



Sixth South and South-West Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals

Accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels

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Report



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Introduction

The [Sixth South and South-West Asia Forum on the SDGs](#) was held in hybrid mode, from 5-7 December 2022 in Islamabad Pakistan, as a subregional preparatory meeting for the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) 2023, which in turn will contribute towards the annual High-Level Policy Forum (HLPF) to be held at the global level in July 2023. The Forum was jointly organized by the Government of Pakistan, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute's (SDPI) and the South and South-West Asia Office of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP SSWA), in collaboration with the UN system, SAARC Secretariat, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and member organisations of the [South Asia Network on the SDGs \(SANS\)](#). The Forum was attended by about 1900 participants representing governments, academia, think tanks, civil society organizations, and other key stakeholders from South Asian countries.

The Forum deliberated on the progress made in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in light of the “triple C” crisis of COVID, conflict and climate change which adversely impacted development gains in the subregion. Countries presented their experiences in carrying out their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and perspectives on the impact of the triple C crisis on prospects for meeting the 2030 Agenda. Thematic discussions were held on progress and challenges in Goals 6 (Clean water and sanitation), 7 (Affordable and clean energy), 9 (Industry, innovation, and infrastructure), 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and 17 (Partnerships for the goals) which will be reviewed at the HLPF in 2023. The deliberations emphasized that the transboundary nature of many issues facing the subregion called for regional cooperation to collectively address challenges to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Highlights

Countries in the subregion may not be able to achieve the Goals by 2030 at the current rate of development. While some advances towards the Goals are visible, the progress is overshadowed by regressions seen in some of the Goals. Despite progresses made on achieving Goal 1 (No poverty), multi-dimensional poverty rates in South and South-West Asia were highest among all other subregions. Relatively good progress has been seen in Goal 3 (Good health and well-being) with reductions in maternal, neonatal and child mortality, but insufficient progress is being seen in Goal 2 (Zero hunger) with more people suffering from moderate or severe food insecurity despite a reduction in the prevalence of malnutrition and stunting among children under five. The subregion has performed well to provide electricity to people, but more needs to be done to increase access to and affordability of renewable energy. Rapid expansion of mobile network coverage and trade volume has pushed progress in Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), but this has come with increased carbon dioxide emissions from the manufacturing sector and a shrinking share of total manufacturing value added in production by medium and high-tech industries. The subregion has seen a regression on Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities), Goal 12 (responsible consumption and production) and Goal 13 (climate action) with urgent action needed to reverse negative trends are air pollution in cities, human and economic loss from disasters, fossil fuel subsidies and greenhouse gas emissions.

The adverse socio-economic impacts caused by the “triple C” crisis of COVID, Conflict and Climate change are challenging the ability of countries to focus on attaining the SDGs by 2030. Just as it looked like countries could come out of the pandemic, recovery efforts have been hampered by the war in Ukraine and natural disasters. The general food price index reached its highest level in 10 years and disruptions to production and shipping, coupled with the depreciation of currencies, have also contributed to inflationary pressures. Many countries are substantially occupied with the immediate problems that time, resources, and energy are being diverted towards crisis response and away from longer-term development investments.

Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) provide an opportunity for governments to create multistakeholder partnerships and to strengthen policy coherence and inclusivity towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Governments found that the first VNRs provided a good baseline for a country’s progress and identified existing gaps in monitoring and evaluating progress on the Goals. Subsequent VNRs enabled wider stakeholder engagement, deeper dialogue on sustainable development, and greater societal awareness and ownership of the Goals. A key lesson learned from the VNRs was that issues such as inclusivity and equity were key to ensure sustainability.

Improvements in data systems to monitor progress on Goals and support evidence-based decision making are important. The first VNRs carried out by countries in South and South-West Asia provided a baseline for monitoring progresses in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and also identified gaps that existed in the collection of reliable and accurate data. Countries have improved data systems by strengthening data collection for SDG indicators, enhancing compatibility of national datasets with international standards, and developing integrated SDG tracking systems and data visualization portals to facilitate the work of decision makers. These improvements need to be accompanied by strengthened statistical capacities at national and sub-national levels.

Accelerate climate action and ensure inclusivity in disaster risk reduction. Countries in South and South-West Asia are extremely vulnerable to climate-induced and other natural and biological hazards and the severity and frequency of natural disasters are increasing. Uncertainty in weather patterns is

eroding human capacity to tackle problems created by it and forcing countries to deal with disasters in a firefighting mode rather than being able to mitigate and avert their frequency and intensity. The recent floods in Pakistan gave the world a stark reminder of the scale of damage of climate-induced disasters. Half the population in South Asia, amounting to 800 million people, live in climate hotspots, i.e., areas that will be impacted by rising temperatures and extreme weather events. As climate disasters have no geographical boundaries, it is critical for countries to collaborate to build resilience and prepare for these events. Subregional cooperation in South and South-West Asia in early warning systems should be facilitated to mitigate climate change related risks. Climate change adaptation includes various regulations for soil and land protection, combating drought, agriculture, agricultural insurance and support, groundwater use, control of disaster risks and natural disaster insurance. These measures need to be inclusive by addressing risks and needs of vulnerable population groups in climate hotspots.

In face of worsening water stress and scarcity, greater efforts are needed in protection, efficiency and restoration of clean water and sanitation (Goal 6). Demand for water continues to rise due to growing population pressures and economic growth in industrial, agricultural, energy and tourism sectors. While access to fresh water has been improved, issues remain in terms of water quality and availability and wastewater treatment. Climate change affects weather patterns and raise incidences of severe rainfall and drought. Policies to ensure the protection of water sources and introducing sustainable management of groundwater and surface water are therefore critical to address the growing demand for water. Concerted efforts are needed to address regressions in the areas of water-use efficiency, protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems and participatory water and sanitation management. Transboundary border resource management is critical for the subregion, as most of the rivers are transboundary in nature and impact agriculture and ground water management. Successful technologies and methodologies for water management should be shared across the subregion.

South and South-West Asian countries need to accelerate a just energy transition by pruning unsustainable subsidies and incentivizing investments in clean energy. Although countries are investing more in renewable energy, the renewable energy share in total energy consumption is decreasing when countries need to reduce their carbon footprints. Governments have knowledge and experiences to share in policies and technologies for clean and just energy transitions (e.g., carbon pricing, import duties, subsidies, public transport), but also need investments, technical assistance and capacity building from private sector and international development partners. With 78.3 million people in South and South-West Asia still without access to electricity, affordable and accessible renewable energy for remote communities and low-income families is a central part of a just energy transition. Modernization of supply and grid infrastructure and maintenance and energy management are essential in improving efficiency and reducing losses, complemented by awareness campaigns for clean and efficient energy use. South Asia's move towards more integrated regional electricity markets should be accelerated to catalyze more reliable, affordable and fluid upstream-downstream connectivity and trade in clean energy.

More attention should be paid on challenges of micro, small and medium-size enterprises (MSMEs) that are essential for industrialization . Progress towards industrialization in the subregion is moderate and the risk of failure to meet SDG targets to significantly raise industry's share of employment and gross domestic product looms large. Several countries have backtracked on the liberalization of trade and FDI, contributing to premature fall in FDI and trade. This is worrying as increased import reliance leads to wider current account deficits and can lead to macroeconomic instability. Moreover, trade, investment and industrialization policies are not always coherent in countries and many barriers exist. Given the particular importance of MSMEs in this subregion, their

bottlenecks and needs must be urgently addressed, including for women who already constitute a minority but have been more vulnerable in losing jobs in face of the pandemic and other shocks. Economic diversification and sustainable industrialization are also important strategies for governments, for which investments in green and job-intensive industries are required.

A whole of government and society approach is needed to address multifaceted issues facing the sustainable development of cities and communities. Cities drive innovation, investment and are powerhouses of economic growth, but those in South and South-West Asia are facing multiple interlinked crises. The subregion is home to 46 of the world's 50 most polluted cities and at least 130 million people live in informal settlements characterized by poor construction, insecure and underserviced housing. Local-level capacities are inadequate to operate and maintain existing sewerage systems and wastewater treatment plants as uncontrolled dumping of solid waste cumulate. Integrated Resource Recovery Centres (IRRC) in certain countries have provided solutions to these challenges through waste and water management system. Air pollution has long been a core environmental and health hazard, stemming from increased emissions from transport, energy and agricultural practices. Furthermore, cities have become increasingly vulnerable to storms and flooding. Despite these challenges, many cities have been working on climate action and transportation plans. Implementation challenges persist due to gaps in financing, technologies and institutional capacities. Engagement, cooperation and coordination for urban planning need to involve national and provincial governments (for policymaking and planning), local administration (for policy execution), academia/think tanks (for the provision of evidence-based analysis), civil society/communities (for the integration of community perspectives), private sector and development partners (for knowledge-sharing, pilot development and scale-ups).

Digital inclusion is essential for sustainable development and leaving no one behind. The pandemic highlighted the importance of digital technology as a successful tool for the collection and dissemination of information, remote healthcare, supply of goods and services to consumers (by use of e-commerce), remote work from home and online learning for children, etc. The Fourth Industrial Revolution has also made digital literacy an essential passport for participation in society, economy and government. However, the proportion of people using the internet was still low in most countries in the subregion. More effort is needed to create digital awareness and build capacity for use in education, health and promoting business. Leveraging modern technology for seamless and resilient cross border connectivity through digitalization, electronic data exchange can significantly improve logistics efficiency and reduce trade costs. Cooperation in broadband connectivity is also potentially instrumental to address the significant digital divide within and across countries.

Innovating financing strategies is critical in face of compounded crises. The "Triple C" crisis of COVID-19, climate and conflict has slowed down economies, ratcheted up inflation and expanded balance of payment deficits. Substantial fiscal and debt pressures have raised interest rates which in turn has increased future debt servicing costs. The cascading pressures are now forcing governments to reduce spending, increase taxes, remove subsidies and depreciate exchange rates. Some countries are developing and implementing Integrated National Financing Frameworks to find holistic ways to make ends meet. It was also proposed that regional development finance frameworks could be developed to generate blended finance, debt swaps for climate action, innovative means to mobilize financing and use of AI or leveraging technology for improved tax collection for financing the Goals. The Loss and Damage Fund adopted at COP27 is another new instrument to be operationalized to help countries address damages incurred from climate-induced disasters.

Regional cooperation is essential as many challenges faced by countries in the subregion are not confined within their borders. Priority areas requiring urgent attention in the subregion are climate action and disaster risk reduction, cross-border connectivity of transport, ICT, energy and supply chains, reduction in poverty and inequality, and sustainable financing for development. High tariff and non-tariff barriers are keeping intraregional trade at only 5% and there is a need to reduce these costs, including through the liberalisation of services and investment. Improvements in trade and market integration, policies for economic diversification and enhanced regional connectivity are essential to improve the chances of achieving the 2030 Agenda, especially for the LDCs in subregion. Sharing of knowledge and good practices are also important tools for accelerating the SDGs.

Summary of Proceedings

Inaugural session

Welcome remarks

Ambassador Shafqat Kakakhel, Chair, Board of Governors, SDPI, Pakistan, welcomed participants to the opening session of the Twenty-fifth Silver Jubilee Sustainable Development Conference and the Sixth South and Southwest Asia Forum on Sustainable Development Goals. He highlighted the role that the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) has played since its founding in enriching national discourse on Pakistan's sustainable development agenda through evidence-based research and wide-ranging consultations with relevant stakeholders for identifying national priorities, vigorous advocacy and publications with information and options for policymaking and development activists. He noted the persistent efforts SDPI has made to serve as the voice of the weaker sections of society, including minorities and economically backward regions, while supporting gender equity and the effective participation of women. He concluded by thanking all partners who have supported SDPI and hoped that the recommendations developed during the two events would be useful for Pakistan's government and stakeholders, including external partners, and contribute to promoting peace and cooperation and integration in the subregion.

Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director, SDPI, Pakistan, opened by noting how in the past the term "sustainable" referred to a balance between consuming natural resources and their rate of replenishment, while today it is something that requires urgent attention to save the planet and the life that it supports. He went on to highlight how the uncertainty created by the three "C's" of COVID, conflict and climate change are challenging the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. COVID-19 has caused much uncertainty through the economic slowdowns as well as possibilities of other future pandemics becoming a global menace. The conflict in Ukraine is affecting global energy and food supply chains. Global nitrogen fertilizer production has also collapsed as Russian exports of natural gas, a crucial ingredient, are squeezed. Farmers are using less fertilizer and cutting production that may lead from a struggle with food-price inflation to a world that simply cannot produce enough food. Climate change is causing uncertainty in weather patterns and eroding human capacity to tackle problems created by it. Rapid changes in climate are forcing countries to deal with such disasters in a firefighting mode rather than being able to mitigate and avert their frequency and intensity.

As such, the three "C's" are forcing countries to question and rethink everything from healthcare systems to economic and financial policies to the ways and means of producing and consuming food. Dr. Suleri opined that many countries are seriously occupied with the immediate problems, such as inflation and food and energy shortages being made worse by the "triple C" crisis, that little time, resources, and energy are spent on attaining the SDGs by 2030. However, the importance of achieving the SDGs is something that all countries and global institutions do not dispute. In order to move forward from the current state of uncertainty to one of a more secure future, time, resources, and energy need to be invested in attaining the Goals. Dr. Suleri closed by stating that the world needs to adopt a futuristic and problem-solving approach rather than getting bogged down by the present state of indecision.

Mr. Syed Zafar Ali Shah, Secretary, Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan, opened by noting that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed thinking about economic growth with an importance placed on health, environment, and quality of growth. He also noted the importance of South-South cooperation to achieve the sustainable development goals and highlighted the outcomes of a twinning programme facilitated by ESCAP for Pakistan and Sri Lanka to exchange on issues regarding VNR preparations and problems faced to accelerate the progress of SDGs. He hoped that the deliberations during the Forum would provide participants with different possibilities and success stories of SDG implementation in the subregion, including discussions on VNR processes, regional perspectives on Goal 6 (Water and Sanitation), Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), Goal 9 (Industries, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). He also looked forward to discussions that would take place on the mobilization of financing to achieve the Goals despite lower fiscal space facing countries in the subregion. Mr. Shah went on to highlight the roles that government, private sector, civil society, academia and think tanks, and media play for the implementation of Goals in Pakistan as well as progresses made to achieve them. He believed that the deliberations would not just focus on solutions, but also the processes for reaching solutions and hoped that all countries would have significant takeaways from the Forum.

Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head, ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office welcomed the participants to the meeting. This year's Forum was felt to be particularly important given the compounded challenges that the subregion, including host country Pakistan, is facing and that the difficult times called for South and South-West Asian countries to come together and strengthen partnerships for development and regional cooperation. She also noted with pleasure that South Asia Network on Sustainable Development Goals (SANS) was expanding its membership to include think tanks in Türkiye, Iran and the Maldives and looked forward to the analysis and recommendations they would provide throughout the meeting. ESCAP would continue to work closely with these institutions in promoting regional cooperation by sharing knowledge and solutions on implementing the Goals in the subregion.

Special Remarks

Mr. Knut Ostby, Resident Representative, UNDP Pakistan, opened by noting the significant progresses that have been made in Pakistan in achieving the Goals, including a decline in extreme poverty, improvement in access to energy, increased industrial activities, reduction in maternal mortality, improvement in undernourishment, food insecurity, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), housing, and climate action. However, catastrophes like the COVID-19 pandemic, and geo-political and global economic crisis have presented socio-economic challenges and reversed development gains in Pakistan, as well as other middle-income countries. Mr. Ostby highlighted key areas of work where UNDP is supporting the Government of Pakistan to mainstream the Goals in national policies and strategies, such as flood recovery, early warning systems for glacier floods, developing Nationally Determined Contributions and provincial action plans for Climate Action, improving access to justice for vulnerable groups and strengthening effective and accountable justice and security service delivery, launch of a national action plan for business and human rights, eco-tourism, finance for development including the development of a SDG Investor Map, capacity building for SDGs and evidence-based policy research and analysis. He closed by noting that by placing the Sustainable Development Goals at the centre of policy making, Pakistan together with its development partners, is laying a strategic foundation for commitment to eradicate poverty and create pathways towards achieving the Goals, to ensure that no one is left behind.

H.E. Ms. Fathimath Niuma, Deputy Minister, Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Maldives, noted that while recovering from COVID-19 was a continuing challenge, it has also given an opportunity to realign global and national priorities and rethink development agendas to make them more resilient and sustainable. Maldives was badly affected by the pandemic as the closing of borders and travel restrictions abruptly halted the main source of income for its tourism-dependent economy. Collaborative efforts at all levels of government helped Maldives to address immediate health concerns and implement strategies to keep the economy afloat and recover from the pandemic. She noted that COVID-19 had forced a rethinking on how people conducted business, including an accelerated adoption of technological platforms for day-to-day work which has also created new forms of disparities and challenges.

Ms. Niuma then highlighted some of the progresses and challenges that Maldives faces in the implementations of the Goals. On Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation), concerted efforts are being made so that all islands will have proper, networked sanitation systems as well as provide desalinated, safe and clean drinking water to all the households. For Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy), measures to eliminate import duties on technologies and materials for renewable energy initiatives are in effect. Financial schemes and innovative competitions are also being promoted to encourage the business and financial sector to change their development approach and a push is also being made for the public sector to incorporate sustainable and greener technologies in development projects. On Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), the provision of public and essential services across the archipelago is challenging. A national public ferry system is starting to be developed to improve connectivity of people to existing services and facilities and serve as a backbone for accelerating socio-economic development. Ms. Niuma also noted that Maldives is in the process of preparing its second VNR for submission in 2023; an important exercise as it is the first review to be conducted post COVID-19. She closed by stating that collaboration and partnerships were essential to achieve the SDGs and she looked forward to sharing knowledge, opportunities, and recommendations with Forum participants to build back better from the pandemic.

