 9.3 on financial and market access for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

Among key industries for countries in North and Central Asia are mining and metallurgy, engineering, and agribusiness. However, resource-use efficiency and sustainability of these industries require improvements. The availability and condition of infrastructure, introduction, and utilization of new technologies, as well as economic diversification are key for countries to better achieve SDG 9. It is also essential that targeted and measurable support are provided to MSMEs which are important engines of economic development in the region.

The session will discuss, among other things:
- Status, trends, emerging issues, and interlinkages of implementing SDG 9;
- Good practices to facilitate more inclusive and resilient development of industries through provision of access to emerging technologies, markets, and innovative services;
- Digital transformation efforts in North and Central Asia and potentials of digitalization and bridging digital divide to advance inclusive recovery;
- Investment in Research and Development, and support to technology-based entrepreneurs to foster innovative development.

Session 5: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable (SDG 11)

Urbanization and sustainable development are inextricably linked. The benefits of urbanization include economic growth due to economies of scale due to greater densities, the fostering of innovation, and higher wages and dividends. However, unplanned and unmanaged growth of cities increases congestion, urban decay, pollution, environmental degradation, and inequalities and places a burden on limited city infrastructure and resources. Unplanned urban expansions have resulted in sprawl, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, generation of large volumes of solid waste and increases in urban air pollution. The North and Central Asia region is already experiencing unprecedented urban challenges that compromised the urban health, sustainability, and resilience of cities. Many local governments struggle to meet existing infrastructure, housing and services backlogs with limited resources and capacity. Affordability issues and limited supply cause a significant proportion of the urban population to reside in settlements that are under-serviced, making them more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, natural disasters, and public health emergencies. The increased demand for energy and water resources will continue to put pressure on the environment and challenge the capacities of cities to provide adequate urban services and countries to meet climate and Sustainable Development Goal 11 targets.

According to the UN Secretary General’s Policy Brief, COVID-19 in an Urban World, an estimated 90 per cent of all reported COVID-19 cases globally were in urban areas given their higher population
levels, densities, and greater levels of local and global connectivity. COVID-19 presented a dual health and economic crisis that has significantly impacted both the survival of urban households and the sustainability and resilience of cities. In addition to the loss of life and the pressure placed on the health systems and essential workers, many cities were brought to a standstill during the COVID-19 pandemic due to lockdown measures, which had severe social and economic implications. The centrality of adequate housing, greater social protection measures for the most vulnerable, more effective urban services and infrastructure including water, transport, energy along with the effective use of technology and digital solutions, and the need to revisit urban planning and sustainable mobility to create greener and liveable cities has been brought to the forefront during the pandemic. Post pandemic, the repercussion of COVID-19 continues with many cities and countries in Asia-Pacific struggling to recover economically, with increasing food, energy and economic insecurities.

Based on this context, the session will discuss:

- Status, trends, emerging issues, and interlinkages of implementing SDG 11 in North and Central Asia within the context of a sustainable urban recovery from multiple connected crises;
- Best practices to recover and develop sustainable and resilient cities and communities in North and Central Asia by accelerating the means of implementation among different actors, including through integrated spatial planning, municipal financing instruments (including public-private partnerships), capacity building, urban data, innovation and smart city technologies.

**Afternoon**

- **Session 6: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development (SDG 17)**

_ Partnerships for the goals (SDG 17) has made limited progress in North and Central Asia. One aspect of SDG 17 that has recorded a regressing trend in the subregion is the commitment of countries to public-private and civil society partnerships. Reported data only showed public-private partnerships for infrastructure development. And although the values of these partnerships have showed an increase across the subregion, the real values (adjusted to the base year of 2019) showed limited increase and in some cases a decrease. Countries need to assure multi-stakeholder participation in the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda.

_ It is important for countries in North and Central Asia to cooperate and collaborate on priority issues of the subregion, especially in the current global context of supply chain disruptions, inflation and widening socioeconomic disparities. Accelerating climate change and conflicts are contributing to wide-ranging socioeconomic impacts that disproportionally affect vulnerable groups.

_ The session will discuss, among other things:
  - Key messages of the 2022 Asia-Pacific SDG Partnership Report
  - Provide subregional analysis and good practices for partnership to accelerate the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
• Identify areas where Partnerships for the Goals can help navigate these challenging times to ensure no one is left behind.

• Closing Session

Further Information and Registration

The Forum will take place in hybrid modality on 6-7 October 2022. It will be conducted in English and Russian with simultaneous interpretation. The Forum is open to all interested participants. Please register [HERE](#) to participate in the Forum.

The Forum will feature an associated event on 5 October 2022.²

(i) North and Central Asia Workshop on Preparation of Voluntary National Review (VNR).

Held outside the official programme, the associated side event will provide an opportunity to discuss the theme of the Forum and to share good practices, identify emerging issues and spread greater awareness of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Detailed information will be available on the official event page. For further information, please contact escap-sonca@un.org.

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² The associated side events are subject to confirmation.