

# How Much Do Ambitions Cost? Investment Needs for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific

Expert Group Meeting  
Bangkok, 14-15 November 2018

## Concept Note

Despite progress towards some SDGs, the Asia-Pacific region needs to accelerate the pace of change and reverse negative trends in several areas. For instance, progress towards improving environmental stewardship has fallen short across the board. ESCAP analysis found that Asia-Pacific region would miss most SDG targets by 2030 without increased effort.<sup>1</sup>

Alongside better policies, increased investment is required particularly in sectors where progress has been slow. For governments to plan, budget and mobilize funds more effectively, they could benefit from a comprehensive assessment of the investment requirements. While there are selected sectoral estimates, for instance, in poverty-related social sectors or in economic infrastructure, we do not yet have a full picture of SDG investment requirements, which would also need to account for synergies and integrated scenarios.<sup>2</sup>

While there is no single correct methodology for such an assessment, since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, several UN agencies and other international organizations have developed or refined cost estimates in their respective sectors and there is considerable scope for bringing together these different models and methodologies for peer-review and synthesis.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, to ensure that such global cross-country cost estimates are relevant for the Asia-Pacific region, which itself is highly diverse, there is considerable scope to engage leading experts from think-tanks and universities in the region, who often advice their respective governments on specific SDG sectors or on issues of national planning, budgeting and mobilization of resources.

In light of the above, the two-day Expert Group Meeting will bring together experts from across the UN and other international organizations as well as leading think-tanks and universities in the Asia-Pacific region, with a view to developing a comprehensive assessment of investment requirements for achieving the SDGs by 2030.

In addition to estimating the investment requirements, the EGM will address cross-cutting issues relating to governance and public expenditure reforms, and explore opportunities for peer-learning

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<sup>1</sup> ESCAP, *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2017*. Available from <https://www.unescap.org/publications/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2017>

<sup>2</sup> There are few such studies at the global level, including the 2015 study by the Sustainable Solutions Development Network. At the region level, prior to the SDGs, ESCAP conducted a costing analysis for selected interventions in education, health, social protection, and sustainable energy. See ESCAP, *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2013: Forward-looking Macroeconomic Policies for Inclusive and Sustainable Development*. Available from <https://www.unescap.org/publications/economic-and-social-survey-asia-and-pacific-2013-forward-looking-macroeconomic-policies>

<sup>3</sup> For instance, UNESCO's *Global Education Monitoring Report 2015* provides cost estimates for achieving universal pre-primary to upper-secondary education by 2030. WHO's SDG Health Price Tag, published in the *Lancet* in 2017, estimates the costs and benefits of progressively expanding health services to reach SDG health targets. IEA's *World Energy Outlook 2017* contained a new Sustainable Development Scenario to capture three main energy-related SDGs simultaneously.

and benchmarking good performers. The EGM will also address economy-wide impacts of scaling up investments, such as on inflation and debt sustainability.

The overarching message of the EGM may be that while the investment requirements are as ambitious as the Goals, they are within reach for most countries, especially if complemented by broader policy reforms. However, least developed countries, of which there are 12 in the Asia-Pacific region, would require external support given their wide development gaps and limited domestic financial resources. Investment requirements are expected to vary considerably across and within Asia-Pacific sub-regions, both in level and composition.<sup>4</sup>

The EGM discussions will directly feed into the forthcoming issue of ESCAP's flagship publication, the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific*, to be released in 2019. Participating experts will have the opportunity to present their work, serve as discussants, and/or peer-review the preliminary findings prepared by the *Survey* drafting team.

The final report is expected to inform policy deliberations at various levels, from national planning and budgeting to regional and global assessments on SDG progress, at the ESCAP Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and the ECOSOC High-level Political Forum.<sup>5</sup> The report could also be a useful reference for UN country teams (UNCTs) in their capacity development efforts and for governments in preparing SDG Voluntary National Reviews.

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<sup>4</sup> ESCAP consists of five sub-regions: East and North-East Asia, North and Central Asia, the Pacific, South-East Asia, and South and South-West Asia. There are also country groupings such as ASEAN, SAARC and Pacific Islands Forum, which have laid out their member States' collective long-term visions, some of which have close linkages with the SDGs.

<sup>5</sup> For more details on these regional and global processes, see <https://www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/apfsd5> and <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2018>