TRANSFORMATION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

KEY MESSAGES

Transparent and accountable governments, responsible businesses and engaged civil societies are needed for social justice transformation that will support trade and economic integration efforts that are more inclusive and equitable. Social justice transformation is also needed to create inclusive and competitive urban and rural environments and inclusive access to basic resources and services.

Wide disparities across the region—between the rich and poor, between those living in urban and rural areas and between the sexes—exist in relation to income and access to food, water and energy.

Addressing inequitable development outcomes requires changing the inequitable processes that produced them. Initiatives to redress these inequalities are emerging, including community-based management of natural resources, corporate and civil society partnerships and participatory budgeting.

Governments can create the enabling conditions to accelerate existing and emerging efforts and thus trigger transformation that redresses inequalities by translating international commitments into national frameworks and laws, enlarging opportunity for multistakeholder participation and promoting access to information and more equitable flows of investment.
4.1 INTRODUCTION

A principle of the 2030 Agenda is that no one should be left behind. This principle is the theme for the 2016 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, a sign of global commitment to a development agenda that benefits all people.

This is particularly relevant to the Asia-Pacific region, where income inequality has worsened. Nearly three out of four people in Asia and the Pacific are living in countries in which income inequality has increased or remained unchanged over the past 15 years. At the same time, the share of total income received by the poorest 20 per cent of people has decreased. Increasing economic inequalities, coupled with persistent social inequalities, shape the degree of inclusiveness and equity in people’s access to natural resources that are necessary to meet their basic human needs. Inequalities in access to natural resources reinforce economic and social inequalities.

This chapter first looks at the state of inequalities in access to critical natural resources and then reflects on the relationships between access to natural resources and economic and social inequalities. Although inequalities are viewed mainly through an environmental lens, the solutions cannot be environmental alone. The chapter proposes three target areas for interventions that can promote more inclusive societies and economies: (i) fulfilment of basic rights; (ii) decision-making processes that are more inclusive and equitable; and (iii) inequalities in outcomes. This chapter is relevant to countries for which advancing equality is critical for achieving SDG 10 and as a means to achieving other targets.

4.2 SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Sustainable development is grounded in social justice. It is integral to addressing structural poverty, the unfair distribution of resources, unequal access to opportunities, shortcomings in respect to fundamental human rights and the protection of vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

There are varying views on what constitutes socially just, or fair, distribution of goods and resources. Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum’s capability approach is a widely accepted basis for policy response that highlights the multidimensions of poverty and the critical role of the State in ensuring that individuals establish basic capabilities to do things that they value and have the freedom to choose between different ways of leading their lives.

The aspiration for a more equitable society is reflected in the 2030 Agenda. Several SDG targets aim to ensure universal access to basic needs and services that derive from natural resources. These targets include access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food (target 2.1), safe and affordable drinking water (target 6.1) and affordable, reliable and modern energy services (target 7.1). Target 2.3 aims at equal access to land and natural resources in general. SDG 14, which aims to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources, dedicates one target to small-scale artisanal fishers’ access to marine resources and markets (target 14.b). SDG 15 on protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably managing forests, combating desertification and halting and reversing land degradation and halting biodiversity loss includes a target on fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources and promoting appropriate access to such resources (target 15.6).

The 2030 Agenda also highlights the importance of gender equity in access to natural resources. SDG target 5.a promotes equal access to ownership and control over land and natural resources and target 5.c promotes policies to reinforce gender equality. SDG 4 underpins these gender equality goals on inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. More broadly, equality among individuals is expressed through the aspiration to reduce inequality within and between countries, for instance, in terms of outcomes of justice in target 10.3 and in regards to social protection and fiscal policy in target 10.4.

Reducing income inequality is an indispensable component of poverty reduction. A study covering 125 countries found that one third of the fall in poverty came from greater equality. There are also studies indicating that highly unequal societies—economically, socially and environmentally—are less successful in sustaining growth, slower in recovering from economic downturns and more susceptible to political instability and violence that arise...
The 2030 Agenda’s pledge of leaving no one behind and its vision of universal human dignity speaks of the necessity for action to protect human rights and the importance of accountability, participation, equality and non-discrimination.

4.3 SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

4.3.1 OVERVIEW—DRIVERS AND OUTLOOK

Although people’s access to water, food and energy has improved over time in most of the countries in the region, there are inequalities between rich and poor, urban and rural populations, and men and women in which the poor, the rural and women generally have less access, ownership and control.

In understanding the unequal access to natural resources, it is useful to examine what drives different dimensions of inequality. For instance, urbanization is a major driving force of widening income gaps.\(^1^\) It creates a modern commercial sector, marked by high productivity and incomes, typically alongside a traditional subsistence sector, marked by low productivity, incomes and investments.\(^2^\) Inequality is not exclusively a rural-urban phenomenon, however. As the State of Asian and Pacific Cities 2015 report highlights, “Cities are home to concentrated poverty, growing inequality, social exclusion and inequitable service provision.”\(^3^\) As more and more people live in cities, ensuring that the drivers of inequality are addressed is critical to achieving sustainable development in the region.