H.E. Mr. Shehan Semasinghe, Minister of State for Finance, Sri Lanka, noted Sri Lanka's progress in achieving the Goals with an upward trend in global Sustainable Development Goals rankings as assessed in consecutive Global Sustainable Development Reports. Social welfare policies that have been a hallmark of Sri Lanka since independence has allowed the country to achieve higher levels of social and human development compared to regional peers with the provision of free healthcare, universal free education up to the tertiary level and social safety nets. The second VNR submitted by Sri Lanka in 2022 highlighted progress in the integration of the Goals in national policies and development plans, a strengthened institutional architecture for SDG governance, coordination and monitoring and a strengthened data ecosystem enabling rigorous evidence-based planning and progress monitoring.

Mr. Semasinghe affirmed the commitment of Sri Lanka's government to ensure that hard-earned development outcomes are not reversed due to the economic and social challenges confronting the country in the post-pandemic era. To that end, the government has initiated important restructuring and reform measures in tandem with a negotiated International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme to achieve macro-economic stability and debt sustainability. Moving forward, Sri Lanka is focussed on harnessing economic potentials through the promotion of an export-oriented competitive economy, an environmentally friendly blue-green economy, and a digital economy. To meet Sri Lanka's commitments to deliver 70% and 100% of the electricity demand through renewable sources by 2030 and 2050, respectively, private sector and international development partners are being engaged for

investments, technical assistance and capacity development to improve the enabling environment and facilities for green hydrogen and solar energy production. Efforts are also being made to further the digital technology industry through the introduction of required policy environment, laws, institutional architecture and facilities. Updated citizen data registries and restructuring of the social protection schemes are also being undertaken to address gaps in targeting and delivery mechanisms of cash transfer programmes and ensure an inclusive and productive social protection system.

The mobilization of financing to achieve the Goals amidst the excessive external debt burden facing Sri Lanka is a major challenge. A Sustainable Finance Roadmap is in the process of being operationalized to enable financial institutions to identify green investment opportunities and mobilize financing for climate action and sustainable development. With the support of international development partners, particularly ESCAP, Sri Lanka is exploring innovative and alternative financing tools to attract new levels of financial flows towards environment, social and governance sectors. In closing, Mr. Semasinghe noted that the Forum gives participants an opportunity to explore and further strengthen opportunities for South-South cooperation in sustainable financing, investment and trade, capacity building and technology transfer which will be critical to accelerate the sustainable development outcomes in their own countries and the South and South-West Asia region.

H.E. Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, UN Under Secretary General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, welcomed the participants and expressed her gratitude to the Government of Pakistan and SDPI for co-hosting the Forum. She noted with concern that the subregion was not on track to achieve any of the 17 Goals by 2030 and just as it looked like countries could come out of the pandemic, recovery efforts have been hampered by the effects of the war in Ukraine and natural disasters.

Ms. Alisjahbana highlighted three areas of particular importance for South and South-West Asia. Firstly, there is urgent need to accelerate climate action and ensure inclusivity in disaster risk reduction. The subregion has the highest risk of climate-induced and other natural and biological hazards and the floods in Pakistan have given the world a stark reminder of the scale of damage that can be incurred from the effects of climate change. Secondly, there is a need to accelerate a just energy transition by pruning unsustainable subsidies and incentivizing investments in clean energy. The subregion has an abundant renewable energy base in the form of hydro, wind and solar power and the full utilization of these resources can provide people with greater energy security and significantly reduce carbon emissions. The affordability and accessibility of renewable energy for remote communities and low-income families is also a central part of a just energy transition. Thirdly, digital inclusion has become essential for sustainable development and leaving no one behind. Digital systems have been instrumental for the dissemination of information, the provision of goods and services to consumers, remote work from home and online learning for children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Fourth Industrial Revolution has also made digital literacy an essential passport for participation in society, economy and government.

In closing, Ms. Alisjahbana highlighted the importance of the Forum as a multistakeholder platform for reviewing progress, challenges and forging common solutions for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Forum guides ESCAP's future work and technical assistance to member States and serves as a subregional preparatory meeting for the 2023 Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) and the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). She wished the Forum successful deliberations and reiterated ESCAP's commitment to fostering regional cooperation and supporting member States in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

H.E. Mr. Esala Ruwan Weerakoon, Secretary-General of SAARC, expressed his sorrow over the lives lost in Pakistan due to the floods and noted that natural disasters and the pandemic have changed the lives and livelihoods of people and impacted the development of countries in the subregion. He highlighted that the progress in achieving the SDGs in the subregion is slow and called for urgent, strategic, and concentrated efforts to accelerate the progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda. He went on to note some of the progresses and challenges that the subregion faces in the achievement of various Goals. For example, despite some progress made on achieving Goal 1 (No poverty), South and South-West Asia has the highest multi-dimensional poverty ratio among all other subregions. Relatively good progress has been seen in Goal 3 (Good health and well-being) with reductions in maternal, neonatal and child mortality, but insufficient progress is being seen in Goal 2 (Zero hunger) with more people suffering from moderate or severe food insecurity despite a reduction in the prevalence of malnutrition and stunting among children under five. He noted that for Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy), the subregion has performed well to provide electricity to people, but more needs to be done to increase access to and affordability of renewable energy. The rapid expansion of mobile network coverage and volume of trade has allowed the subregion to make moderate progress on Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), but that this has come with the cost of increases in CO2 emissions from the manufacturing sector and the shrinking share of total manufacturing value-added production by medium and high-tech industries. The subregion has seen a regression on Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities), Goal 12 (responsible consumption and production) and Goal 13 (climate action). The main areas that need urgent action to reverse negative trends are air pollution in cities, human and economic losses from disasters, fossil fuel subsidies and greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Weerakoon noted that the slowing down of the world's largest economies will have an adverse effect on developing countries through reduced demand for exports, which may be further strained by high food and energy prices. He stated that South Asian countries needed to come together to improve trade and market integration, enhance regional connectivity in terms of transport, digital, and people to people connectivity and strengthen partnerships for development to substantially improve chances of achieving the 2030 Agenda. Mr. Weerakoon closed by reaffirming SAARC's commitment and resolve to assist the member States in achieving the Goals and building forward better, through more effective regional cooperation and collaboration and wished the Forum success in its deliberations.

Inaugural address

H.E. Prof. Ahsan Iqbal Chaudhary, Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan, welcomed the delegates and expressed that the Government of Pakistan was happy to host the Forum and thanked ESCAP for holding the event in Pakistan. He highlighted that the war in Ukraine has particularly disrupted supply chains that are leading to wheat shortages, rise in oil prices, unprecedented high levels of inflation and desperate balance of payments deficits. Although there was much support provided to developing countries to deal with COVID, more pressures are now being placed to reduce spending and increase taxation to reduce fiscal deficit, depreciate exchange rate, remove subsidies, etc. Prof. Chaudhary argued that during times of crisis more relief is needed in terms of debt swaps, debt relief, debt rescheduling and longer-term concessionary loans to help build economic, social and environmental infrastructure that would help in accelerating the progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. He described the efforts made in Pakistan to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals with the incorporation of the Goals into the national development agenda, the establishment of specialized SDG support units as well as Parliamentary Task Forces at the federal and provincial levels and that a SDG Secretariat in the National Parliament has

also been established for oversight, effective coordination and support for the Goals. Pakistan has been aiming to “Building Forward Better” with increasing focus on social protection and income stimulus. However, he noted that efforts are still lagging with respect to green, inclusive and gender sensitive programming to address multiple and intersecting deprivations.

Prof. Chaudhary highlighted the devastation and losses that had been incurred in Pakistan due to the disastrous flooding experienced in 2022. The national poverty rate is estimated to increase by 3.7 to 4.0 percentage points, pushing between 8.4 and 9.1 million people into poverty. The total estimated cost of damages, loss and needs is estimated around US\$ 46.4 billion (PKR 10 trillion) and the recovery and reconstruction needs are likely to exceed Pakistan’s available resources to rebuild itself in a sustainable and resilient manner. Prof. Chaudhary noted that the Forum should contribute to creating an environment of cooperation, sharing of the best practices and implementation strategies to accelerate progress on the Goals.

He noted that the subregion had seen mixed progress to achieve various Goals. Prof. Chaudhary cited the twinning programme between Pakistan and Sri Lanka as a great example of knowledge sharing and peer learning for SDG implementation. Such exchanges of knowledge, ideas and lessons learned could help in strengthening country level cross-cooperation and learning for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The establishment of a Sustainable Development Goal Fund for South and South-West Asia, similar to the SAARC Development Fund, was suggested as a possible way to fill financing gaps that exist to achieve the SDGs. Subregional cooperation on early warning systems with respect to floods and cyclones should be encouraged and endorsed to help mitigate climate change related risks. The COVID-19 pandemic has also brought the adoption of technological solutions to many types of work and enhanced the importance of digital literacy. Businesses should prioritize investing in Industry 4.0 that have a positive societal and sustainability impact. Concerted efforts and collective wisdom of countries can help overcome the challenges being faced during uncertain times.

Session 1: Subregional overview of progress in SDGs: Challenges and prospects

Dr. Abid Suleri, Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan, moderated the session. He observed that the subregion was implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of the “triple C” crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict and climate change. He stated that the pandemic and the war had impacted both energy and food security in the subregion, caused inflation and recession in several countries, and led to funds being diverted towards crisis response from implementation of the Goals. He also highlighted that climate change had led to disasters in the subregion in recent years, including in Pakistan, where heat waves had led to significantly reduced wheat and mango yields and impacted the Himalayan glaciers resulting in serious floods. He noted that floods also occurred in Bangladesh and India, while heatwaves and forest fires were prevalent in almost all countries of the subregion.

Dr. Suleri then mentioned that there was a silver lining amidst the “triple C” crisis. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments have started strengthening their public health infrastructure and healthcare services. There has also been a new impetus towards renewable energy in the subregion to bolster food and energy security, as alternative sources of coal, gas and petroleum are expensive for countries in South Asia. He noted that countries have realized that ignoring Goals 13 (Climate action), 14 (Life below water) and 15 (Life on land) were no longer an option, and that the growing realization of the

impact of climate change had led to a commitment by countries to establish the Loss and Damage Fund at COP 27.

Mr. Kewal Prasad Bhandari, Secretary, National Planning Commission, Nepal, then chaired the session. He observed that South and South-West Asia had seen its progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals stall, with increasing divergence in economic and social outcomes within and between countries. He noted that the subregion continued to lag in all 17 Goals this year. The subregion made most progress towards Goals 1 (No poverty), 3 (Good health and wellbeing) and 15 (Life on land), but regressed on Goals 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), 12 (Responsible consumption and production), and 13 (Climate action). He underscored that there was an urgency for governments in the subregion to revisit strategies and plans to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. To this end, he called for the subregion to: i) increase its investment in the key areas of health, education, social protection, and basic infrastructure; ii) promote sustainable industrialization while addressing the development of rural agrarian sectors; iii) strengthen institutional capacities in science and technology, statistics and financing; and iv) move towards the use of clean energy while placing environmental sustainability at the heart of development strategies.

Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Deputy Head, Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, ESCAP, observed that South and South-West Asia is lagging on all 17 Goals, although some progress has been made for Goal 3 and 15. On Goals 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17, which were the Goals for discussion at the Forum, he noted that the subregion was regressing on most targets; for several targets, data was also not available reflecting challenges the subregion was facing in collecting, analyzing and using data for evidence-based policy interventions.

Regarding the economy, he stated that COVID-related recovery was losing momentum. Should large economies such as the United States and European Union go into recession, economies in the subregion would also suffer as a significant portion of the latter's exports go to these large economies. Further, the prices of commodities including food and fuel are increasing due to the impact of the war in Ukraine.

He then discussed the increase in natural disasters within the subregion and the urgency of climate action. He observed that environmental issues were transboundary in nature and raised the example of ESCAP studies on crop straw burning in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan that recognized cross-border air pollution. On the issue of renewable energy, he mentioned that while investment in renewable energy was increasing, the share of renewable energy out of the total share of energy consumption had decreased over the years due to even larger increases in investments within the non-renewables sector. He advised that countries needed to pay attention to the share of investments in non-renewable energy to achieve carbon neutrality. He also expounded on the importance of regional integration and noted with concern that South Asia was the least integrated subregion in the world, with less than five per cent of intra-regional trade and almost no trade in services.

Dr. Ratna then proposed recommendations for accelerating the implementation of the Goals in the subregion. First, he called for the promotion of growth through sustainable industrialization, including investments in green and job-intensive industries. To this end, the productivity of small-scale units and information in informal sectors also needs to be enhanced. He also highlighted the importance of liberalizing the service sector and of reducing the cost of trade with neighbouring countries. He then underscored the importance of public investments in health, education and social protection, and of closing the gender gap which has widened due to the COVID-19 pandemic and witnessed an increase in gender-based violence and unpaid care burdens for women. Further, he highlighted the importance

of rural and agricultural development for food security, given that the majority of populations in the subregion depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. He also advocated for increased investments in the environment as well as green and clean energy. Finally, he emphasized the centrality of regional cooperation, including strengthened transboundary connectivity in trade, digitalization, and transport, such as through multi-modal approaches.

Ms. Cecile Fruman, Director, Regional Integration and Engagement (South Asia), World Bank, stressed that regional and subregional actions towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals are as equally important as national and local actions, because many challenges faced by countries in the subregion are transboundary and not domestic in nature. She raised the example of Goal 1 on ending poverty and noted that trade integration and cooperation would help countries make progress on this Goal. She observed that intra-regional trade in South Asia comprises only five per cent of global trade, and that trade has been very limited by “thick borders”, with high tariffs and non-tariff barriers, as well as lengthy procedures and restrictive regulations that impede the movement of trucks and goods across borders. She noted that the Motor Vehicle Agreements between Bangladesh, India and Nepal, if implemented, would lead to substantial gains in terms of trade dollars and jobs, particularly for women.

Regarding Goal 7 on affordable and clean energy, she noted that South Asia has been moving towards more integrated regional electricity markets, which have the potential to make electricity trade greener, cheaper and more secure and reliable. She observed that the Eastern South Asia subregion has significant hydro-capacity, mostly from Bhutan and Nepal, which represents a significant flow of revenue for those countries, while downstream countries, particularly India and Bangladesh, currently relying on fossil fuels will gain cheaper and reliable access to cleaner energy sources. On Goal 9, which is to promote resilient infrastructure, industry and innovation, she highlighted the importance of ensuring that investments in infrastructure are green, sustainable and climate resilient. Regarding Goal 13 on climate action, she noted that half the population in South Asia, amounting to 800 million people, live in climate hotspots, i.e., areas that will be impacted by rising temperatures and extreme weather events by 2050, with the vulnerable most at risk. As climate disasters know no boundaries, it would be absolutely critical for the countries to collaborate, build resilience, and prepare for these events. She also highlighted that air pollution and plastic pollution cuts across borders, and that such cross-boundary pollution cannot be addressed without cooperation across countries. She also noted that transboundary water resource management is critical for the subregion, as most of the rivers are transboundary in nature and impact agriculture and ground water management.

Mr. Mohd. Monirul Islam, Joint Secretary (SDG), Prime Minister’s Office, Bangladesh, shared that the Prime Minister of Bangladesh presented a development model centred on people’s empowerment and peace at the 66th session of the General Assembly that is applicable to the Sustainable Development Goals. In recent years, the Government of Bangladesh has institutionalised implementing committees at the division, district and sub-district levels to support the implementation of the Goals. In recognition of the importance of data in monitoring the Goals, a high-level national data coordination committee has been constructed with 55 data-generating institutions as members. The country has also established a high-level Sustainable Development Goals implementation review committee with 25 Secretaries of Ministries represented under the leadership of the Prime Minister’s Office. The Committee undertook its second review on the implementation of the Goals in May 2022, attended by more than 3,000 participants including non-governmental organizations, civil society and academia. Bangladesh is also currently able to produce 176 indicators in its Sustainable Development Goals tracker. Content on the Goals are also included in the sixth to tenth grade curriculum, as well as the foundation training programme of the newly recruited government officials.

Mr. Islam then provided an update on Bangladesh's progress towards the Goals. On poverty reduction, Bangladesh was on track to reducing poverty prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and updated post-pandemic poverty figures would be available next year. Hunger is declining but at a slow pace, while stunting among children under five years of age has declined significantly from 73.6% in 1991 to 28% in 2019. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the infant mortality and under-five mortality rates have been stagnant, while maternal mortality has increased slightly. Gender parity in education has been achieved at the primary and secondary levels, although progress is slow at the tertiary level. One hundred per cent of the population has access to electricity, although the share of renewable energy out of total energy consumption is limited. Bangladesh aims to achieve 40 per cent clean energy out of its total energy consumption by 2041. On economic growth, including in the area of manufacturing value-addition, he shared that Bangladesh is still recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. On social protection, coverage has increased over the years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when at least one-fifth of the total budget was allocated for social protection. Mr. Islam closed by underscoring that the three challenges currently faced by Bangladesh were the three "f's" of food, fuel and foreign exchange reserves.

Dr. Ali Gholampour, Head, Department of Development Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran, observed that the year 2015 was a milestone year in the history of international agenda setting, with several normative commitments being adopted including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development. He noted that the spirit of cooperation, partnership and integration at the international, regional and subregional levels have been incorporated in these commitments, and that the transfer of technology, financing, capacity building and knowledge sharing, as delineated in Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda, are necessary for the implementation of the Goals. He then highlighted that the Islamic Republic of Iran has faced challenges in accessing technology, knowledge and funds required for implementing policies and projects towards realization of the Goals.

