

## **Third South Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals Dhaka, 8-9 December 2019 Report**

### **Background and context**

The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) embody the strategic vision and aspirations of all countries for the future of development and its implementation will require actions at the global, regional<sup>1</sup> and sub-regional levels, as indicated in General Assembly Resolution 70/1 on Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The South Asian Countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) urgently need to accelerate actions on the 2030 Agenda. UNESCAP SDG progress assessment for South Asia suggests that despite considerable progress in poverty reduction (Goal 1), affordable and clean energy (Goal 7) and steady and sustained economic growth (Goal 8), the subregion has regressed in sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11) and needs accelerated efforts in Goals 2 (zero hunger), 5 (gender equality), 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) and environmental Goals such as climate action (Goal 13), life below water (Goal 14) and life on land (Goal 15). South Asia needs to strengthen its means of implementing the 2030 Agenda (Goal 17) since lack of progress in SDG 17 could jeopardise the achievement of all other SDGs.<sup>2</sup> Given that one quarter of world's humanity resides in South Asia and the subregion is home to almost 34 percent of global poor, if South Asia falls behind on the 2030 Agenda, the world would find it difficult to achieve the SDGs.

As a regional commission for Asia and the Pacific, UNESCAP has been supporting the achievement of SDGs by its member States through technical assistance and through a regional follow up and review mechanism institutionalized in the form of Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) feeding into the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), as a part of the regional roadmap for implementing the 2030 Agenda adopted by the ESCAP member States. The South Asia Forum on SDGs (SAFSD) has been conceived as the sub-regional preparatory work for the APFSD and was launched in 2017 in Kathmandu in collaboration with the National Planning Commission, Nepal. The Second South Asia Forum on SDGs was organized by

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCAP resolution 72/6 on 'Committing to the Effective Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific', calls upon member States to cooperate at the regional level in the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCAP (2019). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2019, Bangkok. ST/ESCAP/2860.

UNESCAP in partnership with the NITI Aayog, India and the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), on 4-5 October 2018 in New Delhi, India which focused on the theme of the 2019 HLPF, ‘Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality’.<sup>3</sup>

The **Third South Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals** provided a unique opportunity to the subregion to feed its perspective into regional (the 7<sup>th</sup> APFSD scheduled in March 2020), and global (the HLPF 2020) processes on the proposed theme of ‘Accelerating action and delivery of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific’.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the Third South Asia Forum on Sustainable Development Goals focused on national and sub-regional perspectives and taking stock of the lessons and best practices learned in implementation of SDGs, as well as forward-looking dialogue on partnership to accelerate the progress of SDGs.

The Forum brought together stakeholders from the governments, think-tanks and academia, international community, civil society and private sector representatives on a common platform to discuss how countries in South Asia can cooperate to address gaps and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to assess progress on the thematic SDGs for review by the HLPF 2020. To achieve this, the South Asia Forum for the SDGs aimed to:

1. Enhance awareness and understanding on key challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Regional Roadmap to support and complement the sub-regional agenda through sharing of experiences and knowledge.
2. Provide a platform for expert discussions and reflections on sub-regional perspectives and good practices which may accelerate SDG achievement along with challenges related to implementation of the entire Agenda.
3. Support capacity building for countries in the subregion ahead of their Voluntary National Review (VNR) presentations in 2020, building on presentations and experiences of VNR countries at the HLPF so far.
4. Identify ways, through expert discussions to strengthen implementation efforts, stakeholder engagement, follow-up and review, linking national, sub-regional, regional and global processes.
5. Identify needs and opportunities for regional cooperation and delivery by regional and subregional bodies and the United Nations Development System.

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<sup>3</sup> For more details, see <https://www.unescap.org/events/south-asia-forum-sustainable-development-goals>

<sup>4</sup> The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development is an inclusive regional intergovernmental forum which supports the preparations for the High-level Political Forum (HLPF). ESCAP resolution 73/1 indicates that the theme of the APFSD is aligned with the theme of the HLPF and will support an in-depth discussion of the cluster of goals under review at the HLPF. The HLPF structure is currently under review by member States and as of yet no decision has been taken on the format, theme and SDGs under review during the next cycle. As such, ESCAP has decided to focus the 7th APFSD on opportunities for accelerated action, responding to paragraph 26 of the Political Declaration to be adopted at the SDG Summit in September 2019, which requests the Secretary General.... to engage governments, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in generating solutions and accelerating action to address systemic gaps in implementation.

## Highlights of proceedings

### Session 1: Inaugural Session – Setting the Tone

The session was addressed by Mr. Monowar Ahmed, Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Government of Bangladesh, Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director, UNESCAP South and South West Asia Office (UNESCAP-SSWA), New Delhi, Ms. Mia Seppo, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh, Mr. Abul Kalam Azad, Chief Coordinator for SDG Affairs, Prime Minister’s Office, Bangladesh, Dr. Puspa Raj Kadel, Vice-Chairman, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal and Mr. Khandker Anwarul Islam, Cabinet Secretary, Cabinet Division, Government of Bangladesh.

**Mr. Monowar Ahmed**, complimented UNESCAP for hosting this event in Bangladesh. Since the SDGs have set a very ambitious agenda which cannot be achieved in isolation by countries in the subregion, he highlighted the importance of regional cooperation to collectively achieve SDGs. South Asian countries face similar challenges in several areas *inter-alia*, relating to lack of availability of data for many SDG indicators, taxation related matters and LDC graduation – three out of four LDCs from the subregion are graduating etc. He stated that after LDC graduation, the countries in the sub-region will no longer be entitled to TRIPS flexibility and other preferential treatments. The sectors of pharmaceuticals and technology upgradation will be severely affected. He stressed the need for countries to develop strategies by focusing on global agenda, domestic resource mobilization and internal cooperation. He also emphasised that achieving SDG targets will require substantial additional resources which at times go beyond the capacity of governments and thus some external funding for SDG implementation will be necessary.

**Dr. Nagesh Kumar** thanked the Government of Bangladesh for co-hosting the forum. He argued that the Forum provided a unique platform to multi-stakeholders in South Asia to review the progress made, challenges faced in meeting the SDGs and feed the subregional perspective into the regional and global processes (i.e. APFSD and HLPF). At the SDG Summit at the UNGA held in September 2019, the leaders while noting that the world was not on track to meet the targets by 2030, and the business-as-usual was not an option anymore, decided to launch the decade of 2020 to be the ‘*decade of accelerated actions*’. This acceleration was more critical for South Asia, the sub-region which is home to more than one third of the extreme poverty and hunger globally. He noted that the findings from ESCAP’s Asia Pacific SDG report 2019 indicate that the sub-region has been lagging in 15 out of 17 goals. He emphasized that South Asia also needs to strengthen its means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Goal 17) including for finance, technology, market access, data and statistics and capacity building. Without progress in global partnerships, international and regional cooperation, it would be hard to achieve SDGs in the subregion. In particular, Dr. Kumar highlighted the greater role of regional cooperation in complementing the national strategies for achieving SDGs, given the shared challenges and vulnerabilities that the sub-region continues to face, including through sharing the development experiences and good practices.