The degree to which urbanization impacts inequality varies.\(^4^\) A study in 2014 that examined data from the 1990s to the late 2000s found that urbanization contributed 300 per cent of the increase in inequality at the national level in the Philippines and contributed more than 50 per cent of the increase in inequality in Indonesia and slightly less than 15 per cent in India. The same study also indicated that the increasing urban population had helped reduce inequality in China, where rising rural inequality accounted for 43 per cent of inequality at the national level.\(^5^\)

Trade integration could potentially be a driving force for income inequality in the region. A study in 2014 on Asia’s intraregional trade found that intraregional imports contributed to increasing income inequality within countries, while intraregional exports contributed to narrowing income inequality within countries.\(^6^\) Regional trade integration is generally considered beneficial to countries, though to varying degrees. If human rights are not respected, economic integration could contribute to further deterioration of the environment via relaxation of regulations that result in pollution havens, loss of biodiversity and a race to the bottom, in which competition encourages businesses to prefer locations with lower wages and weaker environmental standards and law enforcement capacity. The increase in capabilities and diversification expected from trade integration has so far been limited to a small number of countries in the region (see Chapter 5).

Impacts of environmental degradation, such as air pollution and climate change, affect individuals and societies differently and often disproportionately. The manifestation of climate change as floods, droughts, cyclones and sea level rise disproportionately affects people who are poor because their livelihoods are sensitive to climate and because they often lack the means to protect themselves or cope with the impacts. The damages to livelihoods brought about by frequent and sudden-onset disasters, such as storms and floods, are on the policy agenda for many countries because of their visibility. But there are also slow-onset climate change impacts, such as drought and sea level rise, that do not get as much attention. In the Pacific countries, and also in Viet Nam and Bangladesh, sea level rise, higher waves and stronger winds have caused coastal erosion and salinization of the arable land, leading to lower agricultural yields.\(^7^\) Both types of damage deprive coastal populations of their livelihoods.

When Typhoon Haiyan stormed the central Philippines and killed more than 6,000 people, it was the landless who were hardest hit. Many of them did not evacuate to safer areas despite the warning because they feared that they would not be allowed to return home. In other developing countries, many rural families do not have secure land rights and thus do not have the motivation to invest in building climate-resilient houses. The landless tend to have the most difficulty recovering from the impacts of disaster.\(^8^\)
4.3.2 STATE OF ACCESS TO FOOD, WATER AND ENERGY

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and multiple human rights agreements affirm the entitlement of everyone to adequate food, and some nations explicitly recognize the right to adequate food in their constitution. In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly declared access to clean water and sanitation a human right. While access to energy is not formally recognized as a human right, it is a critical input to meeting basic needs. For example, producing and cooking adequate food and preparing clean drinking water require energy. Energy also enables the provision of health care services, education and information. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) included human beings’ physiological needs for food and water through Goals 1 and 7 on eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and environmental sustainability, respectively. The goal of ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all was introduced in the 2030 Agenda.

There are great differences in the prevalence of hunger across the Asia-Pacific subregions. The MDG target on hunger was reached in Central Asia, East Asia and South-East Asia due to rapid economic growth; South Asia and the Pacific did not reach the goal. In South Asia alone, there are approximately 281 million people who still lack access to affordable and nutritious food. The Pacific countries have about 1.4 million people with precarious access to affordable nutrition due to increasing dependence on imported food and frequent natural and human-caused disasters that affect the availability of staple food and result in volatility of food prices.

In the region, a total of 277 million people, of which 138 million live in South and South-West Asia, lacked access to safe drinking water in 2015, despite significant progress towards increased access to drinking water.

Equitable access to water for women can empower them economically if water is used productively. Yet, women’s limited access to and ownership of land leads to their lack of access to water.

Affordable energy is needed not only to achieve economic growth but also to meet basic human needs. In the region, 455 million people did not have access to electricity in 2012, and the rural areas accounted for the majority of this access deficit (see Figure C5 in the Statistical Annex). Around 1.8 billion people still rely on traditional fuels for cooking and heating. In most of the countries that have not reached universal electrification, the rate of electrification in urban areas exceeds that of the rural areas. In Cambodia and Myanmar, the rate of rural electrification was below 20 per cent in 2012, while in urban areas it was 97 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively.

With their dependence on imported petroleum to meet energy needs, the Pacific countries are among the most vulnerable in the region to energy poverty. Similar to water, access to energy and efficient use of energy is determined by income. Poor households often have a limited range of opportunities to convert energy to productive use because the technologies that are available to them are often of low quality and inefficient, such as candles and kerosene lamps.

