

Opening Remarks

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Virtual Meeting, Wednesday, 26 January 2022, organised by ESCAP

Dear Excellencies participating in this opening session and the Moderator of the session, Kuzuzangpo and Good morning!

Distinguished other participants, ladies, and gentlemen Kuzuzangpo and Good morning!

I feel highly honored, and privileged participating in this **Regional Dialogue on Linking the Past and the Future Regional Cooperation and Partnerships**. This probably is the best time as we have seen the major disruption of the link that needs to be understood.

I would like to thank ESCAP for the invitation and let me also extend gratitude for ESCAP's support to **Bhutan**. ESCAP secretariat among other UN agencies have a unique status to address regional emerging concerns, collaborations and stimulate cooperation through its knowledge products and tools.

It is understood that the conventional social trend and economic models are fast becoming obsolete. ICT had been playing a critical role and demonstrating its potential which we might have downplayed but no more. The role now is to embrace more and more and get ready to accept and move ahead. Therefore, the focus of ESCAP towards digitization and ICT are only going to bring larger benefits to countries like us. There is no second thought on this, and we cannot wait and miss the link.

The infrastructures has to be futuristic and supportive of this development. What ICT offers is already clear, which is more so in last two years. The focus on co-deployment of infrastructure, linking, and integration of energy and transport resources are critical for trade and commerce of every economy

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen let me share few outputs in reference to Bhutan.

Let me highlight a few points **on Energy -Transport-ICT collaboration**

Through the support of ESCAP and considering cross-sectoral benefits, **Bhutan** actively implemented ICT infrastructure co-deployment. For example, in Bhutan there were significant cost savings on the installation of fibre-optic cables over transmission power lines since minimal civil works were required and the rights of way were already granted. Furthermore, the time required to begin network operations was significantly reduced, and damage to the natural environment was minimal.

Our investment in ICT has proved useful during the pandemic as businesses could upgrade to e-platform, we have improved contact tracing, travel information sharing and telemedicine information through local apps and software. Our kids have access to coding

and are increasingly becoming aware of information technology and its future around them. They are getting used to of this disruptive economy, missing links and dots, social environment through knowledge sharing and information using ICT. We are looking forward becoming digital through a dedicated flagship program so that 21st century opportunities and information sharing is productive.

During the process, we have been fortunate to use ESCAP resources and various tools out there and to mention few like co-deployment of infrastructure, simulator of the smart corridors, and the e-resilience monitoring framework.

The resources, tools, analytical knowledge products and such collaborative discussions and regional dialogues to forge further cooperation among Asia-Pacific countries is a well thought idea and thank you ESCAP.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is important that countries dedicate to develop common infrastructures including for transport and mobility, energy, ICT and trade facilitation. Countries must work for seamless movement of goods and services among each other and it is possible with ICT as it has no geographical barriers. The integration and collaboration of Asia-pacific has to happen more seriously and dedicatedly.

The other potential for co-operation lies in our varied natural endowments and how best these may be used to support our ICT regional integration. Online connectivity requires lots of energy and countries like mine can be the “clean batteries” from hydropower to fuel the increasing demand of the mega-ICT industrial complex.

This reminds me to take this opportunity to thank UNESCAP for supporting Bhutan in developing the SDG7 roadmap.

Finally, **Excellencies**, as the world is going through an unprecedented crisis of COVID-19 pandemic, massive structural changes are happening in our economies and societies that might change the way we think and live. And this is where the Strategic Action Plan for ESCAP is to continue advancing the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway and facilitate the development of its Action Plan for 2022-2026 through sub-regional working groups. In this practical work, our region needs to gain a new understanding and invest in cross-boundary and integrated infrastructure.

This region has potential to enhance its integration for which we need to enhance our trust, collaboration and modalities on sharing of resources and building the network better.

I wish successful deliberations and a productive event, and offer wishes for seamless collaboration and integration of the countries in the Region.

Thank you and Tashi Delek!