Dr. Gholampour underscored that national ownership and consideration of individual country circumstances are crucial for the implementation of the Goals, with the concepts of dignity, people, prosperity, planet and justice being a precondition for partnerships on the Goals. He also highlighted that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is voluntary in nature, not legally binding, and dependent on national priorities, policies, culture and other circumstances. He noted that a main challenge in the implementation of the Goals is the failure of developed countries to abide by their commitments, for example, the annual mobilization of US\$100 billion for climate change mitigation and adaptation under the Paris Agreement. He highlighted that injustice and illegitimate unilateral sanctions and unilateral coercive measures has impeded the Iranian people to have access to the means of implementation of SDGs and has impeded the country to exercise its right to development. On Goal 6, the country is on track in terms of the population using at least basic drinking water services and improving in terms of the population using basic sanitation services. Challenges however remain, in terms of wastewater treatment and scarce water for consumption. On Goal 7, 100 per cent of the country's population has access to electricity and 96.5 per cent has access to clean fuels and technology for cooking; challenges include carbon emissions from fuel combustion and the limited share of renewable energy in total primary energy supply.¹

¹ Due to limited time, the speaker was not able to elaborate on Iran's achievements under SDG 9 and 11.

Mr. Priyantha Ratnayake, Deputy Secretary to the Treasury, Ministry of Finance, Sri Lanka, noted that the socioeconomic impacts arising from the COVID-19 pandemic have been severe and disproportionately affecting developing countries with extreme vulnerabilities. He shared that Sri Lanka is currently facing multiple economic challenges including a contraction of the economy, high fiscal deficit, high government debt and inflation – all of which have resulted in rising income and multidimensional poverty, significant job losses, and acute food insecurity and malnutrition. In the area of health and education, he highlighted that Sri Lanka’s healthcare infrastructure requires additional financing and that additional resources are required to narrow learning inequalities that worsened during the COVID-19 related school closures. He then expressed concern about gender disparities, citing the low participation of women in the labour force and the need to increase their participation given that 26 per cent of households in the country are headed by females. In addition, the sectors that employ the larger proportion of females, including manufacturing, accommodation, food services, wholesale and retail, are high-risk sectors with a high probability of unemployment due to the pandemic and the vulnerability of females to economic and other shocks. He also stated that there has been an increase in the number of female labour migrants in recent years and that the exploitation of migrant domestic workers requires attention.

Mr. Ratnayake then shared about the responses of the Government of Sri Lanka to the abovementioned socioeconomic challenges. The Government leveraged its partnerships with various stakeholders to mobilize resources for pandemic response across various sectors such as education and healthcare, including repurposing available funding with multilateral lenders, forming private sector partnerships that reached the poor and vulnerable, and utilizing public contributions through the healthcare and social security fund. He further mentioned that the government had taken steps to strengthen the institutional framework of social safety net programmes to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of protecting the most vulnerable.

Finally, he stated that South-South investments, as well as trade and technology transfers, could strengthen productive capacities of countries, in tandem with supportive policy environments. He called for support to Sri Lanka in engaging with regional and peer countries to strengthen trade and investment linkages, given the country’s need to expand the export sector and receive foreign direct investment. To this end, he cited preferential market access to other countries through special tariff reductions, special quotas and similar measures as being vital. He also requested for support from neighbouring countries to develop Sri Lanka’s tourism sector, given that the momentum of tourism industries would be crucial to the recovery of the economy. In closing, he underscored the need for more collaborative efforts, partnerships and institutional frameworks regionally and globally, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic – where governments, international agencies, financial institutions and non-governmental organizations joined hands in responding to the pandemic – to counter current challenges, including the slowing economy, high inflation and the lack of food security.

Mr. Yusuf Esidir, Expert, Strategy and Budget, Office of Presidency, Türkiye, highlighted that global challenges – including the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical developments, the increase in energy prices, deterioration in the global supply chain, drought, forest fires and food security concerns – all reveal the necessity of harmonizing short-term priorities in economic, social and environmental policies with long-term goals and demonstrate the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals. He observed that while the Asia-Pacific region grew rapidly in the last decade, this growth had not developed in parallel with the reduction of income inequality, and that 85 million more people have been pushed into extreme poverty since the beginning of the pandemic. The general food price index reached its highest level in 10 years, and pandemic-induced disruptions to production and shipping,

including higher shipping costs, coupled with the depreciation of currencies, have also contributed to inflationary pressures.

Further, he noted that the COVID-19 outbreak has shown that the continued destruction of nature for short-term economic gains increases the fragility of the countries and their economies. In this context, policies in Türkiye have been designed to support green growth and limit the increase in emission trends; efforts for adapting to the climate change being given utmost importance. He underscored that Türkiye ratified the Paris Agreement in October 2021 and has set a net zero emission target for 2053. He then emphasized that the protection of biodiversity is very important for human health and the future of the planet, given that changes of anthropogenic origin, such as deforestation, ecosystem destruction, uncontrolled land use, and unplanned urbanization, affect the transmission of infectious diseases from animals to humans by changing the interactions of host and the virus. He also observed that with the effect of deterioration in climate and environmental conditions, the severity and frequency of natural disasters in the world are increasing, including in Türkiye, which is one of the countries most affected by climate change. The country therefore attaches special importance to climate change adaptation, including through various regulations for soil and land protection; combating drought; agriculture; agricultural insurance and support; the use of groundwater; the control of disaster risks; and natural disaster insurance.

Mr. Nadeem Ahmed, Social Policy Advisor, Federal Sustainable Development Goals Support Unit, Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Pakistan, summarized activities being undertaken for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan. Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Parliament of Pakistan declared the SDGs as its national development agenda through unanimous resolution. The Government of Pakistan and UNDP initiated a project titled “National Initiative for SDGs” for the mainstreaming of policies, development of robust monitoring and reporting frameworks, enhancing vertical and horizontal coordination and bridging the knowledge gap for the implementation of the Goals. To accomplish this objective, seven dedicated SDG support units were established within the planning and development departments at the provincial and area government levels and within the planning commission at the federal level. National and provincial parliamentary taskforces on SDGs were also established to oversee the legislations. Mr. Ahmed highlighted that in 2020, the National Economic Council (NEC), the highest decision-making forum in Pakistan headed by the Prime Minister, instituted NEC sub-committees on the Sustainable Development Goals for review of progress, strategic guidance and strengthening of coordination mechanisms. Further, to localize the Goals, the Federal SDG Support Unit has developed a prioritization matrix and a national Sustainable Development Goals framework that was approved by the NEC in March 2018, and provincial governments have also developed their own SDG frameworks reflecting local priorities.

With regard to data, the Government of Pakistan analysed the entire data ecosystem for the monitoring and reporting of the Goals in 2018. This provided a snapshot of the number of indicators the country could report in 2018, which was less than 50 indicators. He noted that in 2021, the government has published its First SDGs Status Report that showed Pakistan could now report on 133 indicators, in which more than 93 were drawn from national sources. The country has also developed its own Sustainable Development Goals index and dashboard. He then concluded his intervention by raising questions on how to define localization of the 2030 Agenda – on whether localization meant the transformation of the global agenda into local needs or the strengthening of local systems and capacities, including financing and taxation capacities. He also called for enhanced coordination within countries and at the regional and subregional levels, while noting that both internal and external political stability

was imperative for the achievement of the Goals. Finally, he noted that high population growth is a major issue in developing countries and that there is no target within the indicator framework of the 2030 Agenda that specifically addresses the issue. A short documentary on Pakistan SDG Dashboard, developed by Federal SDGs Support Unit, was also shown to the participants.

In the open discussion session, a question was asked on whether the Pakistan Sustainable Development Goals dashboard was connected with those of the United Nations and other countries. The participant also opined that having such national dashboards would allow for more accurate data and ensuing evidence-based analysis. In response, Mr. Ahmed shared that the Government is in the process of integrating the dashboard into Pakistan's SDG Dashboard, including those of the Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Human Rights. An ILO social protection dashboard designed to measure indicator 1.3.1 has also been integrated into Pakistan's SDG Dashboard. He also shared that the dashboard has not been formally launched, but efforts would be made to integrate it at the global level and with the UN dashboards.

Sessions 2 and 3 - National SDGs progress and challenges in the context of COVID-19: Reflections on voluntary national reviews (VNRs) in South and South-West Asia

Sessions 2 and 3 provided national perspectives on the progresses made and challenges encountered in addressing SDGs and share experiences of countries in carrying out their VNRs. The aim was to exchange national perspectives on the impact the pandemic has had on SDGs and highlight priorities and the kind of policies being implemented to recover and get back on track with the 2030 Agenda.

Mr. Oliver Paddison, Chief, Countries in Special Situations Section, ESCAP presented on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). He first explained how the VNRs tie into national sub-regional and global processes. Türkiye presented its second VNR in 2019, while Bangladesh, India and Nepal presented their second VNRs in 2020, followed by Afghanistan and Bhutan in 2021. Pakistan and Sri Lanka presented their VNR in 2022. In 2023, the Maldives will be the only country from the subregion presenting its VNR at the HLPF.

VNRs are meant to assess progress on the Goals and to analyze the drivers of setbacks and successes to better understand implementation challenges. The VNR process is ultimately an excellent opportunity for national governments to create multi-stakeholder partnerships for strengthening policy coherence and inclusion. It can act as a tool for national integration processes and encourage a coordinated cross-sectoral approach to implementing the Goals. It also allows countries to analyze inequalities and vulnerabilities and seek to involve groups being left behind in the VNR and review ongoing progresses. Mr. Paddison explained that the first VNR was a good baseline for the country's SDG progress and served to increase awareness about the Goals. A second VNR can provide a more detailed and in-depth analysis of progress on the Goals and key implementation challenges since the first VNR. As the global and national context changes, it is important to assess the impact and highlight issues and partnerships. Having more VNRs can deepen dialogue on sustainable development and engage stakeholders more comprehensively.

Mr. Paddison further discussed the ESCAP's twinning programme as a successful case that started in 2020. The programme connects two to three countries that are presenting their VNRs in the same year and supports a peer learning process so that countries can learn from each other and facilitate exchange

of experiences. In 2022, Sri Lanka and Pakistan peer-reviewed each other's VNRs and the mutual feedback was helpful for the two countries to move forward in their VNRs. For 2023, the cycle of this twinning programme will expand to three countries, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Mr. Paddison also provided information on other helpful resources on sustainable development, including the ESCAP's data gateway and a policy brief on Voluntary National Reviews. Finally, he reminded the participants of the upcoming Tenth APFSD, which will be held in Bangkok from 27-30 March 2023, and invited the member States to participate in this event.

Pakistan noted that their first VNR and second VNRs were presented in 2019 and 2022, respectively. It was emphasized that Pakistan views the Goals as a national obligation and has established a parliamentary task force and other acting bodies such as SDG support units at the provincial level. The National Economic Forum, headed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan and attended by all the chief ministers, have sub-committees, which provide guidance on what to do and how to move forward as far as the SDGs are concerned. Mr. Kemal explained that Pakistan had also developed a framework and integration priorities, completed in 2018, with 42 leverage points connected to all 169 targets. If Pakistan engages in these 42 leverage points, it will achieve most of the targets included in the 17 SDGs. He also discussed on a SDGs Achievement Programme, a cabinet programme carried out through the members of national and provincial assemblies. While the programme does not have much funding, it is a demand-driven project at the local level covering water and sanitation, health, education, and electricity.

In Pakistan, the main focus of the 2022 VNR were the COVID-19 strategies that were developed to overcome pandemic-related problems. Even though Pakistan had 31,000 deaths during COVID-19, it recovered very quickly from the COVID-19 crisis. Regarding some of the other Goals, Pakistan reduced its maternal mortality rate (MMR) from 276 in 2006-2007 to 186 in 2018-2019 and poverty was reduced by 2.4%. A key lesson learned from the VNRs were that issues such as inclusivity and equity were key to ensure sustainability.

It was noted that during COVID-19, developed countries were assisting developing countries, but this support has disappeared after the Ukrainian-Russia conflict which has created a new super shock of high inflation and a balance of payment crisis. Pakistan initiated a series of reforms in August 2022 to turn around social and economic threats facing the country. Green financing, debt swaps, green bonds and various social bonds, even gender bonds and climate bonds, are areas that need to be exploited by Pakistan. Despite efforts made to report on all targets, 50 indicators are left unreported and needs to be resolved. In closing, participation in the HLPF was felt to be useful as it provided an opportunity to interact and receive feedback from other countries

Sri Lanka carried out its first and second VNRs in 2018 and 2022, which encompassed almost all the sectors and all the Goals. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Easter attacks in 2019, which took place between the two VNRs, greatly damaged the tourism industry. The country is also still struggling with the recent financial crisis that has affected the economy and devalued their currency. The importance of partnerships in leveraging innovations and strategic joint ventures to untap potential international markets were emphasized. Issues related to transportation were also discussed, including the long waiting time that exists for the transfer of goods between countries such as Bangladesh, India and Pakistan despite being on the same continent.

In 2021, Sri Lanka was ranked 95th among 132 countries in the global innovation index of the World Intellectual Property Organization. Sri Lanka's allocation of funds for research and development is

much smaller than its neighbouring countries, with 0.11% of GDP spent on research and development, compared to ratios of 0.25% for Pakistan, 0.3% for Nepal and 0.7% for India. It was noted that 98% of industries in Sri Lanka are either micro, small or medium, and they produce 52% of the GDP, causing them to be seriously impacted by the crisis. Unlike many large industries, it is harder for these MSMEs to return to where they were. Some new policy frameworks have been introduced to promote high-potential SMEs and improve their business opportunities. National vocational training programmes have also been started to support improvements in the technical skills of these companies.

It was also noted that the SDG goals were multi-dimensional and the country's policies had to align with them to provide a successful transformation into a blue-green economy that addressed the sustainable management of land and ocean resources. Sri Lanka has submitted its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) which includes nine adaptation sectors and five mitigation sectors. Sri Lanka has pledged to become net zero in carbon emissions by 2050, and for renewable energy share to be 70% by 2030. Even though achieving these targets does not seem possible, Sri Lanka hopes to increase its renewable energy share. There are many plans in action, such as increasing the share of renewable energy in electricity generation, improvement of public transport systems, promoting e-mobility, introducing carbon pricing instruments, introducing policies for increasing parking fees, improving asset management and also promoting online and work from home to reduce emissions and save the environment.

In Sri Lanka, access to safe drinking water is 89%, and safe sanitation is 97%. Sri Lanka promotes climate-resilient integrated water management to strengthen climate resilience in communities, and SDG 13 is in action in the country's national policies and programmes. An investor map has been prepared, which tries to enhance the operationalization of the Goals in the country as well as with the neighbours. It was hoped that through the strengthening of partnerships and fostering of international cooperation that Sri Lanka's recovery could be accelerated and achieve the country's vision for an inclusive, transformative nation through the realization of the 2030 Agenda.

Bangladesh noted that it had submitted its first and second VNRs in 2017 and 2020, respectively. Poverty in Bangladesh has declined from 40% in 2005 to 20.5% in 2019 and life expectancy at birth has increased from 65 to 72.6 years within the same period. The VNR process helped Bangladesh to identify some of the key challenges for achieving the Goals. Reducing income inequality and absolute number of poor people, ensuring food security universal health coverage and quality education at multilevel educational streams, inadequate infrastructure to meet the demand of urban amenities, facilities, primary healthcare, wastewater treatment, collection and disposal of urban solid waste, transportation services, still remain as areas of concern. As a climatically vulnerable country, Bangladesh needs to reduce its exposure to the climate change impacts by applying adaptation and mitigation measures, which will be challenging. In addition, increasing domestic resource mobilization, particularly increasing the tax-to-GDP ratio at the desired level, will be challenging.

Bangladesh has incorporated strategies into its Eighth Five-Year Plan to overcome COVID-19 challenges. Following the guidelines of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the government undertook a comprehensive economic recovery program containing 28 fiscal and stimulus packages worth around US\$ 22.08 billion to facilitate the implementation of these strategies. In closing, it was felt that international cooperation, multilateralism, and international solidarity is the best way for the world to effectively overcome and recover from COVID-19 pandemic, prevent future pandemics, and address urgent global challenges.

In **Bhutan**, the guiding development philosophy is Gross National Happiness (GNH), which is tied to a harmonized balance between the material well-being that is being pursued as well as the spiritual, emotional, and cultural needs of their society. The Sustainable Development Goals are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. As such, there is a strong alignment between the GNH, SDGs and the ongoing Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2018-2023).

Bhutan first carried out its VNR in 2018 and a second round was conducted in 2021. The second round of the VNR took place during the peak of COVID-19; nevertheless, efforts were made to make the process as participatory and inclusive as possible. Around 65 agencies, including the private sector, CSOs and academia, were engaged, which greatly improved participation compared to the first VNR exercise. Bhutan had an in-depth analysis of the Goals that were the thematic areas for the 2021 HLPF and also analysed the impact of COVID 19 and key learnings from how the country responded to the pandemic during that time. An effort was made to also analyze the Goals that were not included in the 2021 HLPF thematic areas. The current Twelfth Five Year Plan has 17 national key result areas closely aligned to the 17 SDGs, and the report in 2021 found broad-based progress in all SDGs. As a result of the success over the past few decades, Bhutan is due to graduate from the LDC category by the end of 2023.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had immediate effects on many SDGs, especially on livelihoods, education, and mental well-being, in addition to the revenue and economy of the country. While all Goals, except SDG 17, were assessed to be on track during the 2018 VNR, it was likely that the progress of SDGs 1, 4, 8, 10, and 17 were "at risk" during the 2021 VNR. Due to the COVID restrictions, Bhutan sealed its international borders in March 2020 and reopened only after two and a half years. At that point, the economy recorded a growth rate of -10%, which was a 15% drop compared to the previous year. This was a historic low for Bhutan in recent history. Except for the agriculture and hydropower sector, all other sectors experienced negative growth during that year because of COVID.

Many people were also displaced from their jobs; unemployment rates also increased compared to the previous year to the highest level of 5% in 2020. To minimize the impact of COVID, many actions were taken such as switching to online education and a Welfare Scheme under His Majesty's Relief Kidu which ensured that around 37,000 people from the most vulnerable population, including children, were supported with minimum income, cash transfers, loan deferrals, and interest payments by the government until June 2022.

