



## **Subregional perspectives on “A common agenda to advance sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific”**

10:00-12:00 (GMT+7), 25 May 2022

Hybrid Meeting

### **Concept Note**

For the 75 years of its existence, ESCAP has been a recognised platform for a consolidated voice of Asia and the Pacific on the most important issues. Subregional organisations play an important role in advancing regional priorities through cooperation. The 75<sup>th</sup> Commission session launched the subregional dialogue to facilitate the exchange of views and practices on the commission theme topic within and across ESCAP subregions. Under the theme of “A common agenda to advance sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific”, the subregional dialogue of the 78<sup>th</sup> Commission session will focus on outlining the developmental priorities in each subregion, highlighting the key areas of cooperation between subregional organisations and ESCAP as well as identifying potential cooperation areas among subregions.

As Asia-Pacific countries strive to shake off the remnant of COVID-19, the subregions need to align their development pathways with a common agenda to achieve inclusive, resilient and sustainable development. The Pacific subregion, which is home to many Small Island Developing States (SIDS), underlined the need to be more resilient to disasters and the impact of climate change. In East and North-East Asia, carbon neutrality efforts are at the forefront of national strategies as countries strive towards net-zero emissions. In South-East Asia it is important to embrace inclusivity with the principle to “Leave No One Behind” integrated into development strategies. For South and South-West Asia cross-border connectivity, regional integration, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable graduation remain key for advancing sustainable development. The North and Central Asia subregion, which consists mainly of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDC), highlighted the importance of sustainable transport and trade for a green and inclusive economy. Common priority areas across the subregions are mainly related to climate and social resilience. A stronger, more networked and inclusive multilateral system is critical to promote wider cooperation and greater coherence for advancing the 2030 Agenda. Subregional organisations are a key stakeholder in this process and have contributed to developing multilateral strategies and promoting subregional cooperation post-pandemic.

- Pacific governments are seeking to strengthen collaboration across and within Government line ministries for improved data collection and analysis. Priority areas of the Pacific governments aside from addressing environment issues such as climate change and sustainable ocean management, include development activities to reduce inequalities and reach the most vulnerable groups.
- In East and North-East Asia, member States of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) shared experiences in national response to COVID-19 through TCS’s joint webinar with ESCAP and Tripartite Health Ministers’ Meeting, and adopted the Joint Action Plan on Preparedness and Response against Infectious Diseases with Pandemic or High Consequence Potential of Common Concern. Member States of the Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI) has facilitated member States to share national measures for post-pandemic recovery through the Consultative Commission meeting.
- In South-East Asia, the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework was launched as a consolidated COVID-19 recovery strategy for the member States. The ASEAN-UN Plan of Action 2021-2025 contributes to the

implementation of the Framework ensuring that recovery efforts are in line with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs by coordinating joint substantive programming and dialogues, especially between ESCAP and ASEAN.

- In South Asia, a COVID-19 Emergency Fund was established within the SAARC framework in March 2020 which was followed by cooperation in health sector. Member States of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) are also committed to strengthen cooperation on health, regional integration, cross border connectivity the subregion. ESCAP is working with the SAARC and BIMSTEC Secretariats for fostering regional cooperation for better connectivity, disaster risk reduction and building back better through South Asia Network on SDGs (SANS).
- In North and Central Asia, increased cooperation among Shanghai Cooperation Organization countries has allowed member States to tap into the intra-regional trade, transit and transport potential. Trade and business measures among countries in the Eurasian Economic Union and the Economic Cooperation Organization continue to be simplified, including through the implementation of digitalization processes.

New opportunities have arisen from this past year of crisis. More importantly, there is new resolve from governments, young people, civil society, international organisations, etc. to move beyond business as usual. In this connection, ESCAP has promoted policies and regional cooperation in several priority areas, which varies based on the subregion's needs, i.e., early warning systems, climate resilient infrastructure, public health systems, and financing for development, as presented in the theme study report. Subregional organisations are undertaking and actively promoting subregional initiatives in these priority areas as well. ESCAP together with these organisations will continue to facilitate dialogues among member States to refine subregional priorities and strengthen multilateralism with actions for advancing sustainable development in Asia-Pacific.