**Ms. Mia Seppo** highlighted the efforts made by Bangladesh in achieving the SDGs. The country had made rapid strides since its independence in 1971 in poverty reduction, climate adaptation, maternal and child health, and disaster resilience. In implementing the 2030 agenda, Bangladesh is leading the group of LDCs on LDC graduation especially for sustainable graduation and taking measures to avoid the middle-income trap. She informed that Bangladesh has aligned its 7<sup>th</sup> five-year plan with the targets of SDGs and the government has been working very closely with the UN system. She stated that the Bangladesh Development Forum 2020, to be held in January 2020 in Dhaka will be a precursor to the 8<sup>th</sup> five-year plan of Bangladesh. Despite the concerted efforts, there are numerous challenges such as rising inequality, existence of large marginalized communities, gender inequalities which hinder the progress on SDGs. She highlighted that one of the emerging concerns is that the SDG financing has not risen to the challenge and more inclusive approach in achieving SDGs is missing. She complimented the agenda of the meeting which includes three important components emphasized by the UN Secretary General – SDGs, Climate Change and Gender. Highlighting that core of SDG agenda is leaving no one behind, she emphasized on the need to collect data at most disaggregated level so as to include all sectors of society. She concluded by reiterating that regional cooperation could be a catalyst for all the countries in the sub-region to collectively achieve SDGs, without which it is difficult to achieve global SDGs

**Mr. Abul Kalam Azad** expected the Forum to provide a great opportunity for the South Asian delegates to share their experiences on progress made in achieving the SDGs and explore the areas of cooperation for mutual advantage. There was a highest-level political commitment in Bangladesh towards SDGs which resulted in aligning national policies to SDG targets. He acknowledged that the five Ps of the SDGs (People, Prosperity, Planet, Peace and justice, and Partnership) are equally important and the Government's policies are aimed to address them. He shared his views on challenges that Bangladesh is facing especially with regard to lack of availability of data and resources to implement policies that can help achieve SDGs. Another challenge related to sustainable graduation from LDC status which is a highest-level commitment in Bangladesh. He supported the views that means of implementation is an important pillar for achieving SDGs, especially for South Asia. Further, he highlighted that Bangladesh's budget has allocations for climate change, women empowerment etc. but the funding is not adequate and thus there is a need for exploring innovative ways of generating finances. He suggested that this Forum can discuss challenges of financing SDGs and countries can share their best practices which could be emulated in other countries. He also desired that UNESCAP assists the South Asian countries for identifying new and innovative resources for achieving SDGs. Mr. Azad suggested that it is desirable to create a digital platform on SDGs where the best practices can be shared.

**Dr. Puspa Raj Kadel** emphasized that the South Asia Forum has emerged as a key event for the sub-region to discuss challenges, opportunities and identifying areas of cooperation and collaboration in achieving SDGs. Sharing Nepal's progress regarding SDGs, he highlighted that the government is promoting inclusive development on the principle of 'leaving no one behind'

through its programme ‘*Prosperous Nepal – Happy Nepali*’. Dr. Kadel informed Nepal’s vision for SDGs by briefing the Government’s short-term and long-term planning. The government introduced 15 periodic plans with a 25-year long term vision to bring structural changes to graduate by 2022 and to achieve SDGs by 2030 and eventually joining the league of high-income group in next 25 years. For this, the government has mainstreamed SDGs in its national and sub-national programs, which include 7 provinces and 753 local government bodies having one plan. Nepal will be presenting its second VNR in 2020 and will highlight the progress since its last VNR in 2017 especially in reduction of inequality (to 0.31 percent) and increase in enrolment in primary education to 96%. Despite these efforts, one-third of Nepal’s population still lives below poverty line across different social groups and geographical regions. Highlighting the threats of climate change as manifested in depleting its natural resources and creating problems for food security, Dr. Kadel mentioned Nepal’s efforts towards developing projects on clean energy and exploring hydro-power electricity generation to achieve SDGs. Among other challenges that impede progress of SDGs, he pointed out that Nepal still lacks capacity to implement many policies that can help attain SDGs as it requires technical assistance on monitoring and evaluation system, localization, weak infrastructure and strategies to tackle the issues relating to national and international migration. Financing for development is another key challenge as Nepal requires 25 billion Nepali Rupees to finance SDGs. Therefore, he called upon the national and international funding agencies to come forward in supporting financing for development and stated that greater coordination between multiple stakeholders such as the public sectors, CSOs, international organizations was important for achieving SDGs.

**Mr. Khandker Anwarul Islam** appreciated ESCAP for organizing the Forum in Bangladesh and expressed his satisfaction on its comprehensive agenda given the relevance of sharing of best practices, identifying challenges and exploring the possible areas of cooperation. He emphasised that it is now time for taking action by all participants, especially the policy makers to make things happen. Sharing the experiences of MDGs he stated that SDGs are more ambitious and hence greater challenges are being faced by the countries and achieving these targets is not possible without cooperation, collaboration and exchange of best practices. He also highlighted the efforts of Government in formulating the Second Perspective Plan 2021-2041 which will help Bangladesh achieve SDGs and to make Bangladesh a developed country in the South Asian region. He further stated that this 20-year perspective plan (2021–2041) will be implemented during the next four five-year plans starting in 2021. In the end Mr. Islam assured full support from his government for achieving SDGs and their cooperation to the UN system.

## **2. Taking stock of progress, achievements, and challenges in five years of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda**

This session was chaired by Dr. Shamshul Alam, Member, General Economics Division (GED), Bangladesh Planning Commission and had presentations made by representatives of planning agencies of the 8 South Asian countries. It began with an introductory presentation by UNESCAP

secretariat which indicated that all the countries in the subregion have submitted their VNRs by 2019. Bangladesh, India, and Nepal will do their second VNR in 2020.<sup>5</sup>

**Afghanistan** has made efforts towards nationalization and contextualization of SDGs from 2016 onwards. A high-level SDG Executive Committee serviced by the SDG Secretariat has been established under the Council of Ministers. 110 local targets and 177 indicators have been identified and aligned with SDGs while 41 indicators could not be aligned on account of non-availability of data. The second phase (2020 – 2030) will be the decade of actions towards achieving SDGs including national budget to have SDG component. Afghanistan is also integrating SDGs with the national budget and programmes. The main challenges are resource mobilization, accelerating economic growth, access to technology and meaningful market access.

**Bangladesh** has aligned SDGs with the 7<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2016-20), with a strong ownership of SDGs by the top leadership and establishment of SDG Coordination Office within the Prime Minister's Office. The government has set up National Data Coordination Committee to address the data gaps and M&E framework has been established with 5-yearly milestones and SDGs have been localized at the districts and sub-districts levels. The progress is on track on poverty reduction, government spending on health, education and social protection, access to electricity, improving child health, political empowerment of women, manufacturing sector led growth, increasing per capita GDP and access to ICT is increasing. Bangladesh is facing bigger challenges in terms of resource mobilization (an amount of USD 95.8 billion is needed), attracting FDI, skill development and quality education, strengthening international development cooperation and building effective partnerships, natural disasters and climate change mitigation. Over 1.1 million Rohingya refugees and SDGs localization are other challenges.