Bhutan is currently conducting the Living Standards Survey, which is expected to be completed in 2023. The Survey results will allow for the quantification of the positive impacts of Bhutan's measures taken over the last couple of years. Bhutan highlighted that the VNR and international forums have helped deepen societal awareness and strengthen ownership of the Goals. Bhutan sees the VNRs as an opportunity to understand how the country is progressing in implementing the Goals as well as their alignment with Bhutan's national programmes. VNRs serve as the national SDG report, and it also helps in terms of building the capacities of national officials. Lastly, the sharing of knowledge and best practices from other countries provides helpful ideas to improve SDG processes in a country.

India (Research and Information System for Developing Countries) started its intervention with a discussion on the G20 and the importance of the youth. India has taken up the presidency of the G20 starting in December and in order to draw more attention to the youth of the region, 75 universities across the country will be connected. Over the next few months several G20 related events would take

place across the country to mainstream the role of the youth and students in the process. India has proposed to place accelerating the Goals as a key priority area for the G20 next year, focusing on the large-scale transformations taking place and the use of digital and other forms of technologies. There will also be a focus on women-led development and green transition. India has called for a strong focus on climate action and climate justice which is also a concern in South Asia. India is taking the lead in setting the agenda on climate finance and adaptation beyond the normal mitigation narrative.

India presented its first VNR in 2017 and its second in 2020. The first VNR was mostly around reporting on the status of the various indicators and what India was doing in its national initiatives, but a key focus was also on bringing in sub-national initiatives in the form of cooperative federalism. Indian states also took the lead in coming up with their SDG vision document and these were reflected in the first VNR. The VNR in 2020 was still a process of assessing what has happened in terms of goals, targets and indicators, but more focus was placed on what can be done in terms of localization. The framework for the localization of SDGs was more clearly identified in the second VNR and some new policies corresponding to that were put in action in different levels. As SDG 17 is a cross-cutting Goal, countries have to pay more attention to what is required and what is done in the region in terms of strengthening systems and capacities as part of delivering SDG 17.

Iran noted that during the negotiation and adoption process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the General Assembly, the country had raised concerns on some parts of the Agenda that conflicted with national priorities or national policies, including Sharia rules and regulations, and stated that it would not be affiliated to such parts of the SDGs. A first VNR had been prepared in 2018 but not presented at the HLPF due to some sensitivities in Iran regarding parts of the Agenda where the government had reservations. However, Iran may consider preparing and submitting its VNR in the future.

Iran has made some progress in the SDGs, but international sanctions have made it extremely difficult to gain access to necessary financing and technologies to support SDG achievement. Iran has thus had to rely on its own domestic resources to work towards the achievement of the SDGs. During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Iran was unable to pay for vaccines due to sanctions on international financial transactions but managed to initially import vaccines through UN agencies. Since then, Iran has developed its own COVID-19 vaccines.

With regard to social development aspects of SDGs, it was mentioned that in the field of education, the percentage of women in the universities is more than males. All rural and urban areas are covered by schools and infrastructure has been developed so that everybody has access to the internet throughout the country.

Maldives noted that out of 17 goals, it has achieved SDG 1 (No poverty) and SDG 4 (Quality education) while having major challenges with Goal 2 (Zero hunger), 5 (Gender equality) and 14 (Life below water). Much still needs to be done in the areas of gender equality, climate action and environment sustainability and access to timely data is needed to make effective policy decisions. While moderately improving, eight goals still have significant challenges and Goal 15 (Life on land) reported a decreasing trend, as it was in 2021.

Maldives conducted its first VNR in 2017 and work is ongoing for submission of a second VNR in 2023. For the first time an Economic Census has been carried out together with the Population Census and this is expected to provide a very robust dataset for the VNR analysis.

A third of Maldives' population is identified as being dimensionally poor and COVID-19 has also affected the food security situation in the country with its heavy reliance on food imports. Efforts are being made to strengthen local food production, supply and distribution chains in order to reduce food wastage. Increases in sexual exploitation and abuse, gender-based violence, mental health issues and non-covid health issues are also being seen. In order to reduce disparities that exist in access to safe drinking water and sanitation between Malé City and the outer islands, efforts are being made to improve water and sewerage systems in the outer islands. COVID-19 has accelerated the use of digital technologies for the provision of various services. ICT also offers solutions to bridge the geographic divide between islands and bring services closer to people. However, a lot of inequalities have been created in acquiring affordable internet and the ability to use digital technologies differ between knowledge workers and manual workers.

Maldives has developed a National Strategy for Development of Statistics 2021-2030 (NSDS), a 10-year strategy document to support the Government of Maldives in realizing the national and international targets and commitments. NSDS focuses on strengthening the SDG indicator framework to facilitate the review of available data, measure the progress and enhance reporting of SDGs. Additional efforts are being made to work with the stakeholders to formulate mechanisms to collect the missing data.

Improving connectivity of Maldivian citizens to the country's economy, infrastructure and social services has started with the development of an Integrated National Public Ferry Network. Once completed, the existence of an efficient, reliable, convenient and sustainable national ferry network will help to develop the economy. The government is also focusing on diversifying the economy; creating job opportunities and re-integrating the redundant workforce back into the labour force, supporting MSMEs and providing fiscal stimulus through a National Resilient and Recovery Plan.

Nepal provided a brief overview of the various steps the country has taken to integrate the Goals into national development planning processes. Nepal's first VNR was submitted in 2017, a second VNR in 2020 and a third VNR will be prepared for the HLPF in 2023. Initially Nepal had prepared 479 indicators to measure progress on SDGs, but this has now been reduced to 300 indicators due to difficulties in data availability. The Fifteenth Plan (2019-2024) has been aligned with the SDGs and planning guidelines have been developed to facilitate SDG localization. A medium-term expenditure framework incorporating SDGs for all ministries and departments as well as a national evaluation action plan for evaluating SDGs have also been prepared.

Localization of SDGs has been challenging as newly elected officials at the local, provincial and federal levels of government need to be oriented on the SDGs. Weaknesses exist in available databases and efforts are being made to improve the situation. Funding for SDGs is shared between government (54.7%), private sector (36.6%), households (4.4%), and cooperatives/NGOs (4.3%). However, there remains an annual financing gap of NPR 585 million and the need to mobilize funding is a major challenge.

Türkiye has conducted VNRs in 2016 and 2019 and the next VNR is planned for 2024. The SDGs have been integrated into national long-term development plans, annual programmes, annual investment programmes and sectoral action plans. To monitor the implementation of the SDGs, 131 indicators have been identified out of 231 unique SDG indicators and these have been annually published by the National Statistical Institute.

For Türkiye, Goals 1 and 10 are considered to be important as they aim to end poverty and inequality across the country. Various measures have been taken to address these Goals, including the implementation of support systems for children and people with special needs. Türkiye has also made significant progress on SDG 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure). SMSE-oriented industrial policies have been developed that include the provision of grants and loans. Efforts have been made to strengthen organisational capacity of local management systems so that development strategies can be better adapted to the local contexts and develop locally tailored solutions that efficiently and effectively respond to national priorities.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the capacity of the health system and disrupted primary health and mental health services. It is felt that people with income below a certain level should be provided with free primary health care services. Research and development in the field of health should be strengthened by developing production capacity for technology-based products such as vaccines, drugs, medical equipment and devices. The TURKOVAC vaccine for COVID-19 was developed by Turkish scientists and sent to many countries in Africa to strengthen global partnerships.

With regard to Goals 11 and 13, Türkiye has ratified the Paris Agreement and announced a 2053 net zero target. To this end, Türkiye has been striving to transform its economic sectors and production dynamics. For example, an electric car production factory has been opened by Togg which is the first domestically built electric car of Türkiye and will facilitate electromobility and green mobility transformation of Türkiye.

Session 4: Subregional perspectives and review of cluster of Goals for HLPF 2023 in South and South-West Asia (SDGs 6, 7, 9 and 11)

Session 5: Plenary- Review of selected Goals for HLPF 2023 in South Asia: Reporting by the Working Groups and the Way forward

Sessions 4 and 5 deliberated on subregional perspectives on the cluster of Goals under review in the HLPF 2023 (Goals 6, 7, 9 and 11). The impact on progress due to the pandemic, challenges, priorities, good practices, and policy proposals to accelerate progress in the selected Goals were discussed. In Session 4, separate break-out sessions on each of the four selected Goals were conducted. Subregional perspectives, policy issues and recommendations from each working group were presented by the respective conveners in Session 5.

Plenary

Oliver Paddison, Chief of Countries in Special Situations Section, ESCAP, provided an overview of how national VNRs tie into sub-regional, regional and global processes, highlighted the SDGs that are selected for discussion at annual SDG Forums each year and shared that an SDG progress report for the Asia Pacific region is produced each year. Some brief highlights of progresses being made in SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17 in the SSWA region were presented.

For **Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation)**, the continuous availability of water – both in sufficient quantity and adequate quality – is fundamental to the expansion of safe drinking water services. The

most notable threat to Goal 6 progress in this subregion is water stress; in the plight to ensure food security for growing populations, the status of available freshwater resources has largely been neglected.

Looking at **Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy)**, there has been considerable success in providing access to electricity to urban and rural populations and SSWA is well on track to achieve universal electricity access. However, renewable energy as a share of total energy consumption has regressed both in this subregion and in Asia Pacific as a whole.

With regard to **Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure)**, the subregion has made moderate progress mainly due to the rapid expansion of mobile network coverage and the volume of trade. However, this has come with increased carbon dioxide emissions from the manufacturing sector and a shrinking share of total manufacturing value added in production by medium and high-tech industry.

For **Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities)**, there has been limited progress made since 2015 at both subregional and regional levels. Progress towards reducing urban air pollution since 2015 has been stagnant. The transboundary nature of air pollution further aggravates challenges to address this issue, where assigning blame is often a complicating factor. Economic losses due to disasters in the region are higher than in the rest of the world. The overlaps of poverty with extremely high exposure to natural and biological hazards lead to cascading risks and cyclical and intergenerational poverty.

Progress on **Goal 17 (Partnership for the goals)** has been slow with the greatest gaps found in the volume of public-private partnerships for infrastructure development. Debt levels are also at dangerously high levels for some countries, notably in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. The lack of available data about SDG 17 targets and indicators also continue to pose a challenge.

Group 1: Goal 6 – Clean water and sanitation

Moderator: Dr. Fahad Saeed, Climate Scientist/Regional Lead, Climate Analytics, Germany

Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation was felt to be particularly important as major economic sectors, such as agriculture and energy, are primarily dependent upon a reliable supply of fresh water. Aside from Goals 11, 12, and 13 which have seen a regression in progress compared to 2015, Goal 6 is one of the goals that is seeing the least amount of progress being made in the sub-region. There is a need to accelerate progress with regard to access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene and transboundary water cooperation to achieve 2030 targets. Concerted efforts are also needed to address regressions in progress that are being seen in the areas of water use efficiency, protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems and participatory water and sanitation management.

Countries have made progress in improving access to freshwater but face a variety of issues in terms of water quality and availability. The transitioning from traditional sources (such as ponds and canals) to piped or improved sources (mostly tube wells and piped water) has been considered as a significant achievement in Bangladesh, but further improvements in water quality is needed as a small share of the population has access to water piped to their premises and arsenic-free tube well water. In Maldives, the poor quality of ground water means that rainwater, desalinated water and bottled water are important sources of potable water for administrative islands. Low rainwater harvesting and per capita water storage capacities can result in some island communities facing water shortages in the dry season. Nepal has managed to provide basic water supply to 94% of the population, but only 32% are getting medium

and high-quality drinking water access against the SDG target of 90%. Efforts are being made to reduce regional inequalities in accessibility of safe drinking water. Iran, which is facing decreasing the amount of underground water and precipitation, has been improving access to fresh and clean water, but international sanctions have made it very difficult to gain access to necessary international investments and technologies. Many companies have left Iran and developmental projects in clean water have stopped due to unilateral coercive measures reimposed on Iran.

Climate change affects weather patterns and raise incidences of severe rainfall and drought. Economic growth will also increase demand for water for industrial, agriculture and tourism related sectors. Policies to ensure the protection of water sources and introducing sustainable management of groundwater and surface water are therefore critical to address the growing demand for water. Economic growth also places further pressures on the treatment of industrial water and management of industrial waste which need to be considered.

Policies for participatory water and sanitation management were also mentioned as being important. There are, however, an inadequate proportion of local administration units with operational policies for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management which affects the quality of actions taken. Nepal has been doing well in establishing community managed water supply systems which could be something other countries in the sub-region can learn from. Local and provincial governments are implementing water supply projects and the federal government is focusing on the large-scale projects in big cities and integrated sewage and solid waste management projects.

The need for more funding to support water and sanitation infrastructure and services was an important issue. For example, in Bangladesh it is estimated that the annual funding provided by the government and development partners for water and sanitation only covers about 42% of the demand in the country. In Maldives, issues exist on financial sustainability and cost recovery of water supply and sewerage systems requiring the provision of subsidies to cover operating costs.

Some key recommendations coming from the discussions included:

- **Financing:** Government, national and international financial institutions and multi-sectoral actors need to be improve targeting and use of existing funding for water and sanitation initiatives more effectively. There is a need to mobilise domestic resources and additional investment is needed from the private sector and public sources.
- **Governance:** there is a need to enhance institutional and individual capacities to foster cross sectoral decision making, planning and implementation and identifying areas for horizontal and vertical cooperation at all levels. Decision makers need to combine traditional knowledge with the modern technology and innovative methods by involving multiple stakeholders to increase efficiency of water use and ensure sustainable fresh water supplies, especially in water stressed and transboundary regions. Addressing the rural urban disparities and the decentralization of the freshwater management needs to be prioritized.
- **New paradigm:** There is a need to shift from a reductionist, hydrologic paradigm to hydro eco-social paradigm, to secure water for humans, ecosystems and food. At the same time gender dimension in the governance of scarce resources is becoming more critical nationally.
- **Regional cooperation:** There is a dire need of horizontal and vertical cooperation between the countries for water protection which will be beneficial for ecosystem preservation, agriculture and food security. Cooperation between countries on early warning systems is also important. SSWA

countries could also learn from Iran on how it has been implementing actions to achieve SDG 6 despite the many problems it faces with unilateral sanctions.

Group 2: Goal 7 – Affordable and clean energy

Moderator: Dr. Nawaz Ahmad, Director, SAARC Energy Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan

In South and South-West Asia, progress toward Goal 7 targets on energy access, efficiency and renewable energy is off-track. In terms of energy access, 78.3 million people in South and South-West Asia remain without access to electricity. The remaining electricity access gap is primarily in rural areas. There is a need to focus on the quality, reliability and affordability of electricity. With respect to primary reliance on clean fuels and technologies, 745.5 million people remain without access. The pace of energy intensity improvement in SSWA is not accelerating or on track to align with the 2019-2030 global target rate of 3.2%.

Electrification through national grids and micro grids shows promising progress toward achievement of universal access in terms of energy connections, but the quality, reliability and affordability of the energy supply is critical to realizing the full socioeconomic benefits of energy services. Countries want to accelerate progress, but COVID-19, conflict, and climate impacts have left economies with limited fiscal space and have pushed them toward the increased use of subsidies to compensate for high energy prices.

Countries with rich hydropower resources in the region are looking to increasingly leverage their natural resource potential to generate export revenues to support domestic development. Several are exploring options for diversifying and expanding cross-border energy trade on a bilateral basis, but numerous barriers must be overcome for the realization of multilateral energy markets. Economies are looking to reduce current high dependencies on fossil fuel imports through renewable energy development, energy efficiency and the electrification of end uses, including transport, cooking and heating. Technology innovation, diversification of renewable energy supply chains, and fast-track frameworks for renewables are needed to accelerate the transition to clean energy. The modernization of existing supply and grid infrastructure is needed to improve efficiency and reduce losses. At the same time, non-capital measures such as maintenance and energy management can support lowered energy demand.

The following recommendations were brought up:

- Proactive rather than reactive policies are needed to enable a transition to clean energy, while consistency in policy and fiscal support is necessary to create a favourable investment environment.
- Awareness campaigns to improve energy use practices and create user demand for energy efficient and renewable energy technologies are needed.
- To recover from and build resilience to the “triple C” impacts while advancing toward Goal 7 achievement, economies should look to shift toward targeted subsidies, mobilize both public and private finance, strengthen the policy environment to attract investment, and explore innovative financing options, such as blended financing, carbon markets, and renewable energy credits.
- Nations face challenges in achieving Goal 7 due to low economic and implementation capacities. International and regional cooperation and knowledge exchange are needed to support capacity development, technology transfer, cross-border power connectivity, and to attract investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency across sectors.

- Social protection schemes and safety nets should be expanded to provide priority support to “non-standard” beneficiaries that are unable to afford energy at increased prices. Burden arrangement schemes can be used though support coming from consumption-smoothing assistance, firm support, or regulations to limit excessive profits.

Group 3: Goal 9 – Industry, innovation and infrastructure

Moderator: Dr. Posh Raj Pandey, Chairman, SAWTEE, Nepal

The Working Group discussed the importance of Goal 9 on Industry, innovation and infrastructure. This Goal was felt pivotal to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as it is an important enabler for achieving Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth), Goal 1 (No poverty), Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation), Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy) and Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities). This goal is also particularly important for LDCs and is critical for their sustainable graduation.

Overall, the South and South-West Asian region has exhibited mixed progress towards the indicators of Goal 9 and across countries. While there is good progress on the universal coverage of mobile networks and official flows for infrastructure development in the least developed countries, progress towards industrialization is moderate and the risk of failure to meet SDG targets to significantly raise industry’s share of employment and gross domestic product looms large unless major efforts are put in place.. Moreover, trade, investment and industrialization policies are not always coherent in countries, and in some cases crony capitalism, mismanaged economic liberalization, lack of access to finance or high cost of credit, inadequate infrastructure, erratic power supply, shortage of raw material; inadequate human development especially basic education and shortage of labour including skilled labour are some of the roadblocks for industrialization.

