



ESCAP Sustainable Business Network

ESCAP Sustainable Business Network – Monthly Update

August 2020

Dear ESNB members,

We hope you are doing well and staying safe. This monthly update aims to help ESNB members stay updated with ESCAP activities to plan your engagement and volunteer for opportunities.

Recent ESNB related news and activities

Catalyst for change: Sustainable finance developments across Asia Pacific (Report by ESNB Banking and Finance Taskforce, KPMG and PBEC), 24 July 2020

Globally, the volume of assets invested in sustainable projects is rising, with growth accelerating significantly in the last three years. Approximately one fifth of all assets worldwide are now in funds that use some form of environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria. Asia, however, continues to lag behind, especially outside Japan. This report, published by the ESNB Banking and Finance taskforce, KPMG and PBEC, provides a snapshot of the sustainable finance landscape in the Asia Pacific region. <https://esbn.unescap.org/resources/catalyst-change-sustainable-finance-developments-across-asia-pacific>

Webinar: Supporting SMEs in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Asia-Pacific, 22 July 2020

Ms. Barbara Meynert of the ESNB Executive Council participated in the panel discussion of this webinar. Jointly organized by the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) of the United Nations, the webinar brought together policymakers, researchers and entrepreneurs from developing countries to share their first-hand experiences on helping SMEs respond to the global crisis. A recording of the webinar is available at: <https://www.southsouth-galaxy.org/events/webinar-supporting-smes-in-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic-in-asia-pacific/>

Blog by David Morris and Mia Mikic: There is no substitute for Cooperation in Sustainable Development

David Morris, Vice president of ESNB EC, and Mia Mikic jointly published a blog post on 10 July 2020: <https://www.unescap.org/blog/there-no-substitute-cooperation-sustainable-development>

Call for Research Proposals: Evidence-based Financial Solutions for Women Entrepreneurs

ESCAP is launching a Call for Research Proposals to undertake human centred design inspired research. The research should explore the nuanced challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing financing at different stages of their enterprise journey. The research findings will be used to inform the design of private sector solutions that enhance different groups of women entrepreneurs' access and use of financial services. Successful proposals will receive up to US\$ 25,000 in research funding. Further information and how to apply can be found at: <https://www.unescap.org/projects/cwe/research-challenge>

Second ESNB Steering Committee Meeting on Augmenting Tsunami Monitoring, 13 May 2020

A follow-up meeting to the Tsunami monitoring roundtable held in Singapore in August 2019 was organized virtually on 13 May. The meeting covered updates on Ship-based tsunami monitoring, stationary platforms and rigs, and undersea telecommunications cables.

On ships, a number of companies are installing newer versions of Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) including new onboard low-cost computing systems which would be able to aid in better detecting tsunamis. For oil platforms and rigs, Fugro noted that installation of sensors on platforms with helipads require wave radar to measure ocean data which can also pick up tsunami wave signals, and the Oil Companies International Marine Forum highlighted that their entire membership expressed willingness to host monitoring equipment on their respective stationary offshore infrastructure. On undersea telecommunications cables, increased work has taken place in the area of optical fiber sensing which offers a breakthrough in cost barriers for undersea SMART cables to monitor tsunami signals and ocean health, as well as serving cable protection purposes. A SMART cable system is planned between New Caledonia and Vanuatu, and Indonesia is also a major candidate for application of SMART cables. NEC noted that work has recently started on building another large-scale submarine cable-based observation system in Asia, dedicated to monitoring earthquakes and tsunamis. <https://esbn.unescap.org/task-forces/disaster-climate-risk-reduction>

Conversion to corporate/organizational membership

Following the decision by the ESNB Executive Council to convert from personal to corporate/organizational membership of ESNB and strengthen sustainability requirements of members, the Secretariat has sent out the email to all ESNB members. **All members are kindly requested to submit the relevant information on their conversion by 31 August 2020.**

ESCAP related news and upcoming events of interest to ESNB members

For a short overview of ESCAP related news and activities over the past month, please see ESCAPs monthly newsletter: <https://mailchi.mp/un/escap-newsletter-august-2020>

All ESCAP upcoming events: <https://www.unescap.org/events/upcoming>

15 July 2020: *New gender lens investing tool for Asia-Pacific SMEs unveiled*

ESCAP and the Small Enterprise Assistance Funds (SEAF) in March 2020 partnered to unlock US\$ 150 million in capital for gender lens investing in Asia. With the support of ESCAP, SEAF developed a Gender Equality Scorecard© (GES) Manual, which was launched on 15 July 2020. The Gender Equality Scorecard (GES) is a tool to assess women’s economic empowerment and gender equality in growth-orientated small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The manual gives clear guidance to investment and gender professionals on assessing a company’s demonstrated commitment to gender equality by focusing on six performance criteria, namely pay equity, women’s workforce participation, gender diverse leadership and governance, benefits and professional development, safe and healthy workplace environment, and women-powered value chains. The tool identifies areas for organizational improvement and supports the development of a gender improvement plan.