**Bhutan** has aligned its 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2019-23) with SDGs and has integrated SDGs at national, sub-national and local levels' key result areas. Bhutan has been successful in reducing income poverty and multidimensional poverty, addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, good progress was made on education, health, environment and economic growth. Despite the economy growing at 7.5% over last few decades, it faces problems of economic diversification, youth unemployment, market access etc. The new challenge that it faces relates to graduation from LDC by 2023 and thus Bhutan is looking forward to technical assistance on sustainable graduation, financing for development, for attracting FDI inflows and for harnessing Public Private Partnerships (PPP).

**India** has aligned all ministries' programmes and schemes to SDG targets, developed a national indicator framework, developed SDG India Index for periodic ranking of States and Union Territories (UTs) in terms of SDG performance, and has operationalized half-yearly review mechanism with States/UTs. As per the SDG India Index, India is on track in four Goals (8,10,15 and 16) out of the 13 Goals, for which data is available, on 5 Goals (1,3,4,6 and 7) the performance

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<sup>5</sup> VNRs done: Afghanistan (2017), Bangladesh (2017), Bhutan (2018), India (2017), Maldives (2017), Nepal (2017), Pakistan (2019), and Sri Lanka (2018).

is average and for 4 Goals (2, 5, 9 and 11), the performance was not satisfactory. There are three Goals (12,13 and 14) where adequate data is not available representing all the States and UTs. India has identified the focus areas which include, SDG financing, enhancing spending efficiency and rationalization of spending, assessing fiscal sustainability and space, engaging the private sector, strengthening data systems, leveraging science, technology and innovation to leave no one behind and use STI platforms to promote entrepreneurship and business development.

**Maldives** incorporated SDGs into 5 Year Island Development Plan (2017-21) to be implemented by the Island Councils. It took several actions in 2018 towards achieving SDGs which included Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) for identifying the National Priority, Communication Strategy and SDGs Baseline Report was finalized. In 2019 Maldives incorporated the SDGs into the government's Strategic Plans and the 8th National Development Plan. The current challenges in achieving SDGs are in the form of lack of coordination and poor inter-agency collaboration, low capacity of agencies, financing for development and data collection and processing. Localization and prioritization of SDGs, increasing the role of CSOs, private sector and academia, strengthening data, financing for development and costing of SDGs are important areas of work in future.

**Nepal** has mainstreamed SDGs in its 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Plans and SDG coding has been introduced in annual budget/projects. Initiatives for localization of SDGs have also been taken through preparation of guidelines, capacity development, assisting in preparing results framework at sub-national levels. Baseline indicators for provinces and manual for localization has been prepared. Nepal requires an amount of USD 19 billion per annum to achieve the SDGs. Nepal has developed the financial strategies which include reorienting investments towards SDGs, formulating investment friendly laws, mobilise internal resources through tax reforms, using ICT in revenue collection, attracting FDI and using PPP models for SDG financing, etc. Nepal is facing challenges relating to resource generation, mainstreaming and localization of SDGs, lack of disaggregated data, capacity constraint and weak governance, monitoring and evaluation, and coordination.

**Pakistan** has included SDGs in its planning and programmes at national, provincial, and local levels. National Economic Council has been established which is headed by the Prime Minister, SDG Secretariat has been established in National Parliament to support the members of Parliament on SDGs. Pakistan has carried out a Constitutional amendment to transfer powers from the Federal government to Provincial Governments on social sector to implement the SDGs more successfully. The National Development Goals have identified the SDG priorities and their implementation. Through identification of priority areas using 7 criteria, target mapping in terms of short, medium, and long-term plans have been carried out.

**Sri Lanka** has created a Task Force, chaired by Secretary (SDGs). The Sustainable Development Council along with stakeholders is engaged in three main activities which include preparations of National Policy and Strategy on Sustainable Development with national targets; SDG mainstreamed Public Service Delivery Strategies for all Ministries including Departments and Statutory boards; and development of a Digital Data and Communication Platform to facilitate

evidence based decision making, SDG progress tracking and stakeholder engagement. A Cabinet memorandum has also been issued by the Government expressing the commitment for SDGs by all departments and agencies.

*South Asian CSOs* in their statement argued that given that about 546 million people are multidimensionally poor, countries in sub-region facing climate change crisis with LDCs being affected highly, it is important that basic services like healthcare, education, water and sanitation, housing and social protection are provided to all. The sub-region has shown mixed progress on different SDGs. The need to ramp up progress to achieve Goal 8, industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9) and the subregion needs to work more on SDG 16 to sustain peace, safety, security, justice and to end multiple types of violence, especially violence against women and girls. The development process was slow, unjust and was not inclusive. Vulnerable people, mostly belonging to poor, informal sector labours, disabled persons, women, children, LGBTIQ, Dalits etc. must not be left behind. In this regard, the need for meaningful multi-stakeholder partnerships, improved monitoring and follow up, generating credible data and make VNRs more open, transparent, and inclusive were emphasized. Measures to foster a safe, respectful and enabling environment for civil society were needed and work with these groups to establish effective national protection mechanisms and suggested that the international development partners need to provide long-term, unrestricted and core support for civil society in countries where civil society is facing increasing restrictions from states.

### **3. Review of Selected Priority areas of cooperation in the Asia-Pacific roadmap for accelerating progress towards the SDGs**

The session discussed how the selected priority areas in the Regional Road Map for Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific interlink with the entry areas of the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) and can accelerate progress towards the SDGs in South Asia. Discussions focused on the identified priority areas for action of the Regional Road Map, highlighting the bottlenecks and challenges that hinder rapid progress in these areas and sharing good practices on accelerating the progress so as to explore solutions to accelerate implementation by harnessing cross-border cooperation among other means. Discussions were held in 4 parallel working groups covering the areas of Leaving no one behind – Human well-being and capabilities, Disaster risk reduction and resilience, Global environmental commons and climate change, and Energy and Connectivity for the 2030 Agenda.

#### ***Leaving no one behind-Human well-being and capabilities***

There was agreement that while poverty has reduced in almost all the countries in the sub-region, the cause of tension was growing inequalities. Nepal shared the view that GDP growth was not a good metric to evaluate economic development which should be measured in terms of quality of life and human development along with growth numbers. The working group highlighted the key challenges relating to improving the quality of life, to reach out most vulnerable sectors of society,



reducing gender inequality in labour force, strengthening social protection measures, removing caste discrimination, etc. Some of the good practices related to Universal Health Coverage (Maldives), subsidizing electricity, water, education for people living in poverty (India, Maldives), cooperatives (Sri Lanka), Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes (India), targeted programmes for mid-wives and quota system in public sector (Nepal). To leave no one behind, countries need to strengthen social security measures, promote gender sensitivity, promote use of digital technology to address the connectivity and health concerns. Similarly, judicial reforms, identifying vulnerable groups and creating disaggregate data for minority groups and decentralization of governance, dedicated institutional arrangements for SDG implementation were also highlighted. Governments and CSOs need to work in a coordinated manner. The South Asian countries also need to take steps to redistribute unpaid care work to release more of women's time for productive and paid work. The working group also agreed that improving regional cooperation is essential for accelerating progress towards SDGs.

