

**Subregional perspectives on
“Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development”**

14.00-15:30 (GMT+7), 16 May 2023
Hybrid Meeting

Concept Note

Since its establishment seventy-six years ago, 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 75th Commission session in 2019 launched the subregional dialogue to facilitate the exchange of views and practices on the theme topic of the session within and across ESCAP subregions. Under the theme of “Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development”, the subregional dialogue of the 79th Commission session will focus on outlining the climate action priorities in each subregion, highlighting the key areas of cooperation between subregional organisations and ESCAP as well as identifying potential cooperation areas among subregions. Moreover, the dialogue will allow heads of subregional organizations to discuss a key priority for the United Nations ahead of the annual meeting of heads of regional organizations to be convened by the United Nations Secretary-General.

As Asia-Pacific countries rebuild after COVID-19, the subregions are faced with climate related extreme weather events threatening resilient and sustainable development. For the Pacific, which is home to many Small Island Developing States (SIDS), climate change remains the single greatest threat to livelihoods, sovereignty, and existence. East and North-East Asia is also strongly affected by climate change and climate extremes, which accounted for 29 per cent of all fatalities from natural disasters and 35 per cent of the people affected in the Asia-Pacific region in the past decade. In South-East Asia which is one of the most vulnerable regions to the impact of climate change, countries could face increasing environmental risks and hazards, as well as economic losses, if the challenges are left unmitigated. South and South-West Asia is highly vulnerable to a wide variation of climate-induced hazards (floods, droughts, cyclones, heatwaves, dust storms and glacial lake outbursts) that impact large populations with considerable proportions living in poverty. In North and Central Asia, which consists mainly of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDC) that rely on agricultural and commodities trade, climate change compounds interlinked vulnerabilities. Increasingly severe and frequent heatwaves and droughts exacerbated water shortages, adversely impacting food and energy security and hampering recovery in the subregion.

Common priority areas across the subregions are mainly related to continued focus on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions including the transition towards low carbon and resilient development, climate change finance, urgent and effective operationalization of “loss and damage” funding and enhanced partnerships including regional and global knowledge sharing and transfer of technology. 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 climate action.

Pacific governments continue to urge for global warming to be maintained at 1.5 degrees with a strategy increasingly focused on seeking the urgent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, including through the transition away from fossil fuel usage and production. They are also continuing to push for climate change finance so that their vulnerable island environments and infrastructure can adapt to climate change impacts. There is scope to better define the oceans-climate nexus, and to understand what measures need to be taken to protect the ocean so that it provides critical environmental services, including to regulate our climate. While cautiously welcoming ‘loss and damage’ in the COP27 outcomes, the Fund must be fit for purpose by contextualizing needs of national stakeholders.

In East and North-East Asia, with 23% of the world’s population and a contribution to 42% of global CO₂ emissions from fuel consumption, countries need to take significant strides to implement Nationally Determined Contributions

(NDCs) under the Paris Agreement. Within this context, China, Japan, Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation set national goals to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 or 2060 and have been developing specific policies and roadmaps. Mongolia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea also updated their NDCs and Mongolia launched the national movement of One Billion Trees by 2030 to reduce the impact of climate change. To implement NDCs and achieve carbon neutrality goals, the subregion should accelerate the transition towards a low-carbon and resilient development through implementing concrete climate actions and promoting innovative technologies, green finance and enhanced partnerships among regional, national and subnational stakeholders including cities.

In South-East Asia, as governments address climate actions, it becomes increasingly important that policy measures also promote financing and investment opportunities in sectors that help build economies to become more resilient, are socially inclusive, and are ecologically sustainable. At ESCAP, policy dialogues aim to look at long-term solutions such as investing in sustainable infrastructure and accelerating the transition to sustainable energy. Public and private finance can lead the transition toward a climate-resilient world, focusing on the supportive policy and regulatory framework for making clean investments in the sub-region.

