

North-East Asian Multistakeholder Forum on Sustainable Development Goals: *Turning the pandemic crisis into collective SDG actions*

3 & 4 November 2020
Virtual

Concept Note

Background

The North-East Asian subregion has made relatively good progress in achieving SDGs 1 to 9 compared with goals from 10 to 16, according to the Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020. North-East Asia is on track or made significant progress on no poverty (Goal 1), zero hunger (Goal 2), good health and well-being (Goal 3) and quality education (Goal 4) as well as clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), affordable and clean energy (Goal 7), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), and industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9). On the other hand, the subregion needs to further intensify progress being made in income equality, women empowerment, renewable energy, marine protected areas, forest coverage, etc., and make spillover effects in their relevant SDGs in the Decade of Action for accelerating SDGs, starting from 2020.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the subregion faces a new challenge which brings about the most immediate impacts on health and wellbeing (Goal 3) and decent work and economic growth (Goal 8). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an increasingly uncertain environment, causing both demand and supply shocks to the global economy. Progress in many other SDGs is further impeded by loss of jobs and income, intertwined with reduced access to health and education, increasing inequality, etc.

At the regional level, the impact of COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific is tremendous due to the concentration of economic activities, demographics, and urbanization. The COVID-19 pandemic has already reversed some of the past achievements by expanding the scale of vulnerable population and intensifying their challenges. The 7th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) highlighted the additional challenges in Asia and the Pacific facing the COVID-19 pandemic and called for a strong, coordinated, inclusive and coherent global response to deliver on the global decade of action as well as to improve preparedness for public health emergency. In contrast, air pollution and carbon emission have dropped as COVID-19 stalled economic activities across the region, reminding us of the high cost of past economic development on environment and health.

Thus, there is an increasing consensus and call at regional and global fora for finding ways to build back better to overcome the immediate crisis, to rebuild the economy, to enhance resilience to future crises and to utilize the new investment to jointly address other challenges, particularly, climate emergency. As the ESCAP study suggests¹, the policy responses should prioritize people over economic recovery, and the region has to continue to pursue the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The pandemic and climate emergency require policymakers to move away from short-termism towards long-term vision through collective policy actions led by Governments and supported by businesses and people along with enhanced global and regional cooperation. The experiences of fighting against the

¹ ESCAP Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2020. <https://www.unescap.org/publications/economic-and-social-survey-asia-and-pacific-2020>

pandemic provide valuable insights to long-term policy framework and cooperation mechanism for accelerating SDG implementation. ESCAP member States emphasize that recovery from the COVID-19 crisis provides an opportunity to build back better and reiterate the importance of multilateralism and international cooperation, as demonstrated by their collective endorsement of Resolution 76/2 on regional cooperation to address the socioeconomic effects of pandemics and crises in Asia and the Pacific.

The fight against COVID-19 put extreme pressure on the countries’ resources (fiscal, human capacities, etc.), making a whole-of-society approach all the more relevant and necessary for achieving shared goals towards sustainable development.

Regional and Global Context of the North-East Asia Forum

The North-East Asia Multistakeholder Forum on Sustainable Development Goals is a part of the preparatory process for the 8th APFSD in 2021, which itself is one of the regional consultations towards the 2021 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and provides a unique opportunity to share sub-regional perspectives on the implementation of SDGs.

All the countries in the subregion have submitted or are planning to submit their Voluntary National Review by 2020. China (2016 and 2021), Japan (2017), Mongolia (2019), Republic of Korea (2016) and Russian Federation (2020) have already submitted its first VNR, while Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (2021) will present at the 2021 HLPF. The progress and approaches in implementing the 2030 Agenda vary across countries, but the common requirement is the effective operation of extensive partnership among state and non-state actors within the country as well as partnerships across countries.

