Launch of the theme report for the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

**Agenda Item 2: Building back better from COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific**

**Session:** Building back better from COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific

**Venue:** Online (YouTube Live) and MSTeams (for speakers)

**Time:** Day 1 – Monday 28th March 2022: 12:05 - 13:05 hours (Bangkok time)

**Background**

The annual Asia-Pacific SDG Partnership Thematic report aims to support regional dialogue at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, in preparation for the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and to inform implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The theme of the 2022 report is *Building Forward Together - Towards an inclusive and resilient Asia and the Pacific*.

This report, released two years after the COVID-19 pandemic first manifested, considers how countries have been responding to this complex and still evolving crisis, and highlights key elements of a forward-looking policy agenda aimed at putting countries on a path to longer-term recovery that is inclusive, resilient and aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Across Asia and the Pacific, national efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic have largely focused on immediate concerns of short-term relief, containing the virus, and securing and distributing vaccines. The less visible but critically important side of the pandemic story is the complex and multidimensional relationship between the pandemic, pre-existing vulnerabilities, and rising inequalities—and the implications for inclusive recovery and the region’s longer-term sustainable development prospects. In this regard, the 2022 Partnership Report reviews the pandemic’s impacts on the region’s economies and people with a focus on the most vulnerable and who is falling behind, followed by a brief analysis of impacts on the priority SDGs to be addressed at the 2022 High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: Goal 4 (quality education); Goal 5 (gender equality); Goal 14 (life below water); Goal 15 (life on land) and Goal 17 (means of implementation).
This analysis demonstrates that the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts have exposed—and magnified—deeply rooted vulnerabilities and inequalities in the region’s economies and societies that pose a major challenge to recovery efforts. Across the region there already are signs of a ‘K-shaped’ recovery marked by increasing divergence in economic and social outcomes within and between countries, particularly among countries in special situations (least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States). This would exacerbate pre-COVID-19 inequalities and leave behind the poorest and most vulnerable population groups. When environmental degradation, increasing natural hazards and accelerating climate change are added to the mix, the risks to developing countries and poor and vulnerable populations are even greater. The report thus reviews six key factors that need to be considered in national recovery strategies: vaccination (including access to diagnostics and therapeutics); social protection; digitalization; economic structure; environmental risks; and fiscal space.

The report also argues that as countries shift from emergency response to longer-term recovery, they face two overriding and intertwined challenges—how to ensure that pathways to recovery are inclusive, just and leave no one behind, while charting a more transformative course toward building sustainable and resilient economies and societies. Looking beyond immediate pandemic response measures would require the need to focus on three interconnected areas for policy action that can contribute to the region’s longer-term recovery while re-igniting and accelerating progress toward the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs: inclusion (ensuring social protection and quality education for all); women’s empowerment (advancing gender equality); and environmental sustainability (building inclusive and resilient green economies). The COVID-19 pandemic has also brought to the fore the importance of stronger inter-governmental cooperation and the pivotal role of solution-based multistakeholder partnerships to overcome common challenges and narrow development gaps.

The launch event will feature the key findings and recommendations of the report with a particular focus on the priority SDGs to be addressed at the 2022 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: Goal 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17.
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- **Remarks**
  - Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of ESCAP will deliver the key presentation on report
  - Mr. Bambang Susantono, Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development of the Asian Development Bank will provide perspectives on the report.
  - Ms. Kanni Wignaraja, UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific will provide perspectives on the report.
  - Guest speaker TBC
  - Question and answer with the audience

- **Tentative Programme**
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<th>Remarks</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>12:05-13:05</td>
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