The group underscored that policies should be directed to decouple the prosperity generated from industrial activities and infrastructure development from excessive natural resource uses, abuse of natural resources and negative environmental impacts. Similarly, infrastructure must be planned, designed, built and operated in such a way that it helps anticipate, prepare for and adapt to economic, social and environmental crises and respond to and recover rapidly from disruptions, as the COVID-19 pandemic and current geopolitical crisis has demonstrated. For instance, the experience was that diversified economies with strong infrastructure were less impacted by the pandemic and that they experienced a faster recovery. Moreover, the pandemic highlighted the importance of digital technology to overcome some of the challenges that it created. However, it also highlighted that the proportion of people using the internet was still low in most countries in the region and that cooperation in broadband connectivity is required to address the significant digital divide within and across countries.

Despite the importance of industrialization for the 2030 Agenda, with manufacturing and construction being essential for employment and poverty reduction, the group highlighted that the South and South-West Asia region was facing slow economic progress which is also impacted by premature de-industrialization in some countries. At the same time, several countries in the region had backtracked on the liberalization of trade and FDI, which was contributing to premature falling in FDI inflows and trade. This is worrying as becoming increasingly import reliant contributes to wider current account deficits and can lead to macroeconomic instability.

A crucial measure to tackle the problem of insufficient industrialization is to pay more attention to the challenges that micro, small and medium-size enterprises (MSMEs) face, as these enterprises are

essential for industrialization. For instance, in India, where 99 per cent of MSMEs were in the micro-sector, the lack of stable power supply, shortage of raw materials, lack of access to finance and skilled labour and insufficient entrepreneurial capacity were some of the principal challenges that these firms were facing. Addressing these bottlenecks will be critical for industrialization.

It is also important to provide a stable political and macroeconomic environment to achieve Goal 9. As the case of Afghanistan demonstrates, industry, particularly manufacturing activities, are vulnerable to disruption and many activities have been suspended in the country due to the threat of violence. The rise of non-democratic institutions has affected entrepreneurial decisions and led to capital flight to the extent that the overall outlook for the 2030 Agenda in Afghanistan is very bleak.

Greater macroeconomic stability is also vital to ensure progress on Goal 9. A volatile currency, high rates of inflation and contractionary policies, for instance, do not create a stable environment for attracting investments in industry, as the case of Pakistan demonstrates.

In addition to domestic policy reforms, including second generation policy reforms, mutually beneficial regional cooperation among countries will play crucial role in achieving SDG 9. This is especially relevant in the South and South-West Asia region where intraregional trade represents only an estimated 5.6% of overall trade, compared to, for instance, 40% for ASEAN. Moreover, too little is spent on R&D in the subregion and there is little cooperation between R&D institutions. R&D investment in green technology is required, especially to enable low carbon pathways.

Based on the discussions of subregional issues related to industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), the Working Group proposed several priorities that need to be considered to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 and accelerate progress to achieve full implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Domestically, the priorities included:

1. The need to increase access to financial services, especially to MSMEs.
2. The need to provide adequate infrastructure.
3. The need to ensure the availability to skilled labour, particularly to small-scale manufacturers.

The Working Group also placed a critical emphasis on strengthening regional cooperation. This will act as a catalyst to implementing Goal 9. Specific recommendations of the group included:

1. The need to expand regional trade and regional value chains.
2. The need to strengthen infrastructure connectivity as cross-border connectivity remains poor. This includes the need to build inter-country transport corridors and strengthen trade facilitation measures at borders.
3. The need to improve cross-border energy infrastructure, especially for electricity and natural gas.
4. The need to strengthen subregional cooperation in ICT, in building capabilities in science, technology and innovation, and to strengthen cooperation in financing.

Group 4: Goal 11 – Sustainable cities and communities

Moderator: Mr. Kewal Prasad Bhandari, Secretary, National Planning Commission, Nepal

The Working Group discussed the state of cities in South and South-West Asia and ways in which cities and human settlements of the subregion could be made more inclusive, safe, sustainable and resilient. It observed with concern that, for South and South-West Asia, Goal 11 had one of the highest rates of

regression among all 17 Goals, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the indicator level, indicator 11.5.2 on economic loss and affected infrastructure and services from disasters regressed the most, followed by indicator 11.b.2 on the proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local DRR strategies.

The Working Group noted that, while cities drive innovation, investment and are powerhouses of economic growth, those in South and South-West Asia currently face multiple interlinked crises. The subregion is home to more than 23 per cent of the world's total population and at least 14 per cent of the world's urban population with a high rate of urban growth. While extreme urban poverty has been reduced in Bhutan and Sri Lanka, it remains high in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. At least 130 million South Asians (equivalent to more than the entire population of Mexico) live in informal settlements characterized by poor construction, insecure tenure, and underserved housing plots. On average, up to 70 per cent of urban employment was in the informal economy, and income inequality in urban areas have risen and are often higher than that in rural areas.

The Working Group observed that the cities of South and South-West Asia experienced significant climate and environment-related challenges. Due to climate change, cities are increasingly vulnerable to storms and flooding. Further, countries of the subregion have a high dependency on fossil fuel, with heightened demands for energy use due to the urban heat island effect; their cities have thus been significantly impacted by rising energy costs. Coupled with rising fertilizer costs and disruptions to wheat and rice supply chains, agricultural productivity and food security have been adversely affected in the subregion. Air pollution, stemming from increased emissions from transport, energy and agricultural practices, was cited as one of the core environmental and health challenges of South and South-West Asian cities. The subregion is home to 46 of the world's 50 most polluted cities, where only 0.8 per cent of cities met the WHO PM2.5 guidelines in 2021 and where 70 per cent of global air quality related deaths occur.

Solid waste management and urban sanitation were also core challenges for cities of South and South-West Asia. The Working Group stated that cities of the subregion lacked facilities for the safe disposal of solid waste, with the common disposal practice being uncontrolled dumping. Rules and regulations developed at national and state levels have not been strictly enforced and translated into practice at the city level, due to inadequate institutional capacity, weak political will, and a significant lack of financial resources to dispose large quantities of waste. Many cities of the subregion also lacked the local and municipality-level capacities to operate and maintain existing sewerage systems and wastewater treatment plants. Factors driving poor urban sanitation include the poor design and inappropriate use of technologies for sewage and water systems, lack of finances for operation and maintenance, and low political priority of the issue for elected representatives.

The Working Group also observed that cities of South and South-West Asia have yet to develop sustainable transportation systems. While being the main mode of transportation in cities, public transport systems are often in poor condition, with inadequately maintained buses, unoptimized routes and frequency, and unpredictable arrival and departure of buses. Private motor vehicle fleets have also been increasing: in 2021, car sales surged by 27 per cent in India and 54 per cent in Pakistan. Yet there has been little use of electric vehicles due to inadequate charging infrastructure and higher costs; the subregion is also not prepared to manage the recycling of electric vehicle batteries. Cycling and walking have fallen drastically over the years, as cities failed to provide a safe environment to users on the congested streets.

The Working Group expressed concern about the exclusion of vulnerable populations in cities of the subregion and emphasized the need to “leave no one behind”. It noted that there was a need to ensure that dwellers in slums and temporary settlements could nonetheless access health, education and other basic services; to make cities safer and more secure for women and children; and to build and retrofit infrastructure, including parks and transportation systems, to ensure that persons with disabilities, children and older persons can better access amenities.

Due to the inherent challenges faced by cities in South and South-West Asia, these cities experienced immense difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic. Local government revenues declined by 15 to 25 per cent, while their revenue pressure increased due to urgent needs to respond to the pandemic. Notably, approximately 90 per cent of COVID-19 infections were in the urban areas. Vulnerable groups were disproportionately affected due to their lack of access to urban health systems. Persons with disabilities, for example, faced increased risk of contracting the virus due to the lack of health service support. The lack of data disaggregated by sex, age and disability at the city level also meant that the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups could not be fully measured.

Despite the abovementioned challenges, the Working Group also highlighted that cities in South and South-West Asia were making progress towards sustainable development and that many opportunities lay ahead. The Working Group observed that many cities have been working on climate action, and served as good practices for their national governments. In particular, many cities have linked their municipal operations to renewable energy sources and have developed early warning systems to better manage floods. Transportation plans have also been developed, although implementation challenges have been faced due to gaps in financing, technology and institutional capacity. Further, the process of recovery from COVID-19 have presented opportunities for cities to accelerate the implementation of Goal 11, and many of them have demonstrated great agility in deploying creative inclusive solutions, ranging from supporting urban regeneration of shrinking or underserved neighbourhoods, protecting vulnerable groups, to ensuring the continuity of local public services.

The Working Group also explored interesting practices of cities in South and South-West Asia. It learned from the experience of the Dhulikhel municipality of Nepal in conducting its Voluntary Local Review of the Sustainable Development Goals. It noted that the municipality focused on engaging vulnerable populations, including through the establishment of councils for women, Dalits, indigenous peoples, youths, and persons with disabilities; entrepreneurship and skills development programmes; and creating an accessible physical environment in the municipality and ward offices. It also discussed Pakistan’s clean and green programme and initiative for five million affordable housing, both backed by political commitment at the highest levels, as well as the use of Integrated Resources Recovery Centres to manage and turn waste into resources. Other encouraging examples mentioned include: Bangladesh having become the first country in the world to ban single use plastics in 2002; India’s Kerala state having created 1,850 forest patches in public spaces since 2019; Sri Lanka’s investments in public spaces, wetlands, and infrastructure; and Türkiye’s renewable capacity having grown by 50 per cent over the last five years.

Recommendations emanating from the Working Group discussion include:

- Develop a national urban policy to guide urban planning at all levels of administration, and resilient city action plans to implement planning decisions at the municipal level.
- Undertake evidence-based planning, including via the use of data systems and foresight techniques to identify current and future needs.

- Fully consider and integrate the concepts of economic geography, balanced territorial development, urban informality and intra-urban spatial inequality into major policy documents on urban planning.
- Develop the capacity of urban local bodies through regular training and provide them with adequate autonomy along with sufficient resources to execute their duties. Develop a formal mechanism among urban local bodies to facilitate experience sharing and peer learning.
- Apply a whole-of-society approach to urban planning and promote engagement, cooperation and coordination among all stakeholders, including federal and provincial governments (for policymaking and planning); local administration (for policy execution); academia/think tanks (for the provision of evidence-based analysis); civil society/communities (for the integration of community perspectives); private sector and development partners (for knowledge-sharing, pilot development and scale-ups).
- Develop mechanisms to engage vulnerable groups (including women and girls, persons with disabilities, migrants, older persons) in decision-making to ensure that their perspectives are integrated in the design and implementation of urban policies and initiatives.
- Develop compact, mixed-use urban environments as spatial solutions to the climate crisis, including via the building of redundancies into trunk infrastructure and services to reduce loss and damage as well as the formulation of planning policies that preserve urban assets from climate impact.
- Improve waste management systems, including through turning waste into energy resources (model of the Integrated Resources Recovery Centres); strengthening the circular economy, including by integrating informal waste actors into the formal waste management system; and strictly banning and enforcing the ban on open burning of waste.
- Improve public transportation systems, including by ensuring its accessibility and safety for all population groups, and by creating more walkways, pedestrian zones and dedicated cycling tracks.
- Protect and expand inclusive public urban green spaces.
- Accelerate the usage of renewable energy and the phasing out of fossil fuels, including through developing a blueprint to recycle electric vehicle batteries.
- Harnessing the “twin transition” of digitalization and the shift to a net-zero economy for cities, both of which have arisen as core strategies for COVID-19 recovery.
- Promote private sector participation in climate action.

<p>Session 6: Strengthening means of implementation to advance progress on the SDGs: Financing for development</p>

Session 6 looked at the means of implementation identified under Goal 17 with a particular focus on financing for development needs of countries in subregion and explored ways and means to generate resources for development. Various means and mechanisms were discussed for designing recovery strategies based on sustainable financing policies, leveraging public and private sources for financing COVID-19 recovery packages and achieving the SDGs.

Mr. Rana Ihsan Afzal Khan, Coordinator to Prime Minister on Commerce and Industries, Pakistan, noted that Pakistan's Sustainable Development Goals index code increased from 53% to 63% from 2015 to 2020. However, crises such as COVID-19, the Ukraine-Russia conflict, and the recent flood, which cost almost US\$30 billion to the economy has caused challenges. Mr. Khan stated that taxation is the centre of development practices. Some multinational financing institutes estimate that the benchmark for tax-to-GDP ratio of developing countries should be around 15%. In 2018 for Pakistan, it was around 11 %, and turned to 8.5% of GDP around April 2022. Hence gradually increasing the ratio through a comprehensive tax policy and administrative reforms is a major objective for the government of Pakistan. Another important area in finance is state-owned enterprises, which are around 200, despite the world governments having moved away from doing business. The efficiency of these companies is way below the private sector and draining government finances to cover their losses. This is an issue that needs to be resolved.

Another major issue with the fiscal deficit is Pakistan's power sector, which has significant inefficiencies. Pakistan is one of the few countries with a massive domestic gas distribution network, which is highly inefficient. The government's long-term goal should be to make electricity available, and the source for many things like cooking should be electricity. The government is also working on increasing solar power to try to reduce energy imports. Mr. Khan discussed rupee devaluation as one of the other big challenges for Pakistan, and one of the major reasons for the US\$50 billion trade deficit. For example, as an agriculture-based economy, Pakistan has areas where palm farms can be grown, which can help to decrease imports of palm oil. The government is currently working on improving the agriculture capacity as, in some cases, agriculture yields are one-fourth or one-fifth of international averages.

In terms of exports, Pakistan has a lot of potential in IT and tourism, and with more efficient work in these two areas, the trade deficit could be covered. Mr. Khan highlighted the importance of political stability as foremost for an economy to try and attract foreign investment. Improvement in spending efficiency in a transparent manner, improving domestic revenue mobilization, improving the business climate, and encouraging private investment were some of the other priorities mentioned as government priorities.

Dr. Hamza Malik, Director, MPFD, ESCAP, presented some of the issues and challenges in the field of financing. Dr. Malik highlighted three main points. The first point was regarding the current difficult economic conditions that are represented by lower economic growth and higher inflation which is making it very difficult to continue to pursue SDGs effectively. It is expected that the next two to three years are going to be very difficult, and things are looking rather pessimistic. The second point related to the substantial fiscal and debt pressures in the countries, which means interest rates have risen. This in turn has a feedback effect on future debt servicing costs, making countries' positions even more difficult. So, enhancing financing for SDGs is going to become quite challenging in the coming years. However, in his third point, he underlined the availability of several policy options available to member States, which can be considered. Dr. Malik explained that some of these options are immediate and short-term; some require more time and hence are medium and long-term in nature. The key is that implementation requires serious political will and this is lacking in many areas, especially in South Asia.

Dr. Hamza discussed the current situation in the Asia Pacific region as well as the subregion. He expressed that there is a lot of concern about countries being left behind, populations and segments of sectors within economies being left behind as well. There are risks of rising inequalities and poverty

levels. The loss that has happened across Asia Pacific so far is around US\$ 2 trillion. There will be "scarring effects" for instance, labour market disruptions, as many workers have lost their ability to return to the job market adversely affecting the prospects of future employment. Similarly, there has been evidence emerging on learning deficits in children who have been left out of school. So, the prospect of strong long-term potential growth looks lower as well. An increase in inflation is another issue that started prior to the Ukraine-Russia conflict and was further exacerbated afterwards. Many countries are now increasing interest rates to try and reduce inflation which Mr. Malik expressed as the current approach to the issue.

In terms of financing options, Dr. Malik explained that from the perspective of the United Nations system, it is proposed that countries should and are already developing and implementing Integrated National Financing Frameworks. This has already been in place in the planning ministries of many member countries. Based on an estimate done by the United Nations in 2019, in order to reach the SDG targets, for the entire Asia Pacific, on average, an annual 5% share of GDP is needed to invest in SDGs from 2019 for five years. However, for least developing countries, this requirement is higher and an average of 16 % of GDP is needed, which is mostly not possible to achieve. Finally, Mr. Malik emphasized the development of a sustainable finance ecosystem as another important solution and an area where ESCAP actively assists countries.

Mr. Pema Tshewang, Senior Planning Officer, District Administration, Lhuentse, Bhutan, discussed the measures taken by Bhutan to alleviate the impacts of COVID-19. Some samples of these initiatives were, first, the revision of tourism policy and branding of tourism products and services to maximize the benefit for both the visitors as well as the government. Another measure is launching a national credit scheme as a counter-cyclical policy measure to enhance access to finance with 100 percent debt financing for start-ups, removing the requirement of collateral replaced by minimal equity for small amounts and cheaper interest rates on working capital loans to encourage businesses. Further, Bhutan had a revision of property tax aimed at enhancing domestic resource mobilization in addition to ensuring accountability and improved public services. The introduction of a clean wage system, the deprioritization of the less impactful activities, and fast-tracking of those activities that could contribute towards job creation and sustainable enhancement of the economy was another initiative. In addition, the adoption of temporary targeted fiscal policies in the agencies to avoid unnecessary expenses at this time of the crisis were pursued. Finally, Bhutan, in collaboration with UNDP, is developing innovative financing strategies to venture into new financing areas. Mr. Tshewang highlighted the importance of partnerships and the fact that a country cannot tackle its problems alone. Therefore, international and regional collaboration, a sense of fraternity, and mutual responsibility should continue to prevail even more during the unprecedented time of the crisis.

Mr. Kewal Prasad Bhandari, Secretary, National Planning Commission, Nepal, explained that Nepal had a -2% growth in 2021, which has had a huge impact on domestic financing. To minimize this impact, the Nepal government has increased its investments in public health and fiscal and monetary measures such as stimulus packages for employment and labour market and support to private organizations were also adopted. Nepal is graduating from LDC status in 2026 without yet meeting the GNI per capita threshold. Nepal's economic vulnerability index and human asset index are very good, but COVID and other global and domestic shocks hurt Nepal's economy. However, Mr. Bhandari stated that despite the challenges, Nepal is optimistic about reaching the necessary level of GNI per capita during the graduation timeframe. Mr. Bhandari mentioned that due to tax reforms, domestic revenue has increased from 9% to around 25% in the past 33 years. The Official Development Assistance (ODA) is 11.2% of the domestic budget, though the level of grants has been decreasing. One of the main sources of funding is private investment, however, foreign direct investment (FDI) is not performing well, so

private investment from domestic sources needs to improve. Otherwise, it will be very hard to finance the SDGs. Regular communication with development partners on redesigning aid architecture that considers the change in government structure is another essential point that Nepal needs to consider.