With the growing demand for food and energy as well as rising water supply uncertainty, the interdependency and links between and among water, food and energy resources have become more pronounced than ever. Competing demands for natural resource endowments, such as land for food and renewable energy production, also continue to intensify. Because water, food and energy resource supply and demand are deeply connected, sustainable management of these resources requires consideration in tandem. Institutional capacity to detect and address trade-offs in the use of natural resources needs to be built up. Economic strategies to meet the growing demand for energy should not constrain the capacity of poor households to meet their food and water needs. And meeting the increasing urban demand for water should not undermine the capacity of rural agricultural users to meet their own demands.

4.3.3 ACCESS TO LAND

Access to land largely determines rural people’s access to basic needs, such as water and food. Secure access to land is critical, especially for the rural poor who are more likely not to meet their basic needs without it. Insecure land tenure, which is typical in many developing countries, is a contributing factor to low productivity—farmers have no incentive to invest in land without long-term land security. The unequal distribution of land is one of the reasons for social disparity and is a contributor to domestic conflicts. Worldwide, land is under increasing pressure due to various
Access to food is often discussed in the greater context of food security, which encompasses availability, stability and utilization of food in addition to access. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations’ food security indicator measures access to food using such variables as the domestic food price index, the prevalence of undernourishment, the share of food expenditure among people who are poor, the depth of the food deficit, the prevalence of food inadequacy and road density, among others. In Asia, most of these indicators improved over the past five years. Nonetheless, disparities in access among countries and within countries should not be ignored.

Access to food is largely determined by income in places where people purchase food. Thus, there is invariably a disparity in access to food between the rich and the poor. Although poverty reduction achieved in the past decade in the region contributed towards improving access to food, especially for the rural poor, the region is still home to 490 million people who lack access to a sufficient supply of dietary energy to live a healthy life.

Access to productive land, especially for the rural population, is also an important determinant of access to food. Access to land (as well as control and ownership) is not equal between men and women. Women usually have less access to land and lack access to fertilizer and tools. Households headed by females tend to become less food secure.

Access to food is also determined by location and, to some extent, access to roads. It is a problem especially for people living in mountains, remote areas and small islands where local agricultural production is inadequate and transporting food from outside is physically difficult due to lack of transportation and financially difficult due to high prices. Because many of the people in remote places are ethnic minorities and indigenous people, they account for a large portion of the region’s poor and hungry population.

Source: Food security is defined as ‘when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food’ by the World Food Summit in 1996; FAO, 2015; FAO, 2015; FAO, 2015.

Factors, including population growth, climate change and land degradation.

Because people who are poor, especially women, tend to have weak and unprotected land rights, they are the most vulnerable to the increasing pressures. In many of the region’s developing countries, land ownership is largely determined by customary or non-formal tenure and provided as a social right. Land rights are often unequally distributed between men and women. For example, in 2015 the share of agricultural land owned by women was only 10.1 per cent in Bangladesh, 14.3 per cent in Tajikistan and 15.4 per cent in Viet Nam. The quality of the land as well as equipment available to women tends to be lower than what men can access. Women also have limited or no access to valuable extension services and cannot easily acquire loans or purchase inputs. These factors usually result in lower yields for women farmers and, consequently, the persistence of poverty and inequality.

Land grabbing is a threat to land security of people in developing countries. Land grabbing refers to “land deals that happen without the free, prior and informed consent of communities that often result in farmers being forced from their homes and families left hungry”. The deals can be national or international for any purpose—road construction, commercial real estate development or agricultural investment. Conflicts over land issues have occurred in Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines, among others. Disputes over land sometimes lead to human rights violations of the poor and marginalized, including indigenous people, whose customary rights to land are not recognized by many States, but it also applies to the growing number of the region’s urban poor living in informal housing without security of tenure.

4.3.4 ACCESS TO AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF OCEANS, SEAS AND MARINE RESOURCES

Fisheries are an important source of income and food for many impoverished people around the world; SDG target 14.b speaks to the access of small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets. Conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources at large are captured in SDG 14. To realize this goal, a legal framework called the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea was suggested under target 14.c. Most of the region’s countries have ratified the Convention but it has not been followed through thoroughly in some countries due to lack of capabilities and human resources in the ocean sector, among other reasons.
Follow-through on the Convention is urgently needed for sustainable use of the resources—conflicts prevail over access rights, and ocean, sea and marine resources suffer pressure from unsustainable human activity, including overfishing, unregulated illegal fishing, pollution and invasion of alien species.

