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

Hotel Pan Pacific Sonargaon, Dhaka 1215, Bangladesh

Concept Note

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 implementation action at the global, regional and subregional levels, as indicated in General Assembly Resolution 70/1 on Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The countries of South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) urgently need to accelerate action on the 2030 Agenda. UNESCAP SDG progress assessment for South Asia suggests that despite massive improvements 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. 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, then the world cannot 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 subregional preparatory for the APFSD and was launched in 2017 in Kathmandu in collaboration with the National Planning Commission, Nepal. The Second South Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals was organized by UNESCAP in partnership with the NITI Aayog, India and the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS),

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1 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.

on 4-5 October 2018 in New Delhi, India, focused on the theme of the 2019 HLPF, ‘Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.’

The third “South Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals” is a part of the preparatory process for the 7th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) in 2020, which itself is one of the regional consultations towards the HLPF 2020 and provides a unique opportunity to share sub-regional perspectives on the proposed theme of “Accelerating action and delivery of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific” to be addressed at the APFSD in 2020.

With completion of the first cycle of follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level and the HLPF structure currently being under review by member States, UNESCAP has decided to focus the 7th APFSD on opportunities for accelerated action. All the countries in South Asia have submitted their first Voluntary National Review by 2019 and three South Asian countries intend to participate in the VNRs again in 2020 (Bangladesh, Nepal and India). In this context, the third South Asia Forum on Sustainable Development Goals will focus on national and subregional perspectives and stock-taking the lessons learned in implementation of SDGs, as well as forward-looking dialogue on partnership to accelerate the progress of SDGs.

The Forum seeks to bring together stakeholders from the government, academia, international community, civil society and private sector 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.

**Objectives**

The main objective of the Forum is to foster deepened and shared understanding of member States and other stakeholders on the opportunities for accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through inclusive dialogue and strengthened partnerships and to reflect subregional perspectives into the relevant regional and global processes

To achieve this, the South Asia Forum for the SDGs aims to:

1. Enhance awareness and understanding on key challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Regional Roadmap to support and complement the subregional agenda through sharing of experiences and knowledge.
2. Provide a platform for expert discussions and reflections on subregional perspectives and good practices which may accelerate SDG achievement along with challenges related to

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3 For more details, see [https://www.unescap.org/events/south-asia-forum-sustainable-development-goals](https://www.unescap.org/events/south-asia-forum-sustainable-development-goals)

4 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.
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, subregional, 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.

**Intended Participants**

1. Government officials and representatives of institutions in UN 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 UN ESCAP focal points for sustainable development
3. Representatives of local government organizations
4. Representatives of regional and subregional organizations that support SDG implementation
5. Representatives of civil society organizations and private sector organizations
6. Experts from think tanks and academia; and
7. Other stakeholders involved in SDG implementation at national, regional and global levels.

**Organization**

- The meetings will be conducted in English and all documentation will be in English.
- The meetings will include panel discussions on key topics. Depending on the session focus, presentations may be delivered by resource persons and experts.

**Expected outcome**

The outcome of the meeting will consist of a summary of proceedings of the key topics and issues raised by participants, as well as recommendations and presentations. The materials will be sent to participants and be made available on the UN ESCAP Website.