

Workshop on Leveraging Public and Private Investment to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action in North and Central Asia

9 June 2023 (Friday) | 09:00 – 16:45 (GMT+6) | Hybrid modality

Workshop Report

1. Introduction

The Building Workshop on Leveraging Public and Private Investment to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA) in North and Central Asia (NCA) was held in hybrid format in Almaty, Kazakhstan and virtually on Zoom platform on 9 June 2023. The EGM was organized by the Subregional Office for North and Central Asia of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

The objective of the Workshop was to increase the capacity of policymakers of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) to identify, access and scale-up public and private sources of financing for the implementation of the VPoA in NCA by:

- (i) sharing experiences and best practices on successful partnerships to mobilize private and public sources of financing to implement the VPoA in NCA;
- (ii) exploring challenges, priorities and needs on connectivity investment and financing, and proposing focus areas in resource mobilization for the way forward; and
- (iii) discussing opportunities to enhance access to and scale up sustainable finance in NCA, including through innovative financing instruments.

The final programme of the Workshop is enclosed in Annex 1.

2. Participation and Evaluation

The Workshop was attended by a total of 51 participants (23 female, 28 male) from nine ESCAP member countries in North and Central Asia, namely from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as experts from International Organizations, business and academia. There were 18 representatives from member States (7 female, 11 male), 6 participants from business and academia (3 female, 3 male), 8 participants from intergovernmental organizations, international and regional organizations (4 female, 4 male), and 19 participants from the United Nations (9 female, 10 male). The list of participants is enclosed in Annex 2.

62 per cent of Workshop in-person participants completed the post-event assessment. Based on the post-event assessment, participants rated the meeting favourably (maximum rating of 5) – 4.91 for relevance, 5.00 for effectiveness, and 4.88 for efficiency.

Participants' feedback highlighted Workshop was well organized and informative and provided a good platform to share information and exchange experiences. Participants also

indicated that the Workshop helped expanding their knowledge and understanding of green taxonomy, sustainable development, and green economy.

In lessons learned, Participants stressed the need for public and private cooperation and coordination to accelerate the implementation of the VPoA and contribute to the sustainable development of LLDCs in North and Central Asia. Participants also noted the potentiality of investment in regional transport and trade networks, energy access, and information and communication technologies to spur economic growth and increase development opportunities.

Participants suggested organizing more workshops on the topic to improve knowledge sharing.

3. Substantive discussions and outcomes

Session 1: Mobilizing partnerships to unlock public and private investment for VPoA implementation in North and Central Asia

The session examined the progress and challenges in domestic and external resource mobilization to implement the Vienna Programme of Action in the subregion. It was followed by a discussion on methods to mobilize partnerships to unlock public and private investment. Particular attention was given to facilitate structural transformation through Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), crowd-in private finance in infrastructural investment through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), as well as supportive legal and regulatory frameworks and enabling policies to maximize the benefits of FDIs and PPPs in North and Central Asia.

Increased FDI flows in the right sectors are needed to facilitate structural transformation in LLDCs and help them achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, LLDCs had not fully benefit from FDIs due to: FDI restrictions and business environment, ineffective promotion of and barriers to FDIs, lack of FDI spillovers, increased competition, and multiple crises. Excluding Russian Federation, the number of FDI projects in NCA had rebounded from the pandemic but remained historically and comparatively low with other countries in Asia and the Pacific region. The largest FDIs inflows to LLDCs in NCA are numerically few oil and gas projects that generates limited jobs. Food and beverage sector had been one of the largest sectors in terms of project numbers, volume of investments, and job creation. FDIs in the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) sector had also generated only limited number of low-skill jobs. However, increasing project numbers in ICT, service, and renewable sector indicate promising future oriented FDIs in NCA. Nevertheless, LLDCs should identify their most immediate comparative advantages and target investors accordingly. In addition to attracting new investment, LLDCs could also engage with existing investors to upgrade investment and increase scale.

PPP Financing is one of the key sources of infrastructure financing in NCA, after the state, development finance institutions (DFIs). PPP helped to increase participation of the private sector in infrastructural financing, reducing and sharing the risks of infrastructure projects. Renewable energy and projects with foreign exchange earnings, such as airports, benefit the most from PPP

in NCA. In Kyrgyzstan, the total number of PPP projects increased from 32 in 2022 to 57 in 2023. From 2022 to 2023, the number of initiated projects and amount of attracted investment increased from 3 projects and USD 14 million to 23 projects and USD 353 million. Currently, 14 PPP projects worth more than USD 40 million were implemented in Tajikistan, including a USD 22.8 million Power Transmission project.