### ***Disaster risk reduction and resilience***

The working group discussed country experiences and key lessons that could be emulated by other countries. Bangladesh being a flood and cyclone prone country, many of its low-lying areas are unfit for constructing buildings. The past cyclones destroyed physical infrastructure and properties and claimed many lives. Similarly, massive earthquake in Nepal in 2015 claimed lives of 9000 people and loss of property worth crores. It was pointed out that in Nepal, police played a very important role in managing people and avoiding violence and unrest. Sri Lanka shared its experience of Tsunami and creation of an Early Warning System. India shared the challenges it faced due to floods, cyclone and drought, stating that each have their own corridor. India stated that the tsunami impacted vulnerable sections the most – the Dalits and adivasis as they were living in low-lying areas which are hazard prone. Sharing the best practices, Nepal stated that during the earthquake relief materials were distributed well and they covered not only the basic needs for all but also took into account the needs of women by creating a dignity kit with the support of NGOs and constructed separate toilets for women. Bangladesh also shared that in early 1998 floods dignity kits were distributed which were very useful. A scheme of cash for work was introduced which created jobs for elderly persons. Setting up of disaster committees, encouraging psycho-social counselling, constructing resilience houses, reserving funds for emergency, knowledge building etc. were some of the practices that can be replicated in South Asia. It was also felt that to make South Asia a disaster resilient sub-region, a strong political will and commitment will be important which can pave the way for a strong regional cooperation given its transboundary nature especially for use of science and technology and sharing of information as early warning system. To accelerate the process, the working group felt that reserving separate funds for emergency, establishing rescue teams and a better network of early warning system would be useful. The working group also recommended that, to harness emerging solutions in a rapid manner, the South Asia Hydromet Forum should contribute to the South Asia forum for SDGs by establishing

institutional linkages and evolve an action plan to enhance and implement disaster and climate resilience measures.

### ***Global environmental commons and Climate change***

The working group collectively emphasized on the fact that the disproportionate effects of climate change are not local or national rather transboundary in nature. India highlighted the case of pollution in river Ganges, it was opined that an integrated approach needs to be taken on addressing this issue. Two examples were shared as good practices. One, in Meghalaya the local communities have garnered benefit from climate restoration with the help of various stakeholders and which can be scaled up and replicated. Two, ban of single use plastic and issuance of green bonds. Bangladesh shared the challenges relating to pollution of rivers and oceans which is adversely affecting the livelihood of people and other ecosystem services. The transboundary nature of climate related issues such as Sunderbans was also highlighted. In Bangladesh, around 20 Ministries with the help of UNDP have adapted a social protection model. Sri Lanka implemented an overall legislative framework promoting social forestry programmes and co-management of fishermen societies. Sri Lanka also shared the good experience of rooftop solar grids and the community-based approach that it followed helped in forestry management as well as coastal and fisheries. Bhutan highlighted that promoting as much of green energy as possible is one of the effective means of mitigating negative effects of climate change. Bhutan shared its experience of use of hydropower which benefitted not only environment and economy but also in upliftment in the social segment. Nepal stated that it is one of the most affected countries in South Asia in terms of climate change. Some good initiatives include ban on plastics, giving training to vulnerable groups for waste management. The working group noted that women working in agriculture, fisheries and the informal sector, are affected more severely by climate change and called for identification of such vulnerable groups. However, limitation of disaggregated data was identified as one impediment in this regard. The working group was of the view that there is immense potential for cross-learning and cross-fertilization of ideas. It suggested that South Asia should develop a regional framework on climate change. Initiatives to promote green energy in the form of hydropower, solar and wind energy and promoting usage of electric vehicles to cut GHG emissions were some other recommendations for South Asian countries where policy interventions were needed. Resource mobilization and innovative ways of mobilizing climate financing as well as financing other SDGs is important. Promoting eco-tourism, involving private sector through strengthened Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) provisions on climate change and civil society organizations were other areas that were identified for South Asia which can help accelerate SDGs achievement. Strong partnerships with multiple stakeholders including the private sector, particularly with reference to sustainable production systems and CSOs would be important given the transboundary nature of climate change. Due importance should be given to traditional knowledge and localization of climate action and community-based approaches. As agriculture is mostly affected by climate change related disasters and shocks in the region, it requires to adapt

and mitigate climate change through climate resilient sustainable agriculture practices. The need for concerted regional action and regional cooperation on climate change was stressed.

### ***Energy and Connectivity for the 2030 Agenda***

The working group highlighted that connectivity is directly related for achieving SDGs goals 7, 9, 13 and 17 and it could indirectly help achieve goal number 1 and 2. Poor connectivity among the South Asian countries has led to increased logistics cost which at present is between 13-15 percent and there is a potential to reduce it to 8 percent. It was agreed that that improvements in three modes of rail, road and water connectivity will accelerate achieving the SDGs. It was pointed out that South Asia was one of the most integrated regions in the world historically, but now it is the least integrated region in the world. Afghanistan shared its experience as a transit country connecting Central Asia to South Asia and highlighted that it has signed few agreements to transfer electricity from Central Asia to South Asia. The progress made between India-Nepal, India-Bhutan and India-Bangladesh was discussed. It was pointed out that some positive developments in India with respect to rail transportation in terms of connecting the Northeast States and efforts towards making it broad gauge. However, situation in Bangladesh is deteriorating and it is even worse in Nepal and Bhutan because of the infrastructure, thus it is necessary to shift the focus to people first and concentrate on the benefits of connectivity to people. A challenge for farmers not able to transport the extra produce to other countries seamlessly due to connectivity issues was also raised. For achieving SDG 1 and 2, one needs to think about the farmers as to how they can gain from the energy and connectivity in South Asia. Noting that 134 million in the sub-region do not have access to safe drinking water, the working group stressed the importance of a regional economic framework on provision of access to water. Discussions also focused on energy where it was pointed out that South Asia needs to ramp up the share of renewable energy resources given the fact that the sub-region severely lags in energy efficiency. Maldives shared use of internet as a mode of providing basic services and street vendors are using e-banking services. Maldives government has introduced e-governance system where people did not have to commute to access utility services like paying bills, buying tickets etc. Therefore, dissemination of information and technology services are vital for achieving SDGs in Maldives. Bangladesh stated that river connectivity between India and Bangladesh is an important mode of transportation, but political will is very important for sharing of electricity and improving transport facilities. Bhutan shared how it is using its natural resources for creating hydroelectricity and benefitting by exporting to India. Bhutan is providing 100 units electricity for free to rural households in order to discourage use of firewood. However, the major challenge Bhutan faces is road connectivity, especially during monsoon, because of its geographical terrain. Establishing rail networks between India Bangladesh, India-Nepal and India-Pakistan was emphasized as rail transport is much more energy efficient compared to road transport. The working group also noted that the present regulations for road connectivity are being governed by 18th century laws and thus a review of these are important. The SAARC Agreement on rail and road connectivity were finalized but could not be signed. Therefore, it would be better to follow building block approach where connectivity issues

could be handled first on bilateral basis than going to multilateral regional initiatives. The group felt that lack of strong political is one of the main reasons why a successful regional connectivity initiative is not materializing. It was emphasized that in addition to connectivity through roads, rails and ports, connectivity through pipelines, electric transmission lines and optic fiber is also important to accelerate the process of achieving the SDGs.