<https://www.unescap.org/news/new-gender-lens-investing-tool-asia-pacific-smes-receives-un-support>

19 August 2020: *Regional Conversation Series on Building Back Better: Accelerating Digital Connectivity and Leveraging Innovation*

Asia and the Pacific is a key driver of a technological revolution that is profoundly transforming the way we live, work and relate to one another. At the same time, the region is also one of the most digitally divided, with less than 14 per cent of the population connected to affordable and reliable high-speed Internet. Around 52 per cent of the region’s population remains offline. As the COVID-19 new normal has seen our reliance on connectivity grow exponentially, the digital divide threatens to become the new face of inequality – exacerbating not only income inequality, but also inequality of opportunity. This Regional Conversation will discuss pathways to digital inclusion and innovation drawing from the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders. <https://www.unescap.org/events/2020-regional-conversation-1>

31 August 2020: *Regional Conversation Series on Building Back Better: Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond in Asia and the Pacific*

This Regional Conversation will share insights on the proposed policy options that are most suitable for the region’s economies. It will revolve on the following questions: (1) What is the situation of fiscal space, debt sustainability, and foreign exchange liquidity in Asia Pacific economies? Which national, regional and global initiatives should countries support to address these issues? (2) What key policies can be implemented to build back better the region’s economies? Which policies are most urgently needed in the region and how they can be prioritized? (3) How can regional cooperation support resilient, inclusive, and sustainable economic recovery? <https://www.unescap.org/events/2020-regional-conversation-2>

3 September 2020: *SME Policy Guidebook - Expert Group Meeting*

In 2012, ESCAP published a Policy Guidebook for SME Development in Asia and the Pacific. During 2020 the Secretariat will work on the second edition of the Guidebook. As earlier informed, ESNB members are invited to volunteer to contribute to this process e.g. through offering expert advice on special issues (like SME finance, digitization, start-ups), through participation in expert meetings and peer-reviews, or by proposing on such issues to contribute to the process. As a first step, on 3 September, from 2PM to 5:30PM, an Expert Group Meeting will be held to review the outline of the second edition of the Policy

Guidebook. ESNB members are invited to volunteer to participate in this activity and contact the secretariat to receive the relevant documentation (esbn@un.org).

25 September 2020: Regional Conversation Series on Building Back Better: Supply Chains and Connectivity. Save the date – details TBC.

29 October 2020: ESCAP Sustainable Business Network (ESBN), 8th Meeting

The ESCAP Sustainable Business Network (ESBN) will meet virtually on 29 October 2020 in connection with the Asia-Pacific Business Forum.

<https://esbn.unescap.org/events/escap-sustainable-business-network-esbn-8th-meeting>

30 October 2020: Asia-Pacific Business Forum (APBF) 2020

As the annual ESNB summit event, the Asia-Pacific Business Forum will be held virtually on 30 October 2020 under the theme “The Future of Global Value Chains and Implications for SMEs”. The Forum will discuss innovative solutions to address the challenges and capitalize on opportunities to recover from the Covid-19 induced crisis and global trade tensions, and restore global trade and investment links through GVCs, while supporting the transfer to more world. Various members of the ESNB Executive Council have been approached to moderate sessions of the Forum. The programme is undergoing frequent changes but the latest version can be found at: <https://esbn.unescap.org/events/asia-pacific-business-forum-apbf-2020>. Registration details will be available through this weblink later this month when the online platform for the Forum has been established.

15-19 February 2021, Bangkok, Thailand: Seventh Trade and Investment Week of UNESCAP

Including:

- **17-19 February 2021: Committee on Trade and Investment, 7th Session.** Details to be advised
- **Tenth Asia-Pacific FDI Network Meeting,** postponed from December 2020. Details to be advised
- **18-19 February 2021: 2nd Forum on Trade Digitalization for Sustainable Regional Integration:** This Forum provides a platform for public and private sector experts from the region and beyond to share their experiences in enabling cross-border paperless data exchange. It will feature presentations of bilateral, regional and global initiatives to enable electronic exchange and legal recognition of electronic data and documents, to reduce trade costs and boost regulatory compliance. Panelists will share insights on how governments can deepen cooperation in this area, including through collaboration with the private sector and through South-South cooperation. The Forum will also provide updates on how frontier technologies such as blockchain and artificial intelligence are being applied to make trade easier and more inclusive. Finally, it will facilitate exchange of views on how to ensure that trade digitalization can most effectively contribute to the sustainable development of the region. <https://www.unescap.org/events/2nd-forum-trade-digitalization-sustainable-regional-integration>

Recently published by ESCAP

ESCAP Policy Brief Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic: Coping with the ‘new normal’ in supply chains

Among other things, the COVID-19 crisis has called for the reassessment of risks and sourcing criteria in global value chains (GVCs) and for their shortening. This, in turn, has given momentum to discussions on

the establishment and strengthening of national and regional supply chains. The new pattern of GVCs remodelled to fit into this new design will have to absorb extra costs from redundancy and inefficiency, which will eventually be shifted onto consumers. In the Asia-Pacific region small developing economies, in particular least developed countries (LDCs), will suffer the most; not only have they struggled to be included in the GVCs of the recent past, but the new shortened GVCs might bypass them altogether.