Participants saw a strong pipeline of well-defined projects in renewable energy, transportation and logistics, and ICT sectors in NCA from connectivity initiatives such as CAREC Program, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia. Future PPPs in NCA should orient to basic infrastructure that generates tax revenues and promote growth. There is a need for more conducive legal and regulatory environment to successfully leverage PPPs in NCA. All countries in NCA had adopted PPP laws, and Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan are among the recent adopters. However, when PPP projects are created under the Common Law system, adjustments under the Civil Law system are needed to adapt to the subregion. Improving the capacity and coordination between regulators, tax authorities, and courts at regional, national, and local levels on PPPs is needed. Regulatory and institutional change should also aim at ensuring transparency and inclusiveness for all stakeholders involved in PPPs.

Experts pointed out the fact that the lifecycle of PPPs is long, and renegotiations time-consuming and costly, long-term legislative and regulatory stability and consistency are essential to reduce barriers to PPPs. Public sector should also aim to match private sector's capacity in negotiating PPPs and develop budgetary risk assessment model. Digitalized information platforms, project office, and assessment and certification system for infrastructure projects can bring significant benefits in attracting foreign investors, prepare bankable project pipelines, and manage financial and sustainability risks.

Session 2: Leveraging sustainable and innovative finance instruments and technologies

The session focused on opportunities to increase access to and scale sustainable finance across VPoA priority sectors. It discussed energy, transport, and digital infrastructure, and examined trends, status, and outlook of sustainable and innovative financing instruments. Experts presented examples of green and sustainability bonds, impact bonds, blended finance, debt swaps and innovative guarantees for small-and-medium enterprises (SMEs). Trends and gaps on digital solutions for financing in North and Central Asia (NCA) were also discussed.

NCA is among the regions of the world, which is expected to suffer the most from the impacts of climate change, including increasing water shortages, expanding desertification, economic reliance on agriculture, and a wide range of climate vulnerabilities. Most NCA countries have committed to their National Determined Contributions (NDCs). However, few countries have concrete financing strategies against their NDCs. Designing NDC financing strategies requires systematic and sequential planning to determine the type, timing, amount, and source of financial flows to critical sectors and projects in line with the situation of each country. Climate mitigation was more suitable to crowd in private finance, while adaptations were usually funded with public resources. In addition, Multilateral Climate Funds (MCFs) such as the Adaptation Fund, the Global

Environment Fund, or the Green Climate Fund represented significant and attractive source of sustainable finance. MCFs feature higher percentage of grants compared to bilateral donors and multilateral development banks. However, a lack of data and capacity had constrained the accessibility of these funds.

One of the key concerns of investors is the reliability, stability, and predictability of policy and regulation. As climate-related investment requires long-term commitment and upfront capital expenditure, uncertainty in regulatory regimes, in addition to sovereign and currency risks, deters investors. Developing sustainable finance roadmaps and taxonomies is crucial to creating an enabling environment for sustainable finance. Azerbaijan and Georgia have implemented sustainable roadmaps, while Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, and Georgia have developed green or sustainable finance taxonomies.

NCA countries need to broaden the variety of financial instruments and deepen sustainable financial markets to close the funding gap for sustainable economic transformation. NCA had achieved notable milestones, including Uzbekistan's pilot sovereign SDG bond and Kyrgyzstan's gender-impact bond issuances. However, NCA countries still lagged behind other developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Malaysia's USD 3.9 billion market size. To grow sustainable finance in NCA, the right incentives need to be placed by governments. Kazakhstan had provided up 15% subsidy on interest payment for green bond and loans that finance projects in line with the national green taxonomy. Tax-related instruments and financial regulatory treatments could also attract companies and banks to invest in green projects.

As the debt burden increased during the pandemic in the NCA, the fiscal space shrunk and left less room to address climate mitigation and adaptation. Debt-for-climate swap (DCS) mechanism presents a win-win scenario by exchanging public debt of a developing country for similar investments in climate-related projects within the debtor country and counts towards the creditor's climate finance commitments. DCS is not a debt forgiveness mechanism and therefore less constrained by traditional debt relief mechanism. For the borrower country, the DCS lowers debt burden, frees up budget resources, does not negatively impact the credit rating and attracting new investment. DCS also allow creditor countries to fulfill their climate finance commitments towards developing countries and fulfillment NDCs.