#### **4. Harnessing the Means of implementation for Accelerating SDGs Achievement in South Asia: Finance, technology, capacity-building, and trade (SDG 17)**

This session aimed to discuss the potential and opportunities for enhancing the means of implementation identified under SDG17 – which include finance, technology, capacity building and trade. The UNESCAP secretariat made an introductory presentation on financing that shared the findings of the UNESCAP Economic and Social Survey 2019 projecting an investment gap of US \$ 1.5 trillion per year or 5% of GDP for developing Asia-Pacific countries for achieving SDGs and which is higher at 10% of GDP in South Asia. SDGs investment needs in South Asia are large relative to their financing flows, especially the largest needs pertain to ensuring people’s well-being. It was pointed out that the sub-region was regressing in achieving SDGs on climate issues and clean water and sanitation which calls for stronger climate finance and larger fiscal resources. For the sub-region, carbon tax that could help cut carbon-dioxide emission below the business-as-usual scenario while enhancing the fiscal resources could be helpful to achieving SDGs.

The panel discussion focused on financial needs and taxation, trade, technology, LDC graduation, partnerships, and capacity building. It was agreed that generating additional finances by countries is essential to meet SDGs. In this regard, the discussion mainly centered around generation of resources through plausible new taxes without overburdening people. Recognizing the crucial role of domestic resource mobilization, it was opined that increasing the tax base and introduction of carbon tax could be effective instruments. Another important source of financing that the panel highlighted was aid, in the form of grants, rather than loans since all the countries in South Asia are either developing countries or LDCs. Experience of Pakistan was shared where the total number of people filing tax returns increased from 0.75 million to 2 million in 2019 and additional 2000 people who were members of high-end clubs in Pakistan were brought into the tax net. The panel felt that while generating finances is an important aspect, it is equally important for the governments to spend the financial resources most efficiently and productively in order to meet SDGs. A case was also made for regional cooperation on illicit financial flows across the subregion.

Given that the trade has acted as engine of growth and for many of the countries in the sub-region, concerns were raised on the recent stalemate on market access in WTO and trade war between USA and China and increased protectionism. Since three out of four LDCs of the subregion are going to graduate in near future, concerns were raised on preference erosion as the graduating countries will lose the duty-free quota-free market access and there are no meaningful discussions taking place in WTO on this issue. It was expressed that the next WTO Ministerial meeting which

will be held in Kazakhstan in 2020 must include this issue in its agenda and provide a larger transition period for DFQF to graduating LDCs.

The panel also found that global partnership should cover transfer of technology as well as capacity building. It was felt that transfer of technology which was earlier ensured through FDI inflows has become weaker and thus innovative solutions would need to be found. Lack of technology will negatively impact the sustainable production systems and thus global partnerships should focus on this issue. Efforts must be made to ensure that global economies help LDCs in acquiring technologies. This session concluded that to accelerate SDG achievement, a committed partnership is essential at global and regional level and it was opined that ESCAP can play an important role in this context.

### **5. Unlocking the Means of implementation for Accelerating SDGs Achievement in South Asia: Policy coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and data, monitoring and accountability (SDG 17)**

This session explored the importance of policy coherence, integrated approaches and the need for whole-of-society approach promoting the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. The introductory presentation made by UNESCAP secretariat, showed that out of 17 goals, there are only 2 goals (Goals 3 and 7) where the sub-region was on track. For 3 goals (Goals 6,12 and 13) where sufficient data is not available, the existing data indicate that the progress seem to move in the negative direction. It was highlighted that on many SDGs (1, 5, 10,11, 14, 16 and 17) there are insufficient data in many of the countries. UNESCAP was willing to assist countries to develop SDG progress assessment at national and subnational levels and the regional statistics and analysis are available at SDG Gateway ([data.unescap.org](http://data.unescap.org)).

The panel highlighted the lack of disaggregated data for a number of goals and targets in South Asian countries which makes taking stock of SDG indicators based on data to provide evidence-based policy interventions difficult. The panel presented the initiatives taken by the countries in order address the data gaps and to capture the targets more effectively. Some of the noteworthy interventions included institutional reforms in national statistical system and human resources development (Bhutan), setting up of a Task Force to integrate horizontally and vertically statistical system, developing national indicator framework and creation of SDG Dashboard which is a unified data repository and it gives horizontal and vertical data visualization (India), preparing a national strategy for development of statistics (Nepal) and developing an effective framework for monitoring data gaps (Sri Lanka). All the presentations highlighted lack of disaggregate data. However, the panel also emphasized that in order to ensure that no one is left behind, basic personal level information gathering is important. The discussions highlighted the effective use of ICT resources, strengthening MIS systems, exploring new alternative processes which go beyond traditional data capture could be more effective in SDG monitoring. It also emphasized on harnessing non-traditional data sources like big data which can give better and predictable analysis. As a way forward it was highlighted that collaboration between national statistical systems,

regional and international organizations, UN agencies and research institutions is important to resolve data gaps. A proposal for SDG course curriculum for school children was also mooted highlighting the challenges of lack of disaggregated data with the use of ICT. The CSO representative stressed the need for the government to put more efforts to fill the gaps in disaggregated data. The traditional data sources are not in the digital form and hence effective use in analyzing the SDG performance cannot be made. Hence the need for digitalization of data and keeping them in open domain so that they are accessible to all was stressed. Creating robust data systems needed more meaningful partnerships between different stakeholders. It was stated that involvement of more community people in data capturing will explain the actual situation more effectively. Highlighting that there was a need to capture some data at regional or global level to analyse issues like trafficking, migration, climate change which are cross border in nature, and they need to be interpreted differently.

The session also discussed that lack of availability of data particularly gender disaggregated data would lead to weak SDG monitoring and any analysis on the basis of such data sets will not be creditable to the public at large. A view was expressed that policy interventions should not stop due to lack of data as the time is running out. A need for data declaration policy to reduce the data gaps between government data and private data was emphasised. It was also suggested that all the countries in South Asia must adopt the UN National Quality Assurance Framework. For South Asia, regional cooperation on methodology of capturing data, use of big data, MIS etc. would be a good step to reduce data gaps. Partnerships between different stakeholders including the CSOs civil society organisations was needed. It was also suggested that in many countries the statistics officials are not fully equipped to handle data and thus UNESCAP was requested to take initiatives for their capacity development.