Mr. Priyantha Ratnayake, Deputy Secretary to the Treasury, Sri Lanka, discussed on the financial challenges of achieving SDGs. He mentioned a United Nations estimation in 2020 calculated the funding gap for Sri Lanka to be around US\$ 2 to 4 billion annually. This could be even higher at this point due to the recent crisis that has hit Sri Lanka. Considering the role of government finances in achieving the SDGs, Mr. Ratnayake described Sri Lanka's tax revenue to be insufficient, and the government has taken measures to revise the tax structure. Considering the current situation of Sri Lanka, Mr. Ratnayake highlighted that given the limited fiscal space in the budget, accelerating progress on Goals would require aligning private sector investment, as well as tapping into new types of lending finances and exploring opportunities for alternatives as well as innovative means of financing for the Goals. To increase the mobilization of private capital, countries need to work on risk mitigation since there is potential capital that cannot be attracted due to risk, foreign exchange rates and interest rates issues.

Mr. Ratnayake shared that the Central Bank of Sri Lanka developed and launched a roadmap for sustainable finance in Sri Lanka to facilitate and promote sustainable financing practices in consultation with the relevant government agencies, industries and a wide range of financial sector stakeholders. The Roadmap provides guidance and support to financial institutions to effectively manage the projects' environmental, social and governance risks. They finance and increase support to business that is greener, climate-friendly and socially inclusive. He further mentioned the development of a SDG investor map in collaboration with UNDP, which is a market intelligence tool that helps the private sector identify investment teams in emerging markets with a significant potential to advance the SDGs, aligning to government policies and the National Sustainable Development needs and commitments.

Mr. Yusuf Esidir, Expert, Strategy and Budget Office of Presidency of Türkiye, explained that Türkiye's Official Development Assistance (ODA) increased approximately ninefold, from US\$967 million in 2010 to US\$8.7 billion in 2019. As a result, Türkiye achieved an ODA/GNI ratio of 1.10% in 2018 and became one of the countries reaching the ODA/GNI ratio of at least 0.7%, which is one of the targets of the Goals.

In addition to ODA, the assistance provided to developing countries through direct investments by the private sector and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) grants amounted to US\$ 826.5 million and US\$ 303.3 million, respectively, in 2018. Türkiye has also responded to the asylum requests of a large population that migrated from Syria due to the humanitarian crisis that started in 2011. As a result, Syrians are now receiving services, especially in education, healthcare and humanitarian needs, under equal conditions with Turkish citizens. Up to the present, Türkiye's expenditures out of its own resources for refugees have exceeded US\$37 billion.

The COVID-19 pandemic strongly affected grants. Grants from NGOs decreased from US\$ 826.5 million to US\$ 349 million, and private flows decreased from US\$ 303 million to US\$ 216 million. These development aids provided outside the public sector reached US\$ 7.9 billion in 2014-2019. Thus, the total volume of Türkiye's development assistance during the same period exceeded US\$ 48 billion. Mr. Esidir concluded that Türkiye is working tirelessly to finance and implement the Goals, knowing that they can only be achieved through sustainable and human-centred development principles. Türkiye is aware that national goals can be attained through international solidarity and cooperation, along with a national vision.

Ms. Sameena Nazir, President, PODA, Pakistan, shared her perspective on the problems seen in implementing and financing issues related to the Goals. One of the issues is the lack of effort to integrate the implementation of the Goals with the existing programmes of the government. Lack of basic necessities such as running water in many middle schools and transportation issues can impact girls' school attendance. There are also serious issues with NGO funding in Pakistan. Appreciating the approach of Bhutan to supporting NGOs, Ms. Nazir asked for the government, the United Nations, and all organizations to see NGOs, civil society organizations, and women groups as their right-hand allies and support them.

Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq provided some remarks and discussed on how COVID, conflict, and climate change has affected developing countries harder due to the nature of these challenges. She emphasized the urgent need for domestic as well as international financing for development. Incentivizing domestic investors, improving the efficiency of the delivery mechanism for the funds and attention to support and partnerships with developed countries needs to be explored to ensure no one's left behind.

Session 7: Strengthening means of implementation for the SDGs: Policy coherence, multi stakeholder partnerships and data, monitoring and accountability (SDG 17)

Mr. Frank Thomas, SDGs Consultant, Asian Development Bank and Ms. Madhubashini Fernando, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP, presented findings from the Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Goals Partnership Report. The 2022 Report, entitled “Building Forward Together Towards an Inclusive and Resilient Asia and the Pacific” focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Sustainable Development Goals in the region and subregions, and explores solutions to address those impacts for member States and other stakeholders.

The report provided an in-depth review on the Goals discussed at the High-Level Political Forum in 2022, namely, Goals 4 (Education), 5 (Gender equality), 14 (Life below water), 15 (Life on land) and 17 (Partnerships). On Goal 4, prolonged school closures reduced both the amount and quality of education that learners were receiving, with female students being disproportionately affected due to increased unpaid care burdens. On Goal 5, the pandemic period saw an increase in gender-based violence, unpaid care burdens and other forms of gender inequality such as child marriage in various parts of the region. On Goals 14 and 15, while there was a temporary drop in emissions with the significant reduction in air travel for a period, there was also a huge surge in medical waste and plastic waste; the decline in tourism while helping to reduce emissions also caused ecotourism or community-based tourism projects to stall.

The region also exhibited a K-shaped recovery, with different countries and subregions (and different communities and groups within countries) having different trajectories based on: (1) vaccination rates; (2) state of social protection systems; (3) extent of digitalization, including government capacities to adopt and deploy digital technologies, including for online learning and remote healthcare; (4) fundamental economic structures, including the extent to which economies were diversified; (5) extent of environmental risks; (6) size of fiscal space, which determined the ability of governments to apply stimulus packages. The report called for greater inclusion of vulnerable groups to narrow disparities accentuated by the pandemic; gender equality; environmental sustainability and the

acceleration of the green transition in Asia-Pacific countries. The report recommended aligning recovery strategies with the Sustainable Development Goals framework; reintegrating financing using various financing sources (public, private, domestic, international) to narrow the financing gap for the Goals; and promoting regional cooperation, including for technology transfer, South-South Cooperation, and knowledge sharing.

The 2023 report, currently under development, focuses on delivering the Sustainable Development Goals through the energy, food and finance nexus. The world is experiencing multiple crises stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and disruptions to key systems, with multidimensional stresses triggering a financial crisis. Consequently, vital funds for food security, energy transition and social protection are being drained, which in turn disproportionately affects vulnerable populations. The impact of climate change has also intensified, with ensuing natural disasters affecting countries significantly. These disruptions to key systems, including those of global supply chains, has heavily affected food security and supplies in the region, and translate into rising energy, commodity, and food prices, with the heightened inflation causing a cost-of-living crisis. Agriculture productivity in the Asia Pacific region has also been very energy dependent and has incurred huge environmental and social costs. The report will: i) analyse the impact of crises at the nexus of the food, energy and finance sectors; ii) explore good practices and innovative solutions to the “triple C” crisis; and iii) provide recommendations to realize the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific. Addressing the crises in food, energy and finance sectors through Goal 17, including mobilizing additional financial resources such as leveraging private sector investments will also be explored.

Mr. Oliver Paddison, Chief, Countries in Special Situations Section, ESCAP facilitated, an audience engagement activity, which involved a live polling on the topic of converging crises and solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals. Three questions were asked:

- ***“What could have most impact in South and South-West Asia region to re-invigorate public and private finance for sustainable development?”***

The most polled option was the **creation of an enabling environment that encourages green, low-carbon investments**. The other three options were: improving tax administration; divestment from non-sustainable sectors on which countries are still heavily reliant for job or wealth creation; and improved private investment through financial sector regulation, better governance, and prevention of corruption.

- ***“What policies are most important to enhance food security in South and South-West Asia?”***

The most polled option was **increased investment in innovative technologies to increase crop production and predict approaching droughts**. The other three options were: improving governance, combating corruption, and increasing environmental regulation standards; trade policies to protect least developed nations and encourage trade of essential commodities; and policies or income support aimed at protecting and supporting small and mid-sized farmers.

- ***“What is required to foster the transition to more sustainable energy in South and South-West Asia?”***

The most polled was **greater incentives for investment in renewable energies**. The other three options were: increased public and private investment; more public awareness of the impact of fossil fuels on climate change; and increased cooperation and knowledge sharing at the local, sub-regional, and regional levels.

Professor Hemanthi Ranasinghe, Member, Sustainable Development Council, Sri Lanka, noted that her country was harder hit by the COVID-19 pandemic than other countries. The government had introduced a ban on non-organic fertilizers during the pandemic to promote organic agriculture, which reduced agricultural yields and almost led to a food crisis and malnutrition in Sri Lanka. The country has since moved forward by recalibrating its approach to not fully shift to organic agriculture but integrate organic factors into its agricultural sector. Sri Lanka is now promoting climate-smart agriculture, including through the selection of crops that can withstand arid conditions temporarily, and through the use of early warning systems and technologies that update farmers on weather patterns for sowing and harvesting. The country is also promoting the use of renewable energy, such as solar energy, for various practices including drip irrigation and other energy-intensive activities. Further, research is also being undertaken to determine the optimum and efficient use of agrochemicals in agricultural cultivation. Finally, Professor Ranasinghe called for countries in the subregion to enhance collaboration and support each other towards a climate resilient work. She expressed willingness to share Sri Lanka's experience, while also stating that the country requires support in terms of technology.

Mr. Mohammed Masud Rana Chowdhury, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh, provided a summary of Bangladesh's position on the issues of food security, energy and access to finance. He highlighted that food security has been one of Bangladesh's top priorities since its independence, and the growth of agriculture and food production in the country has kept pace with its population growth. As a result, the country has attained self-sufficiency at the aggregate level and increased caloric availability. The significant increase in domestic food production has also bolstered household income and enabled food safety and social protection programmes to improve the food security of the poor. While the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the agricultural production and supply systems in many countries, Bangladeshi farmers have given the country a good harvest. The Government of Bangladesh has been implementing several projects to promote food security and safety, to end hunger by 2030.

On energy, he stated that efficiency of energy usage and renewable energy were the twin pillars for sustainable energy. In Bangladesh, while the power sector has made considerable progress in meeting the demands for electricity, the level of electricity consumption has also significantly increased over the years. Bangladesh has set a target to produce 10 per cent of its total power generation from renewable sources by 2030, but would require investments of US\$ 35 billion in the power generation sector alone by 2041, with the annual required investment in the energy sector amounting to 2.5 per cent of GDP per year. On Goal 17, he observed that Bangladesh requires additional funding of US\$ 928.48 billion or US\$ 66.32 billion per year from 2017 to 2030 for the full implementation of the Goals, based on the country's Sustainable Development Goals Needs Assessment and Financing Strategy. He shared that there has been a huge qualitative improvement in resource mobilization and capacity utilization, and that alongside traditional development partners, Southern countries have also emerged as an important source of economic and technical cooperation for Bangladesh.

Ms. Rupa Chanda, Director, Trade, Investment and Innovation Division, ESCAP, elaborated on how trade, logistics and investment could contribute to addressing current food and energy security issues. In terms of unilateral measures, temporary trade liberalization and trade facilitation for affected products (e.g., reduction of import tariffs and non-tariff measures, relaxation of import quotas, easing of regulatory burdens associated with trade procedures at borders) can relieve pressure on consumer prices. Other unilateral measures included avoidance of export restrictions on affected products and the acceleration of digital trade facilitation. In terms of medium-term measures, a coordinated approach

among countries and increased cross-border cooperation in trade, logistics and connectivity would help ease crisis situations, as would the diversification of trade and logistics routes. It would be helpful for countries to diversify their sources of imports for essential products, although such diversification may not be possible or cost effective in all cases due to the dominance of some suppliers; bilateral and regional trade agreements could support both the diversification of import sources and the finding of new markets that would ease the stress on the balance of payments of countries.

On logistics and connectivity, countries need to find alternative transport corridors, which entails longer-term investments in capacities and the management of infrastructural and operational issues. Logistics efficiency could also be significantly improved by leveraging modern technology for seamless and resilient cross border-connectivity, including through digitalization and electronic data exchange. Finally, she summarized her recommendations: (1) promote trade diversification and facilitation strategies to enable resilience, improve trade efficiency and lower trade costs; (2) improve and diversify digital connectivity; and (3) facilitate regional integration and cooperation, including the establishment of institutionalized mechanisms that could be leveraged during crises (existing examples include those of ASEAN and BIMSTEC).

Mr. Dhani Ram Sharma, Joint Secretary, National Planning Commission, Nepal, highlighted the important role of data and monitoring in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. He observed that without the availability of sufficient, reliable and high-quality data and information, it would be difficult to measure the implementation of the Goals and the progress of countries towards sustainable development. However, countries face challenges in expanding their capacities to develop more modern data systems due to the lack of funding, and datasets may thus be incomplete and incompatible with international standards. He shared that Nepal faces challenges in obtaining high quality data, as most of the data on progress towards the Goals are collected at the local levels, where there is lack of knowledge on how to produce data pertaining to the Sustainable Development Goal indicators. Further, while the Government of Nepal has been implementing several projects and programmes to accelerate the achievement of the Goals, the progress of these projects and programmes may not be adequately reflected due to the lack of timely data collection. There is therefore a need to expand management information systems of the Government to capture the activities of such projects and programmes. He emphasized the importance of having a data portal that systematically monitors the Sustainable Development Goals indicators, facilitate data collection from local governments, and provide real time information and feedback on the implementation of the Goals. To this end, there would be a need to invest in the capacity development of local agencies. He shared that the Government of Nepal is developing an integrated monitoring tracking system in which every activity of the federal government is monitored. A section on monitoring will obtain information on activity progress and their recommendations will in turn be recorded in the system. Such a tracking system is hoped to ensure the implementation of activities that support the achievement of the Goals.

Ms. Shaista Ayesha, Chief Executive Officer, SEED Ventures, Pakistan, provided insights about public-private partnerships in Pakistan. A landmark project cited was the Sindh Engro Coal Mining Project. The United Kingdom and China are two main investors in the energy sector of Pakistan. As for the agriculture and food sector, there has not been much investment, particularly in developing the capacity of farming bodies and local farmers to develop better agricultural products. The country also has not been investing in agricultural processing. In a study on Kunri, Umarkot, the chilli-producing capital of Pakistan, it was found that a public-private partnership could potentially be made in developing a consolidated databank that provides information on the amount of chili being produced,

supply gaps, and the standardization of pricing; public-private partnerships would also be required for the country to effectively export chili to international markets.

On food security in Pakistan, particularly in the aftermath of the floods, she underscored that the public and private sectors should collaborate to develop intervention projects and investment mechanisms to improve farming practices, build climate resilience, and promote agricultural exports. Further, she opined that the country would have to look at public-private partnerships in all relevant sectors, including the social sector (such as education and health), in order to comprehensively address the Sustainable Development Goals. An interesting practice from Denmark was cited where a hub, P4G, has been established to incubate public-private partnerships from nine countries, including through the identification and development of knowledge and organizational partners.

On sustainable financing, she cited impact investment, which involves investing capital in start-ups, organizations and/or ideas that can have a positive impact on society and communities, as being crucial although its returns may be slower than commercial investments. Other instruments include green bonds and the use of exclusionary strategies. Pakistan has yet to test the market with these different forms of finance, but the State Bank has provided a manual to develop finance institutions on green financing and is encouraging them to provide financing to environmentally friendly projects and companies.

Ms. Lavanya Jayaram, Executive Director – South Asia, Asian Venture Philanthropy Network, observed the trend that capital has been moving towards impact work and collaborations. She highlighted the importance of collaborative philanthropy and the forging of “unlikely” alliances because no single organization or country would be able to solve the type of problems at scale that the world is currently facing. Citing the financing gap pertaining to the implementation of the Goals, she underscored the need for stakeholders to avoid duplication and wastage in philanthropic and social investment efforts. She also noted that impact investment portfolios were the most resilient among all types of commercial investments during the pandemic. She however noted with concern that impact investment funds have been primarily moving into two areas, namely tech-based solutions, and data and digitalization; she opined that there is a need for capital to move towards capacity development. There is also a need for philanthropy to be trust-based, specifically, to avoid micro-managing the organizations to which funds are provided, and to instead allow the space for them to solve problems and create impact. Finally, she stated the need to attract more private capital into government initiatives. The launch of a social impact bond in India through which the government has funded a public welfare project based on outcome-based milestones was cited.

Prof. Iqrar Ahmad Khan, Vice Chancellor, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan, discussed the plights of vulnerable groups, including women, youth, indigenous peoples and rural populations. He observed a clear rural-urban divide in terms of development outcomes, and the ensuing migration of women, youth and indigenous peoples from rural to urban areas that in turn leads to implications for the agriculture sector and food security. He noted that the mainstream media does not reflect the voices of women and youths from the rural sector. With reference to the recent floods in Pakistan, he stated that most of the emergency camps were populated by women, young children and youth. He then discussed the issue of employment gaps. He stated that the enrolment of women in the universities and medical schools of Pakistan were higher than of men, but these female students largely came from segments of society that were not disadvantaged, such as those with access to urban centres of education. Further, many women end up leaving the workforce after marriage; there is therefore a need to encourage the re-entry of such women into the workforce. Finally, he highlighted the importance of investing in rural development, including both rural infrastructure and human capital, having noted the

urban-rural disparity in public investment. In particular, he called for strengthened education, skills development, job creation and social mobility in rural areas to mitigate the outmigration of populations from rural to urban areas.

