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 Asia 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
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

Day 1
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 for peaceful regional integration 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 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 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 sustainable energy sector;
- Conditions and frameworks required to facilitate cross border collaboration in sustainable energy development;
- Options for public and private financing for infrastructure development.

**Day 2**

**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 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)**

Progress for sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) in North and Central Asia has been limited. While the subregion has shown good progress in adopting national disaster risk reduction strategies, urgent and well-planned actions are required to reverse the regression of the indicators on deaths and economic loss from disasters. This can be further extended to the local level where cities and municipalities also adopt and implement local disaster risk management strategies.

Most of the countries in the subregion have development programs which are aimed at increasing economic competitiveness and improving the quality of life through well managed urbanization. Transport and energy are the sectors that countries could pursue further actions to achieve for low-carbon systems and infrastructure development in cities. Reliable, accessible, and affordable public transportation promotes productivity and inclusion while also reduces pollution and traffic congestion. Global data illustrate the need to enhance access to public transport systems that are well integrated with walking and cycling paths through long-term mobility plans and targeted investments.

The current energy infrastructure in major cities in the subregion also requires rethinking. Central heating systems and the dependence on hydrocarbons are not efficient and does not contribute to the decarbonization plans of countries in the long run.

The session will discuss, among other things:
- Status, trends, emerging issues, and interlinkages of implementing SDG 11;
- Best practices to develop sustainability in the cities and communities and explore means of collaboration among different stakeholders to share ideas, trends, and innovative solutions;
Innovative financing options, including public-private sector partnerships to advance infrastructural development in the cities.

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.

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. Countries need to ensure multi-stakeholder participation in the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda.

The session will discuss, among other things:

- Key messages of the 2022 Asia-Pacific SDG Partnership Report;
- Provide subregional analysis and good practices to address to the different dimensions of the cost-of-living crisis (aligned with the Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance);
- Share subregional priorities, and SDG solutions for inclusion in the ESCAP, ADB (Asian Development Bank) and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) 2023 SDG Partnership report.

- 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).

² The associated side events are subject to confirmation.
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.