## **6. South Asian perspectives on accelerating progress towards the SDGs and sustainable graduation**

The session aimed to gather inputs and develop sub-regional perspectives for the 7th APFSD and HLPF 2020 in the form of priorities, good practices and initiatives. The session identified regional and sub-regional trends, reflect on efforts to address the most vulnerable groups and measures needed to leave no one behind; and highlight opportunities for sub-regional responses to inform the 2020 APFSD and HLPF processes. The session also discussed challenges relating to LDC graduation being faced by South Asian LDCs and examined possible pathways for South Asian LDCs in preparing a roadmap for sustainable graduation and the achievement of SDGs.

UNESCAP secretariat made an introductory presentation. It was highlighted that the LDC graduation is one of the major challenges in the sub-region for achieving SDG targets as three out of 4 LDCs are graduating in the next few years. UNESCAP has organised tailor made capacity building workshops to identify development priorities and particular development challenges by reviewing progress of these countries in implementing the VNRs as well as Istanbul Programme of Action; existing flexibilities and other special treatment at the WTO and RTAs that could be

exploited; and identify future capacity building needs for effective and smooth transition to graduate from LDC. Future work of UNESCAP will focus on enhancing capacity of South Asian LDCs to accelerate SDGs implementation and sustainable graduation from LDC status.

The session identified that the sustainable graduation of LDCs, connectivity, trade and economic integration, finances for development and existing data gaps are the key issues that must be addressed to accelerate achievement of SDGs. The panel felt that loss of preferential market access granted under the WTO and RTAs, was a major concern for the three out of four LDCs of South Asia. It was expressed that structural transformation is key to sustainable graduation and to meet SDGs. However, lack of access to technology and dependence on few products in the export basket and on few markets are the main barriers. Over-dependence on few sectors makes a country more vulnerable. The case of Bangladesh being dependent on textiles and garments, Bhutan on hydropower, Nepal on tourism were cases in point. It was recognised that regional cooperation, cross-border connectivity and learning from success stories was important based on which development strategies can be formulated. The panel noted that since most of the sectors which the South Asian countries are globally competitive are labour intensive and the AI and robotics may put pressure on these industries, leading to job losses. It was suggested that one way to reduce the impact is to promote vocational trainings to keep up with technology. It was expressed that graduation also poses the challenge of possible reduction in ODA, especially from the multilateral donors. LDC graduation may not affect the bilateral ODAs or aid for trade, yet it might impact bilateral trade and development cooperation and technical assistance.

The panel underscored the importance of evidence-based policy interventions for sustainable graduation of countries in the sub-region. The panel called for research on evaluating the impact of graduation at sectoral level and analysis of pros and cons of GSP ++ provisions after graduation. At the same time it is important to reflect on the strategies to continue with the same value chains, reducing high trade costs and identifying countries with whom a reciprocal market access negotiations can be started to retain the market access shares etc. Research should be backed by stakeholders' consultations to explore various policy options. It was also recognised that for sustainable graduation, domestic measures must be taken to improve export competitiveness and for which efforts to promote FDI inflows, technology and innovations would be important. A demand was made for ESCAP, development partners and other countries to provide technical assistance to the LDCs on policy interventions that they need to make. It was also expressed that UN, WTO and other countries may consider for having a more liberal transition periods for graduation which gives adequate time to the LDCs for structural adjustments and to prepare their industries to become globally competitive. Enhancing the efforts for regional cooperation in South Asia and making regional integration more effective for harnessing the economies of scale, establishing regional value chains and enhancing intra-regional trade and investments were recommended and the policy makers were requested to initiate practical and effective actions in this regard.

## **7. Regional cooperation for accelerating achievement towards the SDGs**

This session focused on the role regional cooperation can play to complement the national level policy strategies for achieving the SDGs in South Asia and explored the most critical areas for regional cooperation, potential mechanisms, platforms and related institutional arrangements that can foster regional cooperation. The session also discussed the likely prospects of deepening intra-regional trade and investment relations, promoting regional transport and energy connectivity, and how to address the growing threat of climate change and allied shared risks and vulnerabilities.

The discussion began with a special address by the Secretary-General of BIMSTEC, Mr. Shahidul Islam who argued that although the primary responsibility of achieving SDGs lies with the national governments, the regional interventions through cooperation on cross-border issues are important to accelerate the process. In this regard, he mentioned that poverty alleviation, transport connectivity, trade, disaster, climate change and energy are some of the areas where regional approaches are essential to support the national measures. Stressing that trade is important for inclusive economic growth, job creation and poverty reduction, he stated that regional integration is one of the means to achieve these goals. He noted that to enhance intra-regional trade both the tariff and non-tariff barriers are required to be reduced. In this context, he highlighted BIMSTEC initiatives in the sphere of trade facilitation, transport connectivity and energy cooperation. BIMSTEC transport and logistics study and transport connectivity master plan were highlighted. BIMSTEC was also discussing cooperation in energy including a regional framework on cross-border electricity trade and energy grid by using the bilateral agreements as a building block. On natural disaster he was of the opinion that an effective region wide response mechanism is missing and BIMSTEC has created an inter-governmental expert group to respond to natural disasters. In his opinion, there was enough space for more than one institution to work in South Asia on regional issues noting that BIMSTEC was already working with ASEAN, BBIN, SAARC, ADB and is willing to work with other development partners.

The panel agreed that regional cooperation effort in South Asia was much below the desired level and the progress was very slow costing dearly for the overall development of the sub-region. It was suggested that it might be important to explore sub-regionalism within SAARC which can bridge the trust deficit. An idea to think of South Asia+ was also mooted out suggesting that other neighboring countries can be associated so that they can invigorate the process of regional cooperation. It was also suggested that there is a need to initiate thematic and sectoral alliances among the countries in South Asia which might be more effective than the existing all-encompassing regional cooperation. In this regard, disasters, food security, smog and air pollution, debt strategy, social protection, gender, energy, connectivity were some of the identified areas which are cross-border and demand a regional approach to address the related challenges.

Intra-regional trade and investment was an important area for regional cooperation and integration. The panel felt that the reasons for low integration was due to low appetite for integration and lack of political will. One of the reasons cited for lack of effective cooperation was the relative size



imbalance of GDP, population, and land. It was stated that since India occupies 70 percent of these indicators (unlike countries in South East Asia) and thus the success of regional initiatives depends on India's will. Another challenge that the sub-region faces was that three LDCs are landlocked and their success in achieving SDGs depend on their neighbors in terms of transit rights, reducing trade costs through trade facilitation measures and building infrastructure at borders. It was emphasized that enhanced intraregional trade and investment linkages would not only reduce poverty, but will also create decent jobs, address food security, ensure transfer of technology and thereby help accelerating SDG achievement in many other areas as well. It was felt that if South Asian countries aligned their national policies to SDGs, there would be an increase in appetite for regional integration.