Dr. Khalid Waleed, Researcher, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan, discussed the nexus of energy, food and finance from the household perspective. He noted that households across South and South-West Asia were experiencing similar issues pertaining to food insecurity, insufficient energy and lack of financial resources. To trigger the energy transition and ensure energy security at the household level, there is a need to promote green financing so that households can move from pollutive energy fuels, e.g., firewood, mud cakes and animal residues, to modern fuels. There is also potential to use innovative technologies for clean cooking, such as clean cook stoves. Notably, he highlighted the importance of empowering women for the energy transition to successfully take place at the household level, including the provision of finances to females in households.

Mr. Kashif Salik, Researcher, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan, highlighted the importance of data management in strengthening the resilience of food systems in Pakistan. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, decisionmakers initially lacked necessary data on the food system to respond strategically and tasked the Sustainable Development Policy Institute to improve access to relevant information. The Institute conducted a study to understand the entire food supply chain (including the farmers, food producers, wholesalers, transportation and logistics providers, and retailers) and identify aspects of the food system that were vulnerable. Findings indicated that food production estimates did not show the amount of food that was retained at the farm level and distributed to markets; further, there was a lack of information on who the most vulnerable populations were in the food system and their food requirements. Another notable finding was that farm labour (together with farm machinery) in Pakistan migrated seasonally to provide necessary farm labour around the country. Such cycles were disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemics, with adverse impacts on food production and security. Following the study, the Institute developed a data visualization portal on food security, to support decisionmakers in better monitoring the supply and demand of food at the district level and the production of food at the national level. The portal has since changed the way decisions are made for enhanced food security, including for vulnerable populations.

In the open discussion session, one question was asked on Nepal's centralized national database, specifically on how local datasets are collected, processed and used for policymaking through the database. In response, Mr. Dhani Ram Sharma shared that links to the portal are provided to the local governments and that all administrative levels are required to populate the relevant data into the portal so that data from the whole country can be integrated. As this data system is newly developed, there is still a need to strengthen local agencies, as some local governments do not yet possess the capacities to produce data. Another participant remarked about the importance of vertical integration of agriculture, and of maintaining sustainability from farms to homes. He shared that Pakistan had made some small successes in terms of agricultural mechanization, improved productivity and sustainability, and the integration of carbon farming. He also highlighted the importance of linking agriculture with industry and people, and of public-private partnerships.

Finally, the chair of the session, **Mr. Zafar ul Hasan**, Joint Chief Economist, Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives, Pakistan, made closing remarks. He highlighted that Goal 17 is pivotal in connecting all the other Goals, given that partnerships within and among countries are required for the achievement of the Goals, particularly given the global background of COVID-19, disasters and supply shocks. He then shared that the recent floods in Pakistan was extraordinary and

therefore unexpected in terms of its intensity. There have been massive losses, including the erosion of livelihoods and infrastructure, with economic activity impacted in both the flood affected areas and other parts of the country. He updated that the first phase of flood relief is over, and that the government is now focused on the reconstruction of affected areas and the restoration of livelihoods. To this end, the Planning Commission is working with stakeholders, including provincial governments, international financial institutions and UN agencies to prepare a reconstruction plan. The government will also be coordinating partnerships and mobilizing resources, including from the private sector and civil society, to implement the reconstruction activities. Finally, he congratulated ESCAP, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute and the Ministry of Planning for successfully organizing the Forum, which in turn exemplified the spirit of partnership building.

Concluding session: The way forward

Moderator: Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director, SDPI, Pakistan, highlighted some of the key issues discussed particularly during the Sustainable Development Conference. A wide range of issues were deliberated on such as on countering violent extremism, the role of central banking in dealing with inflation, floods in Pakistan, energy corridors and renewable energy, trade policies and barriers, health policies, tobacco control and issues related to vape and e-cigarettes, social protection, food security, decent work conditions, and humanitarian response for migration. Intensive discussions would continue the following day and culminate with a concluding plenary that would be presided by SDPI member board of governors and the Commerce Minister, Mr. Syed Naveed Qamar.

Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Deputy Head, Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, ESCAP, summarized the key highlights from the deliberations that took place during the Sixth South and South-West Asia Forum on SDGs. Despite progress being made, the subregion is lagging in targets on all the 17 Goals. The subregion had been experiencing robust economic growth, but the impact of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine has pushed back economic progress. Rising prices for food, fuel and basic necessities is leading to a rise in poverty and inequality. From the discussions, it was felt that with the current rate of development, countries within the subregion would not be able to achieve the SDGs by 2030. A consensus also evolved that countries needed to focus on priorities not only at a national level, but also at a subregional level as many of the issues have cross-boundary implications.

Priority areas requiring urgent attention in the subregion included climate action and disaster risk reduction, promoting of cross-border connectivity of transport, ICT, energy and supply chains, reduction in poverty and inequality, and sustainable financing for development. LDC graduation is another important challenge facing the subregion with three out of four LDCs graduating very soon. The Forum noted that the cost of trade in SSWA is very high. Intra-regional trade is only 5% because of high tariff and non-tariff barriers and there is a need to reduce these costs, including through the liberalisation of services and investment. The need for integrated regional electricity markets was also highlighted to make the electricity trade more reliable, fluid and more focussed on renewable energy. It was also mentioned that investments in transport connectivity and infrastructure needed to be green and climate proof.

A clear message that was echoed in the deliberations was that regional cooperation was key to address the development challenges facing the subregion. The sharing of the best practices and knowledge,

transfer of technology, including capacity building to strengthen the productive capacities of the countries and as a means of implementation, are essential to achieve the Goals.

In the discussions undertaken about the VNRs, countries recognised that the process was an excellent opportunity for governments to create multiple stakeholder partnerships, strengthening policy coherence and inclusivity. Experiences were shared of how VNRs were prepared and the challenges that were faced. Countries noted that regional integration and coordination, implementation of the Goals through federal, provincial and local govts were essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

In the breakout group discussions for SDG 6, very little progress is being made in the subregion. Access to fresh water has been improved, but issues remain in terms of water quality and availability and concerted efforts are needed to address regressions in the areas of water use efficiency, protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems and participatory water and sanitation management. On SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy), although countries are investing more in renewable energy, the renewable energy share of total energy consumption is decreasing every year which is an alarming situation when countries need to reduce their carbon footprints. In terms of SDG 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) multifarious issues were discussed, including discussions on science, technology and innovation, intellectual property, creation of regional value chains, what kind of digital economy and ICT collaborations will be required and how cooperation could be built. For SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), very limited progress has been seen since 2015. Social and economic challenges are being faced with increases in air pollution, rural to urban migration, lack of sufficient sanitation, clean water, and clean-living conditions. Social unrest and rising inequality within cities are also leading to security issues.

In the discussions on Goal 17 (Partnerships), the importance of partnerships to promote and accelerate the achievement of the Goals was emphasized, particularly for developing sustainable financial ecosystems to mobilize financing for the Goals. Peer-to-peer learning, improved government coordination, developing financial infrastructure and providing appropriate incentives was seen as crucial to scaling access to sustainable finance and sustaining economic development.

ESCAP presented a partnership report of ESCAP, ADB and UNDP, highlighting the impact of COVID on the Sustainable Development Goals and explored solutions to address those impacts. The report provided an in-depth review of Goals 4 (Education), 5 (Gender equality), 14 (Life below water), 15 (Life on land) and 17 (Partnerships) examined various policy dimensions which are essential at the moment for achieving these SDGs. The report suggested that countries need to go beyond subregional cooperation to regional cooperation as well as look into enhanced partnership for sustainable development. The general narrative emanating from the deliberations echoed five broad policy objectives that ESCAP has been prescribing for deeper cooperation in the subregion, including the need to:

1. Promote growth through sustainable industrialisation
2. Invest in core sectors of health and education
3. Expand social protection, closing gender gaps, improving basic infrastructure
4. Ensure food security and agriculture and rural development
5. Invest in clean energy and environmental sustainability.

Guest of Honour:

Senator Ms. Sherry Rehman, Minister for Climate Change, Government of Pakistan, centred her intervention around the profound importance of regional cooperation to achieve the Goals. Energy connectivity between countries can create economies of scale to lower costs that can be beneficial to all. Climate events, like the flooding that has devastated Pakistan, strikes indiscriminately without concern for geopolitical borders and cooperation between countries can help to pool resources to address issues in a collective manner. While such kind of cooperation can help countries to deal with issues rationally, oftentimes geopolitics can overshadow cooperation that ends up being a detriment to all. Geopolitics can block trade, limit people-to-people contact, and prevent connection of energy grids that can reduce the costs of electricity that would benefit the economy and livelihoods of people. She lamented the fact that even low-hanging fruit of sharing climate, weather and geospatial data that can help in managing the effects of climate related disasters is something that is not happening in the subregion.

Ms. Rehman found the rise in autocratic regimes and moves away from international treaties and multilateralism to be troubling, as cooperation between nations was essential to address and find solutions to problems the world faces. She noted that climate-induced disasters that hit Pakistan went beyond all predictions and science modelling. As such, she felt that there was no room for conflicts such as the war in Ukraine which are disrupting supply chains for food and energy. Developing countries are now bidding for expensive gas on international markets with richer countries and often losing out.

She reiterated the importance of making collective decisions and reaching consensus even if it is a bit watered down. The adoption of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP 27 was a momentous occasion to try to address the issue of climate justice. While the agreement was not perfect, she viewed it as a steppingstone to start the journey for addressing the issue of climate justice. She noted that the flooding that hit Pakistan was a message to the rest of the world on how devastating climate-induced disasters can be. The horn of Africa and Somalia have been facing drought for two years leading to starvation of children. These types of situations cannot be seen as normal, and efforts need to be made to address these problems.

The availability of funding was highlighted as being able to make a difference between subsistence and starvation as well as between sustainability and subsistence. She opined that the financial architecture of multilateral banks and international financial institutions were designed for a post War world when people were rebuilding with industry, agriculture and other development projects. Countries today are drowning in floods and debt yet are expected to build back better. The World Bank has estimated that US\$ 30 billion is needed for Pakistan to build back from the floods and that US\$348 billion is needed for the next six to seven years. The annual cost of adaptation in developing countries is estimated to be US\$160 billion and US\$340 billion by 2030. Mitigation costs are also very high requiring two to three trillion dollars. Individual governments or central banks do not have this level of funding in their systems, but funds are available if you consider the levels of spending on war.

In closing, Ms Rehman encouraged everyone to act as agents of change, whether it be to wear warmer clothes, so homes do not need to be heated as much or using water sparingly in day-to-day life. Governments are not able to do everything, and citizens need to take initiatives as well.

Vote of Thanks:

Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head, Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, ESCAP, thanked the Government of Pakistan and SDPI for co-hosting the SDG Forum despite the tragedies, devastating floods and suffering people are facing through the climate induced disasters experienced this year. She greatly appreciated the work of the SDPI staff who worked tirelessly to organize the many parallel sessions that were ongoing while ensuring that people were in the right place and fed. A debt of gratitude was expressed to all the participants who enthusiastically participated both physically and virtually. The contributions made and ideas shared were extremely enriching and she hoped that everybody would take away new learnings from the insightful discussions. She noted that ESCAP would take the results of the Forum discussions forward in the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) in March 2023 which would also feed into the deliberations at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York and the UN Sustainable Development Goals Summit as 2023 will be the mid-point between 2015 and 2030. ESCAP will support advocacy and the regional and global solidarity that is needed to tackle the issues facing the SDGs.

Mr. M. Ali Kemal, Chief SDGs, SDG Support Unit, Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan, reiterated the importance of the need for countries to work together to deal with climate change and that the sharing of data between countries was important. From the discussions that took place, some good solutions were shared and that it was important to develop action-oriented tasks. Mr. Kemal thanked the Government of Pakistan, including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, Climate Change and Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives for all the support provided to ensure the successful hosting of the event. He wished all participants a safe journey back to their home countries.

Annex 1: Programme of Sixth South and South-West Asia Forum on SDGs



Sixth South and South-West Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals

**Accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels**

5-7 December 2022

**Hybrid mode
Islamabad, Pakistan**

Concept Note

Background and context

The [SDG Forum is organised annually](#) as the subregional preparatory meetings for the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD)² at the regional level and the ECOSOC High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) at the global level. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), led by its South and South-West Asia Subregional Office, has been organizing these sub-regional forums in collaboration with Member States, stakeholders and partners since 2017.³ The Forum facilitates dialogue and deliberations between Government officials, civil society, think-tanks, experts and other stakeholders on the themes of the annual APFSD and the HLPF, providing a unique opportunity to share information on subregional implementation efforts, highlight subregional priorities and good practices. The outcomes and recommendations from the Forum feed into regional and global processes, including the abovementioned APFSD and HLPF.

This year, ESCAP's Sixth South and South-West Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals is being held alongside the Sustainable Development Policy Institute's (SDPI) 25th Sustainable Development Conference (SDC) in Islamabad, Pakistan.

The Decade of Action for Achieving the 2030 Agenda has been severely tested by compounding crises from the COVID-19 Pandemic and war in Ukraine, also heavily impacting countries and the people of South and South-West Asia. ESCAP's flagship SDG progress report of 2022 finds that the South and South-West Asia subregion is not on track to reach any of the 17 SDGs by 2030. Though progress has been made on some goals, the pace is slow. The fastest progress has been made towards life on land (Goal 15), no poverty (Goal 1) and good health and well-being (Goal 3). Meanwhile, the subregion is

² The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development is an inclusive regional intergovernmental forum which supports the preparations for the High-level Political Forum (HLPF). ESCAP resolution 73/1 indicates that the theme of the APFSD is aligned with the theme of the HLPF and will support an in-depth discussion of the cluster of goals under review at the HLPF.

³ The first forum was hosted in 2017 by the Government of Nepal in Kathmandu. Subsequent forums were hosted respectively by the Government of India in New Delhi in 2018, the Government of Bangladesh in 2019 in Dhaka, the Government of Maldives in 2020 in virtual format (due to the COVID-19 pandemic), and the Government of Sri Lanka in 2021 in Colombo in hybrid mode.

regressing on sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) and climate action (Goal 13). Concerted efforts and actions from all stakeholders are needed to accelerate progress towards the 2030 goals. ESCAP Resolution 77/1 calls for greater regional cooperation at all levels to build back better, for getting back on track leaving no one behind to achieve the SDGs and to build resilience to future pandemics and crises.⁴

Against this background, the “**Sixth South and South-West Asian SDG Forum**” will examine inclusive, resilient, and sustainable strategies towards COVID-19 recovery efforts and identify priorities to accelerate the Goals of the 2030 Agenda. In alignment with the focus of the 2023 HLPF and APFSD, this year’s sub-regional forum will assess progress on the thematic SDGs of **Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation); Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy); Goal 9 (Industry, innovation, and infrastructure); Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and 17 (Partnership for the Goals).**

As part of the follow-up and review process for the SDGs, all countries in the subregion submitted their first Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) by 2019. Türkiye presented its second VNR in 2019, while Bangladesh, Nepal and India presented their second VNRs in 2020; followed by Afghanistan and Bhutan in 2021; and Pakistan and Sri Lanka in 2022. In this context, this year’s Forum will draw from the VNR experiences of Member States to examine national and subregional perspectives on challenges, progress and achievements and lessons learned. This reflection will enable a forward-looking dialogue on partnership to accelerate the progress towards SDGs.

The Forum will bring together multiple stakeholders from governments, international community, civil society, academia, and the private sector on a common platform to find ways of cooperation at national and subregional levels to build back better from the Pandemic and get back on track with the 2030 Agenda, leaving no one behind.

Objectives

The objective of the Forum is to foster an in-depth and shared understanding among Member States and multi-stakeholders on strategies and opportunities at country and sub-regional levels to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with special focus on SDG 6, SDG 7, SDG 9, SDG 11 and SDG 17.

1. Enhance awareness and understanding on key challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the SDGs, in line with the [Regional Roadmap for Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific](#) adopted by ESCAP Member States, and to support and complement the subregional agenda through sharing of experiences and knowledge in 2017.
2. Provide a platform for expert discussions and reflections on subregional perspectives and good practices along with challenges related to means of implementation towards the SDGs leaving no one behind.
3. Identify ways, through expert discussions to strengthen implementation efforts, stakeholder engagement, follow-up, and review, linking national, subregional, regional, and global processes, including through sharing of presentations and experiences of VNR countries at the HLPF.
4. Identify needs and opportunities for regional cooperation and support delivery of commitments to such cooperation by regional and subregional bodies and the United Nations Development System.

Participants

1. Government officials and representatives engaged in various aspects of implementing and monitoring the SDGs;

⁴ ESCAP/RES/77/1. See https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP_RES_77_1_E.pdf

2. VNR focal points and ESCAP focal points for sustainable development;
3. Representatives of the UN Country Team, regional and subregional organizations;
4. Representatives of civil society organizations, including those working with vulnerable groups;
5. Representatives of private sector organizations;
6. Experts from think tanks and academia; and
7. Other stakeholders involved in SDG implementation at national, local, sub-regional and regional levels.

Organization

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

Meeting report

The outcome of the meeting will consist of a summary of proceedings of the key topics and issues raised by participants, as well as recommendations and presentations. The materials will be disseminated to the participants and be made available on the ESCAP Website. The highlights of meeting will feed into the subregional reports to the APFSD and HLPF, 2023 as well as ESCAP's flagship report on Sustainable Cities.