Ocean acidification and climate change have also impacted marine biodiversity. In the past decades, the world’s fisheries have been increasingly exploited. Fish stocks have been declining worldwide (see Figure A8 in the statistical annex). Among the assessed fish stock in the ocean, only 9.9 per cent is underfished, while 61.3 per cent is fully fished (fully exploited) and 28.8 per cent is fished at a biologically unsustainable level (overexploited). Depleted fish stocks have negative impact on small-scale fishers. In some countries, especially in South-East Asia, small-scale fishers are among the poorest occupational groups, and fisheries is, in most cases, their main source of income and food.

Fishers in the Asia-Pacific region catch more than half of the fish caught in the world [33]. The demand for fish is expected to grow worldwide, and FAO predicts that Asia will be leading the increase in demand. While this presents an enormous economic opportunity, a framework that affirms environmental sustainability and human rights is desperately needed. Reports of “sea slavery” in Thailand describe the trafficking of poor people from northern Thailand and neighbouring countries to fishing boats, some held for years, to catch fish that is often eventually sold for pet food or food for livestock [35, 36].

Various conventions and treaties concerning terrestrial ecosystems exist. Among them is the Convention on Biological Diversity, which has been ratified by most of the region’s countries. In 2014, the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity entered into force. This is an important protocol in advancing efforts towards SDG target 15.6, which aims to “ensure fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to such resources”. Seven countries in the region have become signatories, while 11 countries have either ratified or acceded to the protocol.

Men receive more socioeconomic benefits from formal employment in the forestry sector than women, although not much data are available beyond formal employment in the forestry sector. Forestry provides firewood for energy and cooking, and both men and women collect firewood, though men tend to sell firewood for income while women tend to use firewood for subsistence purposes.

It is difficult to make a general statement about the ownership of forests in the region because of the range of prevailing arrangements. Overall, ownership has evolved over the past decade in many countries. In some countries, the portion of the forests designated for and owned by local communities and indigenous peoples has increased (from 2002 to 2013), and the portion owned by governments has decreased.

Significant changes have been reported in Bhutan, Cambodia and Thailand. In these countries, the government used to administer entire forests but have designated some forests to indigenous people and local communities for their management. Community rights to forested land are relatively strong in Bangladesh, China, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Viet Nam—where the constitution or civil code protects communities’ tenure rights to forestland.

In India, Nepal and the Philippines, the area of forest owned by indigenous people and local communities has increased significantly and now accounts for one third of the entire forest land. However, the portion of the land allocated to local or indigenous communities in some countries is of low quality—the forests had already been cut down when it was handed to them.
4.4 LEADING FROM THE TOP: STRUCTURAL CHANGES TOWARDS TRANSFORMATION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

4.4.1 OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS

How can the region redress the inequalities?

To begin, decision-making processes to determine people’s access to natural resources need to transform, from being characterized by exclusion, excessive politicization and lack of transparency to a process in which multiple stakeholders’ interests and knowledge are sought out through engagement. Political decision-making processes often reflect social and economic inequalities, with certain groups of a population, such as ethnic minorities, women, youth and the poor, typically excluded from decision-making on resources that concern their lives.

Lack of stakeholder engagement in decision-making entrenches inequality and reduces the impact of high-level policy initiatives. Where stakeholder engagement and delegation of responsibilities to stakeholders has occurred, positive changes have been observed—such as reduced pollution, increased investment and more sustainable natural resource management.

Opportunities for such transformation exist. Some countries in the region have civil society organizations working towards inclusive and sustainable development and contributing to decision-making on the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources. Other successful grass-roots initiatives have led to increased participation in decision-making. But there are also challenges, such as governance deficits that manifest in lack of coordination and cooperation across different line ministries and corruption in the management of natural resources.

Governments can lead a transformation for more socially just societies from the top by putting appropriate policies in place. This section proposes three macro policy changes that can support the more equitable distribution of access to natural resources: (i) protection and promotion of human rights; (ii) addressing inequalities in the “process”, in line with SDG target 16.7, which aims to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels; and (iii) direct interventions for short-term action on inequality in “outcome”.

These structural approaches could provide enabling conditions for scaling up three niches, or bottom-up approaches, that can support the inclusiveness of regional economic and trade integration, urbanization and service provision at the local level related to community-based management of natural resources, scrutiny of supply chains and participatory budgeting, for example.

4.4.2 TRANSLATING INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS INTO NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND LAWS THAT ADHERE TO THE PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The foundation for advancing equality in responding to basic needs is strong adherence to international conventions on human rights, in particular the ten core international human rights instruments. Most of the region’s countries have ratified these conventions, although the degree to which they are translated into national frameworks varies.

In addition, people’s rights to development and a healthy environment should also be recognized. The translation of such rights into national policies is necessary for sustainable development and providing equal access to basic services and natural resources. People’s right to a healthy environment is acknowledged in the Stockholm Declaration (1972), the Hague Declaration on the Environment (1989) and the Declaration of Bizkaia on the Right to the Environment (1999).