Climate change was one area where strong pitch was made for regional cooperation. It was stated that SAARC declaration on climate change can be built up to develop a regional framework, particularly for early warning systems and disaster management. The regional agenda for cooperation on SDGs in South Asia must focus on eight potential areas which include food security, health, regional economic integration, trade in services for promoting integrated labour market, energy, river water sharing and flood management, conserving cross-border environmental resources, halting cross-border crime, and means of implementation (finance, technology, capacity building and reforms in institutional arrangements). Specific timelines for monitoring progress of actions was necessary to ensure that the deliverables are accomplished. The role of academia, private sector, media, civil society and UNESCAP was emphasized for their effective delivery.

### **Concluding remarks**

In his valedictory address, Mr. Nojibur Rahman, Principal Secretary to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh, highlighted that the forum has successfully identified some of the common challenges faced by the South Asian countries in terms of high social exclusion, extreme poverty, inequalities of access and opportunities, gender based inequalities, climate change, and lack of reliable, affordable, disaggregated data to inform policy interventions. Among others, the single most important factor which has been highlighted many times is the issue of financing the SDGs, an issue that requires greater cooperation and collective action from different stakeholders. It was recognised that UNESCAP has played a great role in engaging various stakeholders, including the government and civil society but also the private sector, to cut across boundaries and foster dialogue and consultations for sustainable and inclusive development. There is need for active and greater regional cooperation within South Asia on raising finances, strategies to bridge data gaps and localisation of priorities, where again UNESCAP, as the regional arm of the United Nations, can play an important role.

The Forum concluded with a vote of thanks from Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, UNESCAP to the Government of Bangladesh especially the Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance for hosting the Forum in Dhaka, Bangladesh, to all the panelists, representatives of the governments, private sector, think-tanks, and civil society for their active participation.

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## Annex



# Third South Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals

Dhaka, 8-9 December 2019

Hotel Pan Pacific Sonargaon, Dhaka 1215, Bangladesh

### Programme

Day 1: 8 December 2019 (Sunday)	
Padma Hall, Hotel Pan Pacific Sonargaon	
9:00-09.30	Registration and Tea/Coffee
09.30- 10.30	<p><b>Session 1: Inaugural Session</b></p> <p><i>Welcome/Opening Remarks:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>H.E. Mr. Monowar Ahmed</b>, Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Government of Bangladesh</li><li>• <b>Dr. Nagesh Kumar</b>, Director, UNESCAP South and South West Asia Office (UNESCAP-SSWA), New Delhi</li><li>• <b>Ms. Mia Seppo</b>, United Nations Resident Coordinator, Bangladesh</li></ul> <p><i>Special Addresses:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>H.E. Mr. Abul Kalam Azad</b>, Chief Coordinator for SDG Affairs, Prime Minister's Office, Bangladesh</li><li>• <b>H.E. Dr. Puspa Raj Kadel</b>, Vice-Chairman, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal</li></ul> <p><i>Inaugural Address:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>H.E. Mr. Khandker Anwarul Islam</b>, Cabinet Secretary, Cabinet Division, Government of Bangladesh</li></ul>
10.30-11.00	Group Photo and Tea/Coffee Break
11.00-13.00	<p><b>Session 2: Taking stock of progress, achievements and challenges in five years of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda</b></p> <p><i>Chair:</i> <b>H.E. Dr. Shamshul Alam</b>, Member, General Economics Division (GED), Bangladesh Planning Commission</p> <p><i>Presentation on the main outcome of the HLPF (ECOSOC and Summit level)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Mr. Samiuddin Ahmed</b>, Environment and Development Division, UNESCAP</li></ul>

	<p><b><i>Presentations by Country Representatives (7 minutes each):</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mr. Mirwais Baheej</b>, Director General, Policy and Result Based Monitoring, Ministry of Economy, Afghanistan</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Tshewang Jamtsho</b>, Planning Officer, Plan Monitoring and Coordination Division, Gross National Happiness Commission, Bhutan</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Md. Mokammel Hossain</b>, Additional Secretary (SDG Affairs), Prime Minister’s Office, Bangladesh</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Sundar Mishra</b>, NITI Aayog, India</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Aishath Saadh</b>, Deputy Director General , National Planning and SDGs Coordination Division, Maldives</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Narayan Raj Poudel</b>, Under-Secretary, National Planning Commission, Nepal</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Shah Faisal Kakar</b>, Acting High Commissioner, Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka, Bangladesh</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Samanthi Senanayake</b>, Director, Sustainable Development Council, Sri Lanka</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Presentation by CSO representative</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mr. Daya Sagar Shrestha</b>, Asia Pacific Regional CSOs Engagement Mechanism (AP-RCEM)/National Campaign for Sustainable Development, Nepal</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Open discussion</i></b></p>
13:30 - 14:30	Lunch
14:30- 16:15	<p><b>Session 3: Review of Selected Priority areas of cooperation in the Asia-Pacific roadmap for accelerating progress towards the SDGs</b></p> <p><b><i>Presentation on the priority areas</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mr. Samiuddin Ahmed</b>, Environment and Development Division, UNESCAP</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Break-out sessions: Four parallel Working groups</i></b></p> <p><b>Priority Areas:</b>  <b><u>3A. Leaving no one behind -Human well-being and capabilities</u></b>  <i>Chair: Ms. Sayeda Nayem Jahan, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare, Bangladesh</i>  <i>Panelists:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Prof. Bishwambher Pyakuryal</b>, Chairman, Institute for Strategic and Socio-Economic Research (ISSR), Nepal</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Ganga Tilakaratna</b>, Research Fellow &amp; Head of Poverty and Social Welfare Policy Research, IPS, Sri Lanka</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Sofoora Kawsar Usman</b>, Assistant Director, Ministry of Health, Maldives</li> </ul>
14:30-15:00	
15:00-16:15	

- **Mr. Zakir Hossain**, Nagorik Uddyog, Bangladesh (CSO representative)

*Open Discussion*

### **3B. Disaster risk reduction and resilience**

*Chair: Mr. Md. Shah Kamal*, Senior Secretary, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Bangladesh

*Panelists:*

- **Dr. Madhurima Sarkar-Swaisgood**, Economic Affairs Officer, UNESCAP
- **Mr. Shambhu Prasad Regmi**, Chief of NEOC, Under Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal
- **Dr. A R Subbiah**, Director, Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (RIMES), Thailand
- **Dr. Suman Kumar Karna**, Former Project Chief, Post Flood Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Project and DRR Specialist, Nepal
- **Mr. Giriraj Amarnath**, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Sri Lanka
- **Ms. Beena Pallical**, Asia Dalit Rights Forum, India (CSO representative)

*Open Discussion*

### **3C: Global environmental commons and climate change**

*Chair: Dr. Fahmida Khatun*, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Dhaka