Overall discussion provided valuable insights on sustainable and innovative finance instruments and enabling policies to support structural economic transformation for LLDCs by developing sustainable finance roadmaps and taxonomies. In Kazakhstan, there are ongoing efforts to include low-pollution energy, green building, and associated subsectors in green taxonomy; asset classification for social projects, PPP loans, and bonds is also being developed. Participants also recommended enhancing regional cooperation on carbon trading and aligning national sustainable taxonomies, standards, and reporting requirements. Experts also highlighted the difficulty in identifying bankable green investment projects and reaching out to investors. The Green Financial Center of Astana International Financial Center connects green projects in the region with investors participating in the BRI by integrating investment project databases. To enable DCS for LLDCs in NCA, countries should identify potential creditors to initiate bilateral

diplomatic conversation and build linkage between debt portfolios and climate projects. Improved coordination between Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and local financial champions could drive the development agenda for countries more successfully.

Session 3: Enhancing regional cooperation to finance better connectivity for LLDCs in North and Central Asia

The final session discussed cooperation on financing regional infrastructure corridors and cross-border industrial clusters in the subregion. The session assessed ways to increase international and regional support to expand financing for transport, energy, and ICT infrastructure while strengthening the institutional, policy, and financing environment for cross-border connectivity.

Experts noted that, aside from systemic vulnerabilities and structural constraints, the adverse impacts of the multiple crises hampered financing connectivity projects in LLDCs. As VPoA implementation approached “the last mile”, LLDCs urgently needed to create financing space and address financing gaps to invest in sustainable recovery and enhance the efficiency of VPoA implementation. Therefore, enhancing regional cooperation for development finance was seen as crucial. PPPs are perceived as an important tool to support building regional corridors and connectivity. Private sector participation is key to expanding access to and diversifying finance for key regional projects. However, participants pointed out that improving the viability and attractiveness of investment requires greater alignment with international best practices and a more robust financial mechanism. Reducing policy barriers at regional and domestic levels are imperative to enabling private sector participation. Funding costs should be reduced, and lending portfolios and local currencies markets need to be further built up. Financing priority should be given to green and high-tech projects.

Participants expressed wishes that the UN system and developing partners would continue to support member States in areas of trade facilitation, private sector development, resource mobilization, and measures to strengthen environmental sustainability. No financial institution could finance and implement large projects such as Hydroelectric Power Plants (HPPs) or transport corridors alone. Countries will also need support in capacity development, technical assistance, and research. The importance of learning from international best practices and ensuring social and environmental standards was highlighted.

Several institutions dedicated to supporting and financing cooperation already exist in NCA. For example, the ADB-CAREC supported Almaty–Bishkek Economic Corridor pilot project (ABEC), aimed to create a competitive, cross-border market focused on creative services and a knowledge-based economy. Support at the highest levels, a strong institutional set-up, capacity development, and policy reform enabled the preparation of investment projects in transport connectivity, climate and disaster risk reduction, tourism development, health security, and agribusiness development. Another example was how multinational logistics company DP

World improved digitalization in Central Asia and built Special Economic Zones at the Aktau port and the Khorgos dry port.

EDB's Eurasian Transportation Framework aimed to structure and finance key large-scale projects over the long term. It had recently produced guidelines for cross-border projects in the Eurasian region based on global best practices and environmental and social standards. EDB's Water and Energy Complex advocated for a collective approach to water management in Central Asia as inefficiencies were high amid dwindling water resources. EDB looked forward to supporting the Kambarata HPP-1 envisaged by Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan.

The web-based tools Partnership Portal on Co-Deployment and the Infrastructure Corridors Simulator, developed under an pilot project by ESCAP and International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries (ITTLLDC) in Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Kyrgyzstan, were also mentioned. They supported pre-feasibility studies and the implementation of transboundary infrastructure projects.

Experts called for legal reforms in the subregion to enable FDI and PPPs and reduce the complexity of transnational projects. Concretely, it was proposed to align PPP laws with global standards, as outlined in the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law's Model Law on PPPs and the OECD Principles for Public Governance of PPPs.

Carbon pricing was highlighted not only for providing price signals to facilitate the green economic transition, but also for bringing socio-economic co-benefits, including improved health due to cleaner air and reduced expenses for climate change adaptation under Paris Climate Agreement commitments. As the environment for investment and international financial flows remained challenging, the capacity for domestic resource mobilization and access to concessional finance needed to be strengthened. Therefore, it was proposed to align financing policies and strategies with Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs). It was also suggested to explore if the envisaged 'Multidimensional Vulnerability Index for Small Island Developing States (SIDSs)' might be useful to also determine access to concessional finance and support for LLDCs.