Access to information, participation and justice is one of the important principles in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) and the Future We Want (2012) and should be translated into national policies and governance structures. This principle introduces accountability, transparency and democratic decision-making to sustainable development governance and helps empower people. Efforts in India, where a Right to Information Act has been introduced, and in Bangladesh, where information mechanisms are being made available to the general population, have reported positive development results.

The Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in...
Environmental Matters is one of the most comprehensive efforts to implement the principle of access to information, participation and justice. The principle of free, prior and informed consent, which refers to the rights of local communities, particularly indigenous people, to participate in decision-making about issues impacting them, is included in article 10 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Local communities, particularly indigenous people, tend to rely on forests and marine resources yet are often discriminated against and excluded from the decision-making processes on the use of these resources. In the region, where environmental conflicts and displacement that arise from lack of consultation with local communities are prevalent, adherence to this principle is particularly important.

Translating these principles and commitments into national frameworks does not automatically guarantee that people’s human rights are protected; but it is an important step towards ensuring human rights protection as a basis for advancement towards sustainable development. This is also in line with SDG target 16.6 that aims for effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels and SDG target 16.b that aims for the enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

4.4.3 ENLARGING SPACES FOR MULTISTAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

Participation of various stakeholders in decision-making, particularly those who are underrepresented, as spelled out in SDG target 16.7, provides the opportunity for diversity of viewpoints in the sustainable development process, enhances the implementation of decisions and builds trust among stakeholders, all of which will support long-term collaborative relationships. Because social and economic inequality is often reflected in political representation, enlarging a space for stakeholder participation is an opportunity for the poor, women, indigenous people and others to have their opinions heard on decisions that impact their lives.

National multistakeholder mechanisms exist in various countries of the region, although the term “multistakeholder” is loosely defined as non-state actors. Lack of institutional and financial frameworks, mechanisms for effective consultations and incorporation of stakeholders’ inputs into long-term planning have been the major bottlenecks in implementing multistakeholder participation in national sustainable development processes; specific institutional mechanisms for engagement with various sectors of society, in line with Agenda 21, are needed.

Translating stakeholder participation into fair decisions requires attention to common factors that lead to successful cases. This requires a philosophy that encourages empowerment, equity, trust and learning as a basis for promoting stakeholder participation. That philosophy manifests as engagement with multistakeholders in early stages and throughout a process, assessing their needs and representing those needs systematically, informing them of the participatory process and reaching consensus on decisions, adapting to local contexts, having skilled facilitators and institutionalizing participation.

Local and scientific knowledge should inform stakeholder consultations. Building trust between government officials and stakeholders is a major challenge, often impeded by lack of enthusiasm and commitment to the participatory approach among government officials or corruption.

4.4.4 EQUITABLE INVESTMENT POLICIES

Governments can facilitate increased response to basic needs by channelling the flow of investments into rural development and towards poor and marginalized communities. In many countries, rural areas are home to the majority of the poor yet receive less investment than their urban counterparts. For example, an ADB report estimated that total expenditure for rural development in Cambodia ranged from 1.4 per cent to 1.9 per cent between 2006 and 2010. The line ministries that support rural development are among the most underfunded ones. Ministries of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, water resources, meteorology and rural development lack qualified staff to deliver services in rural areas, which leads to reduced economic opportunities for the rural poor. Agriculture, which supports the lives of many rural poor households, receives only a small fraction of public investment—on average, only 2.6 per cent of total government expenditure since 2000.
Studies show that investments in rural infrastructure, such as roads, irrigation and electrification, have significantly contributed to poverty reduction in many parts of the region.\textsuperscript{57} Roads facilitate mobility and access to markets; they open opportunities and encourage empowerment. Road construction has improved the wages and employment of people who are poor. Electricity expands access to technology and contributes directly to increased employment and incomes. Irrigation, made possible by rural electrification, has boosted agricultural productivity, which also increases income and reduces income inequality.\textsuperscript{58}

Studies from India and the Philippines indicate that rural infrastructure investment is more effective when combined with investment in education. Land reform, development of rural institutions, rural financial services, rural non-farm enterprises and certain subsidies should be combined to advance rural development in a holistic manner.\textsuperscript{59}

Urban areas are also under tremendous pressure to provide for the needs of a growing global population. Where and how much to invest in the urban-rural landscape must be carefully decided within national and local contexts.

Governments can create enabling environments in which private investments support inclusive and sustainable development. A first step is to encourage the private sector to disclose accurate information on their sustainability practices to the public so that investors and consumers can make investment decisions and purchasing actions based on that information.

Investing in the power sector, especially in the poorest countries, is not often considered an attractive proposition by the private sector.\textsuperscript{60} Partnerships between the public sector, private sector and local communities is one way to boost investments for rural development. As the pro-poor public-private partnership project by ESCAP demonstrates, collaboration allows the sharing of investment costs, responsibilities, risks and rewards, which thus encourages more high-risk and high-cost investments to rural communities, where basic services are often not adequately provided (Box 4.2).