### Brief profiles of organizations



**The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** is an inter-governmental organisation promoting regional cooperation and integration in the areas of economic, social-cultural, and political-security. Established in 1967, the grouping sets out to accelerate economic growth through social progress and cultural development while promoting regional peace and stability based on the rule of law and the principles of the UN charter. ASEAN comprises the countries of Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The current chair of ASEAN is Cambodia.



**The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** is a regional organization that was established on 6 June 1997 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration. Initially known as BIST-EC (Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation), the organisation is now known as BIMSTEC and comprises seven Member States with the admission of Myanmar on 22 December 1997, and Bhutan and Nepal in February 2004. Being a sector-driven grouping, cooperation within BIMSTEC had initially focused on six sectors in 1997 (trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism, and fisheries) and expanded in 2008 to incorporate agriculture, public health, poverty alleviation, counter-terrorism, environment, culture, people-to-people contact, and climate change.



**The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)** is an intergovernmental organization which was founded in 1985. Its members consist of ten countries from South and South-West Asia, as well as North and Central Asia. Among the key objectives of the organization are to promote regional cooperation in the areas of sustainable economic development, trade, transport and communications infrastructure. Among recent activities by ECO include facilitation of transit corridors among its member States and initiatives to combat desertification and other types of disaster risks. ECO has a longstanding cooperation with ESCAP since 1993 as governed by the ECO-ESCAP Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which was updated and signed in Nov 2021.



**The Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC)** is the permanent regulatory body of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Currently, there are five EEC countries: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation. The main purpose of the Commission is ensuring the functioning and development of the EAEU and developing proposals for the further development of integration. The EEC also seeks to advance cooperation with countries beyond EAEU members. Among recent activities by EEC includes initiatives to better integrate EAEU businesses into one common market and to improve procedures for official statistics. EEC has a fruitful cooperation with ESCAP since 2013 as governed by the EEC-ESCAP Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).



**The Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI)**, originally known as the Tumen River Area Development Programme, is an intergovernmental cooperation mechanism among four countries: China, Mongolia, Republic of Korea and Russian Federation, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Established in 1995, the GTI aims at strengthening economic and technical cooperation, and attaining greater growth and sustainable development in Northeast Asia and specially the Greater Tumen Region. In particular, the GTI facilitates intergovernmental cooperation through its Consultative Commission, and committees or boards on transport, trade and investment, tourism, agriculture, energy, and environment. The GTI has established strong partnerships with ESCAP to jointly organize international seminars and other cooperative activities in trade, transport, environment and energy.



**The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)** is an intergovernmental organisation that aims to enhance cooperation between countries and territories of the Pacific Ocean. Founded in 1971, it comprises eighteen members from the Pacific. The Forum's vision is for a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity, so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy, and productive lives. The Forum actively partners with other countries and organizations to implement its mandates. Among recent activities by PIF include partnerships on disaster risk finance and dialogues on ocean and climate priorities.



**The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation which was founded in 2001 and was preceded by the Shanghai Five Mechanism. Currently, the SCO consists of eight member States, four observer States and has six dialogue partners. The SCO's main goals are to strengthening relations among its members, promote effective cooperation in key priority areas, and make joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region. SCO has a strong cooperation with ESCAP since 2015 as governed by the SCO-ESCAP Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).



**The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on 8 December 1985. SAARC comprises of eight Member States: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The Secretariat of the Association was set up in Kathmandu on 17 January 1987. The objectives of the Association as outlined in the SAARC Charter are: to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life; to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials; to promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia; to contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems; to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields; to strengthen cooperation with other developing countries; to strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interests; and to cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.



**The Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS)** is an international organization established with a vision to promote peace and common prosperity among China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Upon the agreement signed and ratified by each of the three governments, the TCS was officially inaugurated in Seoul, the ROK, in 2011. The TCS has been widely involved in intergovernmental occasions among three member States related to political, socio-cultural and economic affairs as a trilateral consultative mechanism; and facilitated cooperative projects and dialogues at various levels. The TCS has a close cooperation with ESCAP, and in November 2021 jointly organized a high-level forum on carbon neutrality goals of three member states with ESCAP.

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