Tentative Programme	
Day 1: 5 December 2022	
12:00 – 13:30	<p style="text-align: center;">Inaugural Session (Serena Hotel)</p> <p><i>Welcome Remarks:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambassador Shafqat Kakakhel, Chair, Board of Governors, SDPI, Pakistan • Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director, SDPI, Pakistan • Mr. Syed Zafar Ali Shah, Secretary, Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan • Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head, Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, ESCAP <p><i>Special Remarks:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Knut Ostby, Resident Representative, UNDP Pakistan • H.E. Ms. Fathimath Niuma, Deputy Minister of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Government of Maldives • H.E. Mr. Shehan Semasinghe, Minister of State for Finance, Government of Sri Lanka • H.E. Mr. Esala Ruwan Weerakoon, Secretary-General, SAARC [online] • Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP (in person) <p><i>Inaugural Address:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Prof. Ahsan Iqbal Chaudhary, Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan

Day 2: 6 December 2022 6th SSWASDF	
10:00 - 11:30	<p>Session 1: Subregional overview of progress in SDGs: Challenges and prospects</p> <p><i>South and South-West Asia subregion has seen its progress towards SDGs regressing, more so due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The full achievement of SDG seems now a daunting task. There is increasing divergence in economic and social outcomes within and between countries. This session will discuss the subregional progress, good practices, and priorities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.</i></p> <p>Chair: Mr. Kewal Prasad Bhandari, Secretary, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal</p> <p>Moderator: Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director, SDPI, Pakistan</p> <p>Presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlights of SDG Progress in South and South-West Asia: Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Deputy Head, Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia Office, ESCAP • Benefits of subregional cooperation on the SDGs: Ms. Cecile Fruman, Director, Regional Integration and Engagement, South Asia, World Bank <p>Panellists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Mohd. Monirul Islam, Joint Secretary (SDG), Prime Minister’s Office, Government of Bangladesh • Dr. Ali Gholampour, Head, Department of Development Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran • Mr. Priyantha Ratnayake, Deputy Secretary to the Treasury, Government of Sri Lanka • Mr. Yusuf Esidir, Expert, Strategy and Budget Office, Presidency of Türkiye, Government of Türkiye • Mr. Nadeem Ahmed, Social Policy Advisor, Federal SDGs Support Unit, Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan <p>Open discussion</p>
11:30 – 12:30	<i>Tea/coffee break</i>
12:30 – 14:00	<p>Session 2: National SDGs progress and challenges in the context of COVID-19: Reflections on voluntary national reviews (VNRs) in South and South-West Asia</p> <p><i>The session will reflect on how the regional and subregional SDG follow-up and review processes can strengthen the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national level. Countries will be invited to provide interventions on their VNR experiences and to exchange learnings. This will offer national perspectives on the impact of the Pandemic on SDGs and highlight priorities and the kind of policies being implemented to recover and get back on track with the 2030 Agenda.</i></p> <p>Chair: Dr. Aisha Ghaus Pasha, State Minister for Finance and Revenue, Government of Pakistan</p> <p>Presentation: Introduction of Voluntary National Reviews in Asia-Pacific: Mr. Oliver Paddison, Chief, Countries in Special Situations Section, ESCAP</p>

	<p>Countries that presented VNRs at the HLPF 2022: (10 minutes each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. M. Ali Kemal, Chief SDGs, SDG Support Unit, Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan • Prof. Hemanthi Ranasinghe, Member, Sustainable Development Council, Government of Sri Lanka <p>Other SSWA Countries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Mohammad Masud Rana Chowdhury, Joint Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh • Mr. Phurba, Senior Planning Officer, Office of the Cabinet Affairs and Strategic Coordination, Strategic Planning Division, Government of Bhutan • Dr. Sabyasachi Saha, Research and Information System for Developing Countries, India [online] <p>Other speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Faisal Mushtaq, CEO and Founder, The Millennium Universal College, Pakistan • Dr. Mohsin Kazmi, Associate Research Fellow, SDPI, Pakistan
14:00 – 15:00	<i>Lunch</i>
15:00 – 17:00	<p>Session 3: National progress on the SDGs and challenges in the context of COVID-19: Reflections on VNRs in South and South-West Asia (contd.)</p> <p>Moderator/Chair: Ms. Mehnaz Akbar Aziz, Parliamentary Secretary for Law and Justice, Government of Pakistan</p> <p>Other SSWA Countries: (10 minutes each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Ali Gholampour, Head, Department of Development Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran • Ms. Fathimath Shazly, Senior Planning Analyst, Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Government of Maldives • Mr. Kewal Prasad Bhandari, Secretary, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal • Mr. Veysel Sarici, Expert, Strategy and Budget Office, Presidency of Türkiye, Government of Türkiye <p>Other speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Raziq Shinwari, Economic Policy Advisor, Federal SDGs Support Unit, Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan <p>Open discussion</p>
17:00 – 18:00	<i>Networking Break</i>
18:00 – 19:45	<p>Session 4: Subregional perspectives and review of cluster of Goals for HLPF 2023 in South and South-West Asia (SDGs 6, 7, 9 and 11)</p> <p><i>The session is expected to develop subregional perspectives on the cluster of goals under review in the HLPF 2023 in the form of impact on progress in light of the pandemic, challenges, priorities, good practices, and solutions to accelerate progress, including through subregional and regional cooperation and how ESCAP can support the member States. The moderators of these break-out sessions will facilitate the discussions to identify subregional priorities, policies, and stakeholder-led initiatives to reflect on</i></p>

opportunities for subregional responses, including measures needed for vulnerable groups to leave no one behind.

Introductory plenary (15 min; 18:00-18:30)

Moderator: Dr. Shafqat Munir, Research Fellow, SDPI, Pakistan

Presentation:

- Introduction to sessions – objectives and key take aways from break-out sessions
Mr. Oliver Paddison, Chief, Countries in Special Situations Section, ESCAP

Four parallel break-out sessions in four groups (1:15 minutes; 18:30 – 19:45)

- *Break-out group 1. SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation); Break-out group 2. SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy); Break-out group 3. SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure); and Break-out group 4. SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities)*
- *Each group comprising of government officials, experts, UNRCO representatives, UNCT experts, CSOs, private sector, etc.*
- *Leads presentations will be made in each breakout group highlighting the actions that are required to be taken by member States in the subregion.*

Group 1: SDG 6 - Clean water and sanitation

Accelerated actions are required to achieve clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) in the subregion as the progress towards the Goal is slow. Increasing water pollution, climate change impact, drought and desertification are worsening these trends. The contamination and low levels of water use efficiency, lead to water scarcity if unmitigated.

The session will discuss, among other things:

- *Status, trends, emerging issues, and interlinkages of implementing SDG 6;*
- *Good practices to facilitate inclusivity in access to clean water and sanitation including innovative technologies;*
- *Areas for subregional cooperation.*

Moderator: Dr. Fahad Saeed, Climate Scientist/Regional Lead, Climate Analytics, Germany

Presentation: (10 minutes)

- **Dr. Arvind Kumar**, President, India Water Foundation, India

Panellists: (5 minutes each)

- **Mr. Mohd. Monirul Islam**, Joint Secretary (SDG), Prime Minister's Office, Government of Bangladesh
- **Dr. (Mr.) Ali Gholampour**, Head, Department of Development Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- **Ms. Fathimath Shazly**, Senior Planning Analyst, Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Government of Maldives
- **Mr. Dhani Ram Sharma**, Joint Secretary, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal
- **Dr. Lakmini Fernando**, Research Economist, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka
- **Mr. Haile Gashaw**, Chief of WASH, UNICEF Pakistan

Open discussion

Group 2: SDG 7 - Affordable and clean energy

The subregion is lagging behind on SDG 7, despite countries putting strategies for energy transition to green energy. Renewable energy development is being seen as an important aspect to facilitate achievement of the Paris Agreement targets. It is crucial that countries can integrate renewable energy into existing energy infrastructures to complement national energy security. This session will discuss:

- *Potential areas for cross-border collaboration and multi-stakeholder participation for the development of sustainable energy sector;*
- *Conditions and frameworks required to facilitate cross border energy trade;*
- *Options for public and private financing for infrastructure development.*

Moderator: Dr. Nawaz Ahmad, Director, SAARC Energy Centre, Islamabad, **Pakistan**

Presentation: (10 minutes each)

- **Ms. Kimberly Roseberry**, Energy Division, ESCAP
- **Dr. Hina Aslam**, Research Fellow, SDPI, **Pakistan**

Panellists: (5 minutes each)

- **Mr. Phurba**, Senior Planning Officer, Office of the Cabinet Affairs and Strategic Coordination, Strategic Planning Division, Government of **Bhutan**
- **Ms. Leila Zamani**, General Manager, Environmental Economy and Technologies Management, Department of Environment, Government of the **Islamic Republic of Iran**
- **Mr. Prakash Dahal**, Joint Secretary, National Planning Commission, Government of **Nepal**
- **Mr. Asad Aleem**, Deputy Country Director, Pakistan Resident Mission, ADB
- **Mr. Mahfooz Bhatti**, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Energy-Power Division, Government of Pakistan

CSO Representative:

- **Mr. Talha Khan**, Executive Director, Pakistan Environment Trust, **Pakistan**

Open discussion

Group 3: SDG 9 – Industry, innovation, and infrastructure

The South and South-West Asia show “considerable regression” as per the 2022 Asia and the Pacific Progress Report. As per the UN-Habitats World Cities Report 2022 the urban population in Asia will be 2.99 billion in 2035 and that in South Asia 987,592,000. So, a vision for cities has never been more crucial than it is today, making achieving SDG 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable-important and relevant. Success in achieving the targets under SDG 11 sets the stage for achieving targets in many of the other SDG goals. This session will discuss:

- *The challenges within the region, their roots, and possible immediate solutions for overcoming them;*
- *Available best practices that can be well replicated by the SANS member countries to achieve the targets under SDG 9.*

Moderator:

- **Dr. Posh Raj Pandey**, Chairman, SAWTEE, Nepal

Presentation: (10 minutes)

- **Dr. Shiladitya Chatterjee**, (Visiting Professor), Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, **India** [online]

Panellists:(5 minutes each)

- **Dr. Omar Joya**, Executive Director, Biruni Institute, **Afghanistan**
- **Dr. Selim Raihan**, Executive Director, South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM), **Bangladesh** [online]
- **Mr. Pema Tshewang**, Senior Planning Officer, District Administration, Lhuentse, Government of **Bhutan**
- **Dr. Sabyasachi Saha**, Research and Information System for Developing Countries, **India** [online]
- **Dr. Safdar Sohail**, Director, Studies in Globalisation and Development, **Pakistan**
- **Prof. Hemanthi Ranasinghe**, Member, Sustainable Development Council, Government of **Sri Lanka**

Other speakers:

- **Muhammed Hammad Bashir Saeed**, Project Expert, Private Financing Advisory Network, UNIDO

Open discussion

Group 4: SDG 11 - Sustainable cities and communities

This session will focus on the status, trends, emerging issues, and interlinkages of implementing SDG 11 in South and South-West Asia within the context of a sustainable urban recovery from multiple connected crises (climate, cost of living, covid/health, food, and energy all which impact cities and urban communities in distinct ways. It could identify current best practices to recover and develop sustainable cities and communities in South and South-West Asia as well as new areas to scale up partnerships and cooperation among different actors for achievement of SDG11. The session can address some of the questions as below:

- *South and South-West Asia has the highest number of people living in informal settlements globally. Given this and rising urban inequalities in the region, what policy mechanisms and private sector interventions are required to ensure that all urban citizens have access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services, especially in a post-pandemic context, where adequate housing was central for the survival of urban households and the sustainability and resilience of cities?*
- *The region's cities are vulnerable to extreme weather conditions. What capacities need to be strengthened and what action can be taken to ensure that cities and urban citizens are more prepared and resilient against disasters related to climate and other natural causes?*
- *For countries in the region, the climate crisis coupled with rising levels of urban pollution, particularly solid waste, and air pollution, are an increasing health concern. Given the importance of reducing waste and resource consumption to support sustainable urban development, what policy measures, technologies, and incentives can be implemented to reduce the environmental impact of cities in line with a net zero climate transition?*

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of green public spaces for the well-being and health of urban communities, while acting as a nature-based solution in many countries against air pollution and the ‘urban heat island effect’ due to the climate crisis. How can cities and urban planning promote inclusive green public spaces as a key driver of change especially for women and children, youth, older persons, and persons with disabilities?</i> <p>Moderator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Kewal Prasad Bhandari, Secretary, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal <p>Presentation: (10 minutes each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Curt Garrigan, Chief, Sustainable Urban Development Section, Environment and Development Division, ESCAP • Mr. George Cheriyan, CUTS International, India [online] <p>Panellists: (5 minutes each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Emani Kumar, Deputy Secretary-General of ICLEI and Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia, India [online] • Mr. Surendra Thapa Magar, Chief Administrative Officer, Dhulikel Municipality, Government of Nepal • Mr. Jawed Ali Khan, Habitat Programme Manager, UN Habitat Pakistan • Mr. Umer Malik, Policy Analyst, Development Policy Unit, UNDP Pakistan <p>Open discussion</p> <p>Back to Plenary</p> <p>Chair: Mr. Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Speaker National Assembly, Government of Pakistan</p> <p>Co-Chair: Ms. Romina Khurshid Alam, Minister of State and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister and Convener, Parliamentary Taskforce on SDGs, Government of Pakistan</p>
Day 3: 7 December 2022	
10.00 – 11.30	<p>Session 5: Plenary- Review of Selected Goals for HLPF 2023 in South Asia: Reporting by the Working Groups and the Way forward</p> <p>The session will provide subregional perspectives on the cluster of goals under review in 2023, by the conveners of the Working Groups on the respective Goals based on the discussions in the previous session.</p> <p>Moderator: Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed, Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance, Government of Pakistan</p> <p>Chair: Mr. Riaz Fatyana, Former Convener, Parliamentary Task Force on SDGs, Pakistan</p> <p>Reporting by the Chairs of Breakout Working Groups: (10 minutes each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group 1 (SDG 6): Dr. Arvind Kumar, President, India Water Foundation, India • Group 2 (SDG 7): Ms. Kimberly Roseberry, Energy Division, ESCAP • Group 3 (SDG 9): Dr. Posh Raj Pandey, Chairman, SAWTEE, Nepal

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group 4 (SDG 11): Mr. Kewal Prasad Bhandari, Secretary, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal <p>CSO Representative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Malick Shahbaz Ahmad Tahir, Executive Director, Sungi Development Foundation, Pakistan <p>Open discussion</p>
11:30– 12:30	<i>Tea/Coffee Break</i>
12:30 – 14:00	<p>Session 6: Strengthening means of implementation to advance progress on the SDGs: Financing for development</p> <p><i>Given that COVID -19 pandemic has regressed the growth of subregion, the governments have been struggling with their financial needs for developmental assistance. Three LDCs of the subregion are also graduating in coming years from LDC and thus would need finances for sustainable graduation. This session will focus on financing for development needs of countries in subregion and explore ways and means to generate resources for development. It will discuss means and mechanisms for designing recovery strategies based on sustainable financing policies; leveraging public and private sources for financing COVID-19 recovery packages and achieving the SDGs.</i></p> <p>Chair: Mr. Rana Ihsan Afzal Khan, Special Advisor to Prime Minister and Coordinator on Commerce and Industries, Pakistan</p> <p>Lead presentation (15 minutes): Dr. Hamza Malik, Director, Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division, ESCAP</p> <p>Panellists: (5 minutes each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Pema Tshewang, Senior Planning Officer, District Administration, Lhuentse, Government of Bhutan • Mr. Kewal Prasad Bhandari, Secretary, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal • Mr. Priyantha Ratnayake, Deputy Secretary to the Treasury, Government of Sri Lanka • Mr. Yusuf Esidir, Expert, Strategy and Budget Office, Presidency of Türkiye, Government of Türkiye <p>CSO Representative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Sameena Nazir, President, PODA, Pakistan <p>Remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq, Government of Pakistan <p>Open discussion</p>
14:00- 15:00	<i>Lunch</i>
15:00- 16:30	<p>Session 7: South and South-West Asia Perspectives and Partnerships on Delivering the SDGs through the food, energy, and finance nexus (SDG 17)</p> <p><i>The session will highlight COVID-19 impacts and recovery and discuss the key areas of the 2023 Asia-Pacific SDG Partnership Report on addressing food, energy and finance challenges that are limiting progress on SDG 17. Promising solutions and innovations</i></p>

	<p><i>and areas for regional cooperation at the nexus of food, energy and financing systems that can accelerate progress towards the SDGs will be illustrated.</i></p> <p>Chair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Zafar ul Hasan, Joint Chief Economist, Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan <p>Moderator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Oliver Paddison, Chief, Countries in Special Situations Section, ESCAP <p>Presentation on Asia-Pacific SDG Partnership Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Frank Thomas, SDGs Consultant, Asian Development Bank [online] • Ms. Madhubashini Fernando, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP <p>Audience engagement activity: Live polling on converging crises and SDG solutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Oliver Paddison, Chief, Countries in Special Situations Section, ESCAP <p>Panellists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof. Hemanthi Ranasinghe, Member, Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka • Mr. Mohammad Masud Rana Chowdhury, Joint Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh • Dr. Rupa Chanda, Director, Trade, Investment and Innovation Division, ESCAP [online] • Mr. Dhani Ram Sharma, Joint Secretary, National Planning Commission, Nepal • Ms. Shaista Ayesha, Chief Executive Officer, SEED Ventures, Pakistan • Ms. Lavanya Jayaram, Executive Director, South Asia, Asian Venture Philanthropy Network [online] • Prof. Iqrar Ahmad Khan, Vice Chancellor, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan • Dr. Khalid Waleed, Researcher, SDPI, Pakistan <p>Other speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Kashif Salik, Researcher, SDPI, Pakistan <p>Open discussion</p>
16:30 – 18:00	Networking break

<p>18:00-19:30</p>	<p>Concluding session: The way forward</p> <p>This last session will feature concluding remarks by the organizers, summarizing the key highlights, discussing the way forward, including the process leading to the APFSD and HLPF in 2023 and consolidating subregional inputs for the upcoming APFSD to feed into the HLPF 2023.</p> <p>Moderator: Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director, SDPI, Pakistan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Highlights of 6th SSWASDF – Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Deputy Head, Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, ESCAP <p>Guest of Honour:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senator Ms. Sherry Rehman, Minister for Climate Change, Government of Pakistan <p>Vote of Thanks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head, Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, ESCAP • Mr. M. Ali Kemal, Chief SDGs, SDG Support Unit, Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan
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