Privatizing access to basic services has not been without problems. Opponents of water privatization claim that it undermines the basic human right of access to water by increasing fees and reducing service for remote areas where delivery is considered non-profitable. Privatization of basic service provision must be carefully considered from a human rights perspective\textsuperscript{61} so that it results in expanding access—not contracting it.

In Metro Manila, Philippines, the provision of water services is divided into two service areas. In the area where the private concessionaire did not require legal property title for installing new taps, there has been particular success in providing near-universal tap water connections at a lower price and with better service, despite population growth. This decision by the private company removed a major barrier to service delivery and enabled impoverished communities to access improved water.\textsuperscript{62}

4.5 INITIATING CHANGE FROM THE BOTTOM: EMERGING NICHESS

Macro policy changes provide enabling conditions for scaling up good practices, or niches, as proposed in Chapter 2. The following highlights three such niches that, if scaled up, could support transformations in social justice conditions in the region in the context of urbanization and economic and trade integration processes: (i) community-based management of natural resources, (ii) scrutiny of supply chains based on access to information and (iii) participatory budgeting.

4.5.1 COMMUNITY-BASED MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Community-based natural resource management is a niche for environmental and social justice transformation because it can help expand access to natural resources for people who are poor and who tend to rely on them for livelihoods and food security. Community management of natural resources is also a way of engaging stakeholders in decision-making on the matters that impact their lives. It empowers communities with rights and responsibility to sustainably manage their resources.

In the past few decades, community management has proven effective in many parts of the region. In the early days of the concept, analysts assumed that community management would fail because self-interests would lead to the depletion of natural resources.\textsuperscript{63} On the contrary,
when certain conditions are in place, communities manage their natural resources sustainably. Community-based forestry management, for example, is practised in wide geographic areas in Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

The practice is relatively high in the Philippines, Nepal and India, where almost 37 per cent, 30 per cent and 28 per cent of forests, respectively, are community managed. Nepal is considered a successful case of community-based forestry management. When forestry management was delegated to local communities, usage became more sustainable. Community management helped overcome the constraints faced by various government levels when they had the management duty (including lack of administration and capacity to monitor illegal logging). When communities take ownership in managing the natural resources for their benefit, their practices tend to reflect awareness of long-term consequences.  

Bangladesh and a number of Pacific countries practise community-based management of inland fisheries and marine resources. In Bangladesh, poor households used to have limited access to lakes and ponds because that opportunity went to the highest bidders through annual auctions. When an International Fund for Agricultural
Development-led project gave the security of long-term leases to fisher groups, their confidence to invest in the lakes increased and resulted in sustainable use of the resources. Nonetheless, examination of various cases of community management of natural resources indicates the practice needs to be carefully designed so that all stakeholders are included. Governments can support this practice by investing in strengthening its own capacity as a facilitator rather than carrying on its conventional role as a monitor. Communities can better monitor due to their proximity.

Community-based adaptation to climate change (CBA) and ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change (EBA) are gaining momentum, such as in Bangladesh and Nepal. CBA is based on communities’ priorities, needs, knowledge and capacities to plan for and cope with the impacts of climate change and includes the most vulnerable populations. EBA uses biodiversity and ecosystem services as part of an overall adaptation strategy. Both approaches are people-centred with strong community and participatory components that can be integrated into existing frameworks to support community-based natural resource management.

**4.5.2 SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN**

Global supply chains are increasingly under scrutiny by civil society. Government initiatives to promote access to information can respond to this increased scrutiny.

Fair trade is a good example of a partnership that can improve supply chains. The business model of fair trade has potential to break the race to the bottom commonly associated with global trade, wherein unfair companies seek lower wages and weaker environmental standards and law enforcement to reduce their production costs.

Fair trade is often supported by civil society organizations and consumers who make ethical consumption decisions. The results of fair trade are evident among small-scale producers in developing countries, such as coffee and tea producers in rural communities. The successful cases demonstrate that they are paid fairer wages because they produce higher-quality products, work in safer conditions and engage in democratic decision-making. They now have direct access to markets and know how to manage their ecosystem with more sustainable farming methods. With increased wages, farmers can choose to send their children to school, build hospitals and improve public services in their communities.

Fair trade is often promoted through partnerships between companies and civil society, together with local producers, such as farmers and artisans. The alignment of interests is what makes fair trade viable. For companies, the main incentive to partner with NGOs is enhanced brand or corporate reputation and credibility. Long-term stability and impact and innovation are also high among their motives. For NGOs, the primary motivation is access to funds, long-term stability, impacts of programme delivery and access to networks of expertise and skills. Partnership also helps corporate accountability and transparency.