Taking into account the thematic focus of the 2021 HLPF of “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: Building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”, as well as the set of goals identified for in-depth review, (Goals 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17), the 2020 North-East Asian Multistakeholder Forum on Sustainable Development Goals will focus on sharing experiences and practical example of partnership for accelerating SDG progress amid the COVID-19 pandemic.



The Forum will bring together and connect key stakeholders from government, academia, civil society, the private sector, and the international community in North-East Asia.

Objectives

The main objective of the Forum is to enable an inclusive dialogue among multistakeholder groups in North-East Asia on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and to reflect subregional perspectives into the relevant regional and global processes. To achieve this, the forum will:

1. Enhance awareness and understanding of the key challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in North-East Asia and the Regional Roadmap in view of the COVID-19 pandemic through sharing of experiences and knowledge;
2. Review the impacts and implications of the COVID-19 in the context of the Decade for Action;
3. Provide good practices in the national and subregional contexts in policies, actions and partnerships for accelerating the progress of SDGs based on the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic; and
4. Support capacity building for countries in the subregion ahead of their presentations in 2020, building on presentations from VNR countries at the HLPF

Intended Participants

1. Government officials, representatives of institutions in ESCAP member States responsible for various aspects of implementing the SDG in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
2. VNR focal points and ESCAP focal points for sustainable development;
3. Representatives of local government (mayors, representatives of the municipality);
4. Representatives of civil society organizations and private sector organizations;
5. Representatives of regional and sub-regional organizations that support SDG implementation;
6. Experts from think tanks and academia; and
7. Other stakeholders involved in SDG implementation at national, regional & global levels

Organization

The Forum will be conducted in English.

Expected Outcome

The outcome of the Forum will consist of a summary of key topics and issues, as well as recommendations and presentations. The materials will be shared with participants and also be made available on the ESCAP Website.

Provisional Agenda

1. **Opening**
2. **Progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in North-East Asia with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**

Although the North-East Asia subregion had been ahead in many of the SDG targets, outbreak of the COVID-19 made significant impacts on some of the progress and/or intensified the challenges in the implementation of SDGs. Thus, the session's aim is to reflect on the current situation of the subregion, with country representatives presenting progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Experience of voluntary national review may also be shared in this session.

3. **Leaving no one behind – Lessons learned from accelerated digitalization during COVID-19 in North-East Asian Region**

This session can focus on inclusive measures that support vulnerable groups in facing COVID-19 and post-pandemic recovery. Topics to be suggested by CSO in consultation with the secretariat.

4. **SDGs in action – sharing experiences of multistakeholder engagement for shared goals and response to the COVID-19 pandemic**

This session can highlight good practices on partnership and engagement of stakeholders in accelerating SDG progress, as well as supporting vulnerable population in facing the COVID-19 pandemic, along the selected themes pertinent to the subregion. In light of the thematic focus and goals to be reviewed at the 2021 HLPF, the following sub-themes will be discussed. **Separate group sessions on the following three topics will be organized prior to the Forum for in-depth discussion on 27-29 October 2020.**

(1) Protecting people and reducing inequalities (27 October 2020)

With particular focus on the SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 16 + (and optionally 4, and 5)



(2) Building inclusive and resilient society (28 October 2020)

With particular focus on the SDGs 8, 10, 12, 16, 17 + (and optionally 5)



(3) Promoting sustainable and green recovery (29 October 2020)

With particular focus on the SDGs 8, 12, 13, 17 + (and optionally 11)



5. **Partnership in SDG implementation – the experience of public-private partnership**

This session can highlight the experiences of Public-Private Partnership, subregional cooperation, partnerships among business sector, civil society and public sector in providing effective COVID-19 responses and contributing to post-pandemic recovery, drawing lessons learned for accelerating SDG implementation.

6. **Subregional perspective of accelerating SDGs and the way forward**

This session will highlight challenges and opportunities pertinent to the subregion to accelerate SDGs implementation while ensuring the recovery and building back better from the COVID19 pandemic.

7. **Closing**