<https://www.unescap.org/resources/beyond-covid-19-pandemic-coping-new-normal-supply-chains>

Policies and Strategies to Promote Grassroots Innovation Workbook

Grassroots innovation is a modality of inclusive innovation that enables extremely affordable, niche-adapted solutions to local problems, often unaided by public sector or outsiders. The Honey Bee Network has been leading the grassroots innovation movement in India. In the past three decades, it has strengthened the inclusive innovation ecosystem of the country and has become a global benchmark of frugal, friendly and flexible solutions for men and women farmers, pastoral and artisan households, mechanics, forest dwellers, fishermen etc. This workbook draws on the experience of the Honey Bee Network and discusses experiences, issues and strategies that could also be relevant for other countries.

<https://www.unescap.org/resources/policies-and-strategies-promote-grassroots-innovation-workbook>

Negotiating strategies for LDCs to make the most of Aid for Trade (17 July 2020)

This paper explores the kinds of demands governments in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) could and should be formulating and submitting in the context of the e-commerce negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as well as any current or proposed Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) they are engaged in with advanced industrialized countries.

<https://www.unescap.org/resources/negotiating-strategies-lDCs-make-most-aid-trade>

Non-tariff measures and sustainable development in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (14 July 2020)

This study analyses the relationship between non-tariff measures (NTMs) applicable in the agricultural sector of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

<https://www.unescap.org/resources/non-tariff-measures-and-sustainable-development-kazakhstan-and-kyrgyzstan>

A Guidebook for Assessing SDG Investment Needs (13 July 2020)

This Guidebook aims to provide practical guidance for policy makers and other stakeholders on how to estimate the investment needs for achieving the Goals. It builds on the analytical framework used in ESCAP's Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2019: Ambitions beyond Growth, which estimated that an additional investment of \$1.5 trillion per year would enable Asia-Pacific developing countries to achieve the Goals by 2030. It comes with an online dashboard on SDG investment trends.

This Guidebook aims to support countries in their implementation of the Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs).

<https://www.unescap.org/resources/guidebook-assessing-sdg-investment-needs>

An assessment of fuel-exporting countries in Asia and the Pacific coping with COVID-19 (10 July 2020)

COVID-19 and the oil prices crash induced by it have imposed a double whammy on fuel-exporting countries in Asia and the Pacific. Compared to other countries, they are likely to experience greater economic weaknesses, as they face not only slowdown in economic activities, but also revenue shortfalls, deteriorating export earnings and capital flight, and depreciation pressure on currencies due to lower-than-expected oil prices.

<https://www.unescap.org/resources/assessment-fuel-exporting-countries-asia-and-pacific-coping-covid-19>

Freight transport and COVID-19 in North and Central Asia: Changing the connectivity paradigm (7 July 2020)

The challenges posed by the pandemic have, once again, underscored the connectivity difficulties faced by the countries in North and Central Asia. Despite the progress achieved in the recent years, the subregion continues to suffer from high transport costs and low transport connectivity levels due to its geographic position, shortages in the transport infrastructure coverage and operational weakness in freight transport operations. While strategically located between Europe and Asia, North and Central Asia has not sufficiently realized its transit potential to the detriment to its ability to integrate regional and global supply chains. This policy brief focuses on the link between transport connectivity in North and Central Asia and the policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, revisiting the current levels of transport connectivity and reviewing the transport-related policy responses to the pandemic in the subregion.

<https://www.unescap.org/resources/freight-transport-and-covid-19-north-and-central-asia-changing-connectivity-paradigm>

Enabling growth in the new economy: Industrial policy choices in a world of disruptive technological change (1 July 2020)

This paper examines recent technological developments and how they could impact efforts by policymakers and political leaders in developing countries to harness trade and investment liberalization to achieve economic development outcomes. The paper provides a set of policy prescriptions to benefit from the opportunities of the new economy but also to shelter workforces from possible downsides that these new and disruptive technologies may bring with them. It discusses some areas of reform that seem particularly important in light of the technological transformations unfolding, namely skills and education, empowering the private sector and embracing digitization.

<https://www.unescap.org/resources/enabling-growth-new-economy-industrial-policy-choices-world-disruptive-technological>

Working paper series

Macroeconomics: <https://www.unescap.org/publication-series/mpfd-working-papers>

Trade: <https://artnet.unescap.org/publications/working-papers>

Please don't hesitate to get in touch with us to provide input, questions or suggestions for the monthly update: esbn@un.org.

Best regards,

ESBN Secretariat