Access to information has a critical role in the fair trade model. Facilitating consumers’ access to information can be a powerful tool for governments to improve the global supply chain.

Consumer actions, made through more informed choices and popularized by organized NGO effort, have produced some successful cases in encouraging companies to develop sustainable supply chains. In 2015 following media and NGO reports, for instance, a global food company committed to eliminating forced labour in its seafood supply chain and to report on its progress every year. Governments should ensure that their own procurement processes take into consideration the sustainable practices of companies and their suppliers, particularly in the case of goods that are highly extractive (timber, minerals).

Open access to information is the basis for promoting this practice, including specific information-based policy interventions, such as eco-labelling. Strengthened analytical capacity is needed to strategically target these types of interventions; Input-output analysis can reveal hidden environmental and social impacts related to trade. A 2012 study by Lenzen and others, for instance, found that the major part of biodiversity losses can be attributed to international trade in just a few products.

**4.5.3 PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING**

Participatory budgeting is a direct-democracy approach to budgeting whereby citizens are offered opportunities to deliberate and influence the allocation of public resources.
Participatory budgeting requires spaces for multistakeholder engagement, and it has great potential to drive the more equitable flow of investment.

There are a growing number of successful participatory budgeting practices in the region. Participation, for example, has strengthened citizens’ voices, improved their participation in decision-making, improved local responsiveness to citizens’ preferences, increased accountability of public officials and elected representatives and even fostered greater trust in government in some cases.

Some participatory budgeting processes have been driven by civil society organizations while others were driven by governments. The World Bank, the ADB and other donors also have supported the introduction of participatory budgeting in some countries.

Among the success factors, first comes central and local government officials’ willingness to listen to citizens’ needs and preferences and then take action to deliver the requested services. Second, legal, institutional and policy frameworks for participation are in place. Third, the nature of the formal and informal political systems is such that politics is not based on patronage or identity but is strongly related to policy issues. Fourth, decentralization frameworks exist, with local autonomy, meaningful-sized budgets and spaces for interventions and a clear division of roles and responsibilities that incentivize citizens to participate in the process. Fifth, the budgeting reflects the results of the planning process to ensure that citizens’ priorities are covered. Finally, the capacity of citizens to participate is strong.

It is important to keep in mind the potential shortcomings of participatory budgeting. Depending on the effectiveness of the process, participants and their intentions, the participatory process can become undemocratic, exclusive and be used to advance certain groups’ interests, leading to injustice. The process can be manipulated to foster injustice by depriving the opinions of certain groups and depriving the marginalized from participating. It can override the legitimate decision-making process if manipulated by facilitators. Participatory budgeting thus must be carefully pursued while recognizing the local political and social power dynamics. Designing a participatory budgeting process needs to consider how to ensure increased and broad participation with balanced representation of citizens’ interests by putting the appropriate incentives in place.

4.6 CONCLUSIONS

The proposed top-down changes in tandem with support for emerging niches can be the driving force of social and environmental justice transformation. Together, they can catalyse transformation for equal access to natural resources in the context of the regional megatrends discussed in Chapter 1. The underlying factors that support successful implementation of these top-down and bottom-up actions include governance capacities, stakeholder engagement and partnership, and regional cooperation.
4.6.1 GOVERNANCE CAPACITIES

Implementation of the proposals included here requires strong governance capacities, both at the central and local levels. Decentralization of governance is one way to strengthen governance capacities to respond to the needs of people who are poor and vulnerable and to improve their well-being. Decentralization can work favourably for stakeholder engagement because it allows decision-making to reflect local needs and contexts.\textsuperscript{76, 77} For decentralized governance to be fully responsive and representational, people and institutions at all levels need to be empowered.\textsuperscript{80}

The empowerment of local governments needs to be supported by the central government’s strong commitments to decentralization, accountability and transparency. Institutional arrangements for participatory approaches (such as participatory budgeting and community-based natural resource management) and staff capacity are needed at both the local and central levels. Capacity to conduct proper planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and to create a feedback loop to adapt new approaches is also important.

4.6.2 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP

Partnerships can catalyse social justice transformation. As the examples in this chapter highlight, partnerships between companies and civil society organizations (such as fair trade), local governments and local stakeholders (such as community-based natural resource management and participatory budgeting) and local governments and companies (such as water privatization) have proven effective at addressing inequalities and delivering basic services. Governments need to provide the enabling conditions for partnerships by ensuring accountability and transparency and ensuring that decisions and priorities reflect the local context.

Engaging stakeholders in decision-making is both the means and ends of social justice transformation. Governments need to set up the necessary institutions for multistakeholder partnership and create conditions to allow stakeholders to engage in decision-making. For citizens, private companies and other stakeholders to participate in decision-making processes, certain conditions should be met. For example, stakeholders must be aware of the issues to discuss and the existence of institutions that allow their participation in decision-making. They also need information to make appropriate decisions. Stakeholders also must be granted freedom of speech without being suppressed by authorities.