In South and South-West Asia, climate action is pertinent and urgent on all fronts of mitigation, adaptation and damage recovery. Countries need to scale up the share of clean and renewable energy by disincentivizing fossil fuels and boosting cross-border hydropower energy connectivity. The new global funding architecture for 'loss and damage' proposed at COP27 needs urgent and effective operationalization as fiscal space rapidly diminishes in countries impacted by large-scale disasters. Regional and global knowledge sharing and technology transfer is essential for building resilient climate infrastructure and disaster risk reduction systems.

In North and Central Asia, countries urgently need coordinated actions and international support to address climate mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency. Countries should fully use their diverse and abundant green energy resources and invest in energy efficiency and connectivity infrastructure. Countries should also accelerate national adaptation plans, focusing on water conservation and management, particularly in the agricultural sector. The subregion also benefits from enhancing transboundary land-water-energy cooperation. An integrated strategy that embeds ecosystem service, economic, and social values of water encourages positive-sum solutions for the subregion. ESCAP's policy dialogues and capacity-building programmes enable better coordination with international, regional, and national actors on data collection, knowledge sharing, and technical cooperation on climate actions including environmental, economic, and social dimensions in the subregion.

Climate change is a global problem with no boundaries underscoring the importance of regional cooperation and in particular cooperation across subregions. 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, 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 addressing climate change in Asia-Pacific.

Provisional Programme

I. Opening Remarks by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP (5 minutes)

II. Panel Discussion (50 minutes)

Secretary-Generals or Heads of the subregional organisations will share their perspectives on accelerating climate action and propose key areas for possible cooperation among the subregional organisations in collaboration with ESCAP. Each speaker will have 4-5 minutes.

Panellists:

1. H.E. Mr. Henry Puna, Secretary-General, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (in-person)
2. H.E. Mr. Zhang Ming, Secretary-General, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (in-person)
3. H. E. Mr. Tenzin Lekphell, Secretary-General, Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (in-person)
4. H.E. Mr Sefanaia Nawadra, Director General, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (in-person)
5. Mr. BEK Bumhym, Deputy Secretary-General, Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (in-person)
6. H.E. Mr. Khusrav Noziri, Secretary-General, Economic Cooperation Organization (online)
7. H.E. Mr. Ersala Ruwan Weerakoon, Secretary-General, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (online)
8. H.E. Mr Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (video)
9. H.E. Mr. Andrey Slepnev, Member of the Board (Minister) for Trade, EEC (video)
10. Mr. Andrey Smorodin, Director, Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI) Secretariat (video)

III. Interventions from member States (20 minutes)

Member States will share country perspectives on climate action and propose key areas for possible cooperation among the subregions that can be facilitated by ESCAP.

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, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam. The current chair of ASEAN is Indonesia.



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. Cooperation between ESCAP and BIMSTEC evolves around six sectors: Trade, investment and development; Environment and climate change; Security; Agriculture and food security; People-to-people contact; Science, technology and innovation; and Connectivity.



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, which was updated and signed in November 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, updated and signed in 2019.



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, in line with the GTI-ESCAP Memorandum of Understanding.



The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), founded in 1981, is the region's premier political and economic policy organisation of 18 independent and self-governing states and territories. 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 Pacific Islands Forum works to achieve this by fostering cooperation between governments, collaboration with international agencies, and by representing the interests of its members. In July 2022, Forum Leaders endorsed the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent as the overarching blueprint to advance Pacific regionalism for the next three decades, articulating the region's long-term vision, values, and key thematic areas and strategic pathways



The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) is the Pacific region's key inter-governmental organisation for environment and sustainable development. Established as an independent inter-governmental organisation in 1993, the purposes of SPREP are to promote cooperation in the Pacific Region and to provide assistance in order to protect and improve the environment and to ensure sustainable development for present and future generations. SPREP's vision is: The Pacific environment - sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures. SPREP also functions as the Secretariat of 3 regional conventions: the Noumea Convention, the Waigani Convention and the Apia Convention.



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 nine member States. 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 2012 as governed by the SCO-ESCAP Memorandum of Understanding, updated and signed in September 2022.



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. SAARC has five technical Regional Centres and ESCAP currently collaborates with the SAARC Disaster Management Centre in India and the SAARC Energy Centre in Pakistan.



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 since 2021 has jointly organized a high-level forum on carbon neutrality goals of three member states with ESCAP.

* * * * *