*Panelists:*

- **Dr. Arvind Kumar**, President, India Water Foundation, India
- **Dr. Mahfuz Kabir**, Research Director, BIISS, Bangladesh
- **Dr. Athula Senaratne**, Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies, Sri Lanka
- **Mr. Tshewang Jamtsho**, Planning Officer, Plan Monitoring and Coordination Division, Gross National Happiness Commission, Bhutan
- **Ms. Chandima Priyeshni Arambepola**, Centre for Poverty Analysis, Sri Lanka (CSO representative)

*Open Discussion*

### **3D: Energy and Connectivity for the 2030 Agenda**

*Chair: Dr. Ahmad Kaikaus*, Senior Secretary, Power Division, Bangladesh

*Panelists:*

- **Mr. Anil Gupta**, former Chairman, CONCOR Limited and Consultant, UNESCAP
- **Mr. Asadullah Hamdard**, Deputy Director General, Economic Cooperation Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan
- **Mr. Raghubar Dayal**, Distinguished Fellow, Asian Institute of Transport Development (AITD), India
- **Mr. Syed Munir Khasru**, Chairman, Institute for Policy, Advocacy, and Governance (IPAG), Bangladesh

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mr. Barkat Ullah Maruf</b>, Assistant Director, COAST Bangladesh (CSO representative)</li> </ul> <p><i>Open Discussion</i></p>
16:15 - 16:30	Tea/Coffee Break
16:30 - 17:30	<p><b>Session 4: Plenary- Review of selected Priority Areas for Cooperation in South Asia: Reporting by the Working Groups and the Way Forward</b></p> <p><i>Chair: Amb. Gyan Chandra Acharya</i>, Chairman, SAWTEE Centre for SDGs, Kathmandu and former UN Undersecretary General</p> <p><i>Reporting by Chairs of Working Groups (5 minutes for each group):</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Leaving no one behind-Human well-being and capabilities</b></li> <li>2. <b>Disaster risk reduction and resilience</b></li> <li>3. <b>Global environmental commons and Climate change</b></li> <li>4. <b>Energy and Connectivity for the 2030 Agenda</b></li> </ol> <p>Discussion on the way forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mr. Md. Helal Uddin</b>, Action Aid, Bangladesh (CSO representative)</li> </ul> <p><i>Open discussion</i></p>
<p><b>Day 2: 9 December 2019 (Monday)</b></p> <p><b>Padma Hall, Hotel Pan Pacific Sonargaon</b></p>	
09.45 - 11.15	<p><b>Session 5: Harnessing the Means of implementation for Accelerating SDGs Achievement in South Asia: Finance, technology, capacity-building and trade (SDG 17)</b></p> <p><i>Chair: Dr. Md. Jafar Uddin</i>, Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh</p> <p><i>Introductory presentation by UNESCAP</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dr. Hamza Ali Malik</b>, Director, Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division (MPFD), UNESCAP</li> </ul> <p><i>Panelists:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dr. Abid Suleri</b>, Executive Director, SDPI and Member, Prime Minister’s Economic Advisory Council, Pakistan</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Mustafizur Rahman</b>, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Posh Raj Pandey</b>, Chairman, SAWTEE, Kathmandu</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Sabyasachi Saha</b>, Assistant Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Sakshi Rai</b>, Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability, India (CSO representative)</li> </ul> <p><i>Open discussion</i></p>
11:15- 11.30	Tea/Coffee Break

11.30 – 13:00	<p><b>Session 6: Unlocking the Means of implementation for Accelerating SDGs Achievement in South Asia: Policy coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and data, monitoring and accountability (SDG 17)</b></p> <p><i>Chair:</i> <b>Dr. Md. Shahadat Hossain</b>, Director (Joint Secretary), Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics</p> <p><i>Presentation on SDG progress in the SSWA region</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>ESCAP Statistics Division</b></li> </ul> <p><i>Panelists:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mr. Phub Sangay</b>, Executive Specialist, National Statistics Bureau, Bhutan</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Akhilesh Kumar</b>, Director, Social Statistics Division, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, India</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Keshab Kumar Gautam</b>, Director, Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal</li> <li>• <b>Ms. D.D.G.A. Seneviratne</b>, Additional Director General, Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Benu Maya Gurung</b>, Alliance Against Trafficking in Women and Children in Nepal (CSO representative)</li> </ul> <p><i>Open discussion</i></p>
13.00-14.00	Lunch
14.00-15.15	<p><b>Session 7: South Asian perspectives on accelerating progress towards the SDGs and sustainable graduation</b></p> <p><i>Chair:</i> <b>Mr. Abdul Baki</b>, Joint Secretary and SDGs Focal Point to ESCAP, Economic Relations Division, Government of Bangladesh</p> <p><i>Presentation:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna</b>, Economic Affairs Officer, UNESCAP-SSWA</li> </ul> <p><i>Panelists:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>H.E. Amb. Gyan Chandra Acharya</b>, Chairman, SAWTEE Centre for SDGs, Kathmandu and former UN Undersecretary General</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Tshering Dhendup</b>, Senior Planning Officer, Policy &amp; Planning Division, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Bhutan</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Narayan Raj Poudel</b>, Under-Secretary, National Planning Commission, Nepal</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Md. Mafidul Islam</b>, Chief, General Economics Division, Planning Commission, Bangladesh</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee</b>, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Barkat Ullah Maruf</b>, COAST Trust, Bangladesh (CSO representative)</li> </ul> <p><i>Open discussion</i></p>
15.15-15.30	Tea/Coffee Break

15.30-16.45	<p><b>Session 8: Regional cooperation for accelerating achievement towards the SDGs</b></p> <p><b>Chair:</b> H.E. Mr. Nojibur Rahman, Principal Secretary to the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Prime Minister's Office, Bangladesh</p> <p><b>Special Remarks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H.E. Mr M. Shahidul Islam, Secretary-General, BIMSTEC</li> </ul> <p><b>Panelists:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Selim Raihan, Executive Director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM), Bangladesh</li> <li>• Dr. Abid Suleri, Executive Director, SDPI and Member, Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, Pakistan</li> <li>• Dr. Posh Raj Pandey, Chairman, SAWTEE, Kathmandu</li> <li>• Dr. Shiladitya Chatterjee, Adviser, Centre for Sustainable Development Goals, Government of Assam, India</li> <li>• Mr. Nazir Kabiri, Executive Director, Biruni Institute, Afghanistan</li> <li>• Mr. Chanchal Chand Sarkar, Director, SAARC Secretariat</li> <li>• Mr. W.A. Deshapriya S. Wijetunge, Sri Lanka UN Friendship Organization (SUNFO), Sri Lanka (CSO representative)</li> </ul> <p><i>Open discussion</i></p>
16.45-17.15	<p><b>Valedictory session</b></p> <p><b>Concluding remarks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H.E. Mr. Nojibur Rahman, Principal Secretary to the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Prime Minister's Office, Bangladesh</li> </ul> <p><b>Vote of thanks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Economic Affairs Officer, UNESCAP-SSWA</li> </ul>