Annex 1. Final Programme

Day/Time (GMT+6)	Session
Friday, 9 June 2023	
Morning 08:30 – 09:00	<u>Registration</u>
09:00 – 09:20	<u>Opening Session:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Opening remarks by: Ms. Michiko Enomoto, Officer-in-Charge, Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, ESCAP</u>
09:20 – 10:35	<p><u>Session 1: Mobilizing partnerships to unlock public and private investment for the implementation of Vienna Programme of Action in North and Central Asia</u></p> <p>This session will discuss, among other things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress and challenges in domestic and external resource mobilization to implementing the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA) in the subregion; • Expanding private sector participation in infrastructure financing to crowd-in additional investment, including through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs); • Role of supportive legal and regulatory frameworks and enabling policy environments to attract more infrastructure financing and investments; • Available instruments, frameworks, protocols, and funds to support project preparation and the development of bankable project pipelines; <p>Managing public assets and leveraging public debt to finance sustainable investments in regional infrastructure and connectivity.</p> <p>Part I</p> <p><i>Moderator: Ms. Michiko Enomoto, Officer-in-Charge, Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, ESCAP</i></p> <p>Presenter/ Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ms. Heather Lynne Taylor-Strauss Economic Affairs Officers, and Mr. Benjamin McCarthy, Associated Economic Affairs Officer, Trade, Investment & Innovation Division, ESCAP</i> • <i>Ms. Jannat Salimova-Tekay, Business Development Partner, Unicase Law Firm</i> • <i>Mr. Serdar Charyyev, Deputy Head of the Department for the Development and Finance of Economic Industries, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Turkmenistan</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open discussion • Close of Part I
10:25 – 10:55	Break
10:55 – 12:15	<p>Part II</p> <p><i>Moderator: Mr. Vladimir Grebnev, Climate Change Specialist, the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia, CAREC</i></p> <p>Presenter/ Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ms. Tolkunai Taalaibekova, Head of Investment Promotion Department, National Investment of Agency, Kyrgyzstan</i> • <i>Mr. Karomatullo Mahmudov, Chief Specialist of the State Institution, Center for the Implementation of Public-Private Partnership Projects of the State Committee for Investments and State Property Management, Tajikistan</i> • <i>Mr. Galymbek Mamrayev, PPP Director, KTC Kazakhstan LLP</i> • <i>Ms. Alena Mileschkina, Deputy Head of the Project Risk Modeling and Forecasting Group, National Center for PPP, Russia</i> • Open discussion • Close of Part II
12:15 – 13:30	Break
13:30 – 14:35	<p><u>Session 2: Leveraging sustainable and innovative finance instruments and technologies</u></p> <p>This session will discuss, among other things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trends, status and outlook of sustainable and innovative finance instruments, including green and sustainability bonds, impact bonds, blended finance, debt swaps and innovative guarantees for small-and-medium enterprises (SMEs); • Opportunities to increase access to and scale sustainable finance across VPoA priority sectors, including energy, transport and digital infrastructure • Trends and gaps on digital finance market and solutions in North and Central Asia <p><i>Moderator: Ms. Tolkunai Taalaibekova, Head of Investment Promotion Department, National Investment of Agency, Kyrgyzstan</i></p> <p>Presenter/ Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ms. Subathirai Sivakumaran, Chief of Section, Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division, ESCAP</i> • <i>Ms. Aigul Kussaliyeva, Director for Sustainable Development, Astana International Financial Center and Advisor, Green Finance Center</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mr. Erik Grigoryan, Founder and CEO at Environment Group, Armenia</i> • Remarks by experts • Open discussion • Close of the session
14:35 – 15:05	Break
15:05 – 16:15	<p><u>Session 3: Enhancing regional cooperation to finance better connectivity for LLDCs in North and Central Asia</u></p> <p>This session will discuss, among other things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaling-up international and regional support to expand financing for transport, energy, and information technology and communications (ICT) infrastructure at regional level; • Enhancing cooperation on financing regional infrastructure corridors and cross-border industrial clusters in the subregion; • Strengthening institutional, policy and financing environment for cross-border connectivity investment in the subregion, including through PPPs; • Exploring regional cooperation on carbon pricing and trading mechanisms. <p><i>Moderator: Mr. Davit Grigorian, Head of Multilateral Economic Cooperation Division, Department for Multilateral Policy and Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia</i></p> <p>Presenter/ Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mr. Davit Grigorian, Head of Multilateral Economic Cooperation Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Armenia</i> • <i>Mr. Leonid Efimov, Head of International Cooperation Division, Eurasian Development Bank</i> • <i>Mr. Dulguun Damdin-Od, Executive Director, International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries</i> • <i>Mr. Almas Baitenov, ABEC Coordinator, Kazakhstan Resident Mission, Asian Development Bank</i> • Remarks by experts • Open Discussion • Close of the session
16:15 – 16:30	<u>Evaluation</u>
16:30 – 16:45	<u>Concluding Remarks</u>

Annex 2. List of participants

MEMBER STATES DELEGATIONS

ARMENIA

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