4.6.3 REGIONAL COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION

Regional cooperation can be a platform for sharing knowledge, experiences and good practices. It can be used to discuss and consider regional-scale implementation of certain principles that are environmentally, socially and ethically stringent, such as free, prior and informed consent. In cases involving transboundary natural resource management issues, discussions among all countries involved are necessary.

Regional dialogues, coordination and cooperation can help avoid greater inequality and deprivation of access to basic services by people who are poor, unskilled or marginalized as an unintended consequence of a regional initiative. For example, trade integration agreements in the region should ensure that communities are not displaced and that investment decisions do not degrade natural resources that rural households depend upon. Increased investments in education and training are needed to ensure that workers

Box 4.4 Participatory budgeting in the Republic of Korea

The Republic of Korea is among the most advanced in Asian countries in terms of participatory budgeting. The concept was implemented nationwide in 2011 and as of January 2015, 244 local governments were practising participatory budgeting. All citizens can participate in proposal making at the first stage, while groups of delegates participate in later stages. Technology is used to involve citizens through internet surveys, online bidding, cyber forums and online bulletin boards in addition to public hearings and seminars. In Dong-Ku and Buk-gu districts, those who participate in the participatory budgeting must first take part in training through a “participatory budgeting school”. In many municipalities, the budget for social development sector increased after participatory budgeting was introduced.

Source: Um, 2015.
can access the opportunities that may be created by trade integration and/or can adapt to changes that it may trigger.

4.6.4 EMERGING AREAS FOR RESEARCH

Lack of disaggregated data was a major challenge in developing this chapter. Disaggregated data are important because averages obscure critical information on inequality among different population groups. For example, there is insufficient sex- and age-disaggregated data on hunger and malnutrition in the region. To follow through with the 2030 Agenda, disaggregated data (sex, age, geographical location, economic status and disability, for example) will be critical to determine problems and assess progress towards the SDGs. In addition, capacity to gather, analyse, report and disseminate disaggregated data is important for governments to better understand their realities and create more tailored solutions.

ENDNOTES

1 ESCAP, 2016. As measured by the Gini index or the Palma ratio.
3 Newell, 2005.
4 Sen, 2008.
5 Wells, n.d.
6 Ravillon, 2013.
7 UN System Task Team, 2012.
8 Berg and Ostry, 2011.
10 Ibid.
12 ESCAP, 2015.
13 UN-Habitat and ESCAP, 2015.
14 Ibid.
16 Thi, 2014.
18 Hanstad and Prosterman, 2014.
19 Article 25.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”
21 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 64/292.
23 Ibid.
25 Sustainable Energy for All.
27 In many places, land and property tenure determines people’s access to basic needs, such as water, energy and food.
28 See FAO Gender and Land Rights Database.
29 See Oxfam America, 2015.
30 See Radio Free Asia.
33 While the largest producers in the region were China, Indonesia, Russia Federation and Japan in 2012, the largest exporters were China, Thailand and Viet Nam.
34 World Bank, 2013.
35 Urbina, 2015.
36 IOM, 2011.
Hot spots in the region are Caucasus, Irano-Anatolian, Mountains of Central Asia, Eastern Himalaya, Western Ghats and Sri Lanka, the mountains of South-West China, Indo-Burma, Sundaland, Wallacea, South-West Australia, Forests of East Australia, the Philippines, Japan, Polynesia-Micronesia, East Melanesian Islands, New Caledonia and New Zealand.

Hot spots in the region are Caucasus, Irano-Anatolian, Mountains of Central Asia, Eastern Himalaya, Western Ghats and Sri Lanka, the mountains of South-West China, Indo-Burma, Sundaland, Wallacea, South-West Australia, Forests of East Australia, the Philippines, Japan, Polynesia-Micronesia, East Melanesian Islands, New Caledonia and New Zealand.

Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Japan, Palau, Republic of Korea and Thailand.

Bhutan, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Myanmar, Samoa, Vanuatu and Viet Nam.

UNEP and CBD, 2015.

Terrestrial ecosystems, such as forests, have important socioeconomic values to many rural poor households. The socioeconomic benefits from forests come from consumption of forest goods and services. Forests also provides firewood for energy for many rural poor households, both formal and informal employment and shelter. Forests also purify water and contribute to food security and health.


Center for People and Forests, 2013.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Gené and others, 2012.


The Aarhus Convention is a regional convention in Europe that came into effect in 2001 and was referred to by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan as “the most ambitious venture in the area of environmental democracy so far undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations”. Among ESCAP member States, Armenia, Georgia and Kazakhstan ratified it, while Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan acceded to the convention as of January 2015.


See the work of and standards promoted by the International Association for Public Participation, www.iap2.org/.

Read, 2008.