

COVER STORY

## Economic integration key to development success in Central Asia and the Caucasus



**C**loser regional economic integration is key to meeting many of the challenges and seizing the opportunities of the changing global environment for countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, urged United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP Dr. Shamshad Akhtar during her February visit to five landlocked countries in the subregion.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of independence for many North and Central Asian countries and much has already been achieved in the post-independence era. Market institutions are generally well established and socio-economic progress has been significant, but this is threatened in 2016 by economic contractions driven by steep declines in oil, gas and commodity prices, as well as ongoing currency depreciations.

The deep and complex reforms necessary to build economies that are capable of weathering these storms have yet to be completed. As a result, according to the latest ESCAP analyses, the economies of North and Central Asia, excluding the Russian Federation, saw GDP growth fall to 3 per cent last year, down from 5.1 per cent in 2014. This is expected to improve only slightly in 2016, to 3.4 per cent.

While North and Central Asia has the lowest share of intra-regional trade in Asia and the Pacific, at 6.6 per cent, the subregion has seen rising commodity dependence during the last decade as a result of strong demand and high prices. The difference between commodity prices and their average production costs has increased significantly and remained above 30 per cent of GDP for the subregion over the past 25 years.

Speaking during the two-week visit to the subregion, Dr Akhtar called for a renewed commitment to economic diversification specifically in priority areas such as cross-border infrastructure in transport, energy and ICT, as well as for additional policy reforms to support market-driven trade and investment-led diversification and integration.

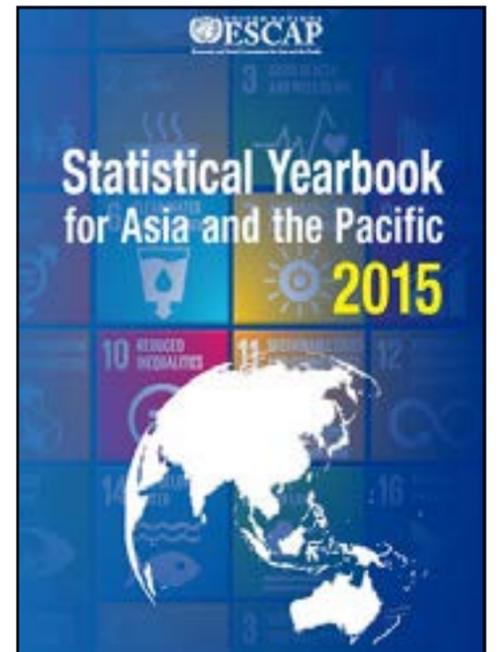
“Enhanced regional integration will accelerate economic structural diversification and promote job-generating growth for sustainable development in North and Central Asia,” said Dr. Akhtar, adding that “a valuable window of opportunity now exists for the subregion to revisit its development trajectory, and to effectively implement the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

(Continued on page 1)

STATISTICS

PAGE 1

### Better data critical to SDG achievement



GENDER EQUALITY

PAGE 2

### Gender responsive budgeting needed to advance SDGs



TRANSPORT

PAGE 2

### New e-learning series on trade facilitation

MARCH EVENTS

PAGE 3

### Upcoming at ESCAP

(Continued from cover)

Dr. Akhtar's two-week visit included meetings with the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. The Region's leaders were united in their view that current investments in physical infrastructure would be most productive if accompanied by a regional integration architecture that provides expanded opportunities for mobilizing financing for development, as well as trade and investment.

To support countries in taking advantage of this window of opportunity, ESCAP will host an unprecedented dialogue for the leaders of North and Central Asia on 17 May in Bangkok, as part of the 72nd ESCAP Commission Session. By creating a platform for all leaders of the subregion to set a new vision and course for regional economic cooperation and integration, ESCAP aims to accelerate coherent structural reform and economic diversification, for a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable subregion.

For more visit: <http://bit.ly/escaoped>



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STATISTICS

## Sustainable development impossible in Asia-Pacific without better data

**T**here is an urgent need to improve data and statistics, if the transformative aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are to be met in Asia and the Pacific. Data are the lifeblood of decision-making. Without them, designing, monitoring and evaluating policies for sustainable development become almost impossible. This is the key message of the *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015 - facts and trends at the outset of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* –launched by ESCAP, on 17 February.

The Yearbook presents analyses of the major development trends for countries in Asia and the Pacific as they relate to the new 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Yearbook shows that although 1.1 billion people in Asia-Pacific have lifted themselves out of extreme poverty since 1990, 53 per cent of the world's extreme poor still live in this region. Despite huge progress in the proportion of the population affected by hunger, the number of people

affected by hunger has remained at nearly 300 million since 1990. Women are continuously disadvantaged in employment and political life in many countries of the region, and child marriage and violence against women and girls are still widespread.

The Yearbook also identifies some of the many existing data gaps for SDG monitoring, illustrating the need to strengthen data and statistics to meet the transformative aspirations of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific. For example, there is a significant lack of data on fundamental aspects of social, economic and environmental issues, including registration of births and deaths, and the extent and impact of pollution.

For a copy of the report visit: <http://bit.ly/syb2015>



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THE YEARBOOK IDENTIFIES EXISTING DATA GAPS FOR SDG MONITORING, ILLUSTRATING THE NEED TO STRENGTHEN DATA & STATISTICS

## GENDER EQUALITY

# Joint UN seminar calls for gender responsive budgeting to advance SDGs in Asia-Pacific

**T**ransformative financing for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are at the center of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for a 'significant increase in investment to close the gender gap and strengthen support for institutions in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women.'

In this context, ESCAP, UN Women and UNDP jointly convened a regional seminar on 'Transformative Financing

for the Achievement of Gender Equality by 2030,' from 18 to 19 February. The Seminar provided a forum for Asia-Pacific countries to deepen their understanding and exchange ideas on the issue of financing for gender equality in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

THE SEMINAR HIGHLIGHTED THAT WHEN COUNTRY BUDGETS WERE PREPARED, THE ALLOCATION FOR INFRASTRUCTURE OFTEN IGNORED HOW WOMEN AND GIRLS WERE AFFECTED

The Seminar highlighted that when country budgets were prepared, the allocation for infrastructure or transportation tended to ignore how women and girls were affected, while in some cases, funding policies on women's issues like the reduction of maternal mortality and the prevention of violence against women were low priorities. Participants agreed that concerted efforts from all stakeholders were critically needed in order to reduce such inequality.

For more visit: <http://bit.ly/gender-eqty>



## TRADE

## ESCAP launches e-learning series on business process analysis for trade facilitation

**E**SCAP has launched an e-learning series on business process analysis (BPA) for simplifying trade procedures.

Aimed at policymakers and stakeholders involved in designing and managing trade facilitation projects, the seven-module course introduces a step-by-step method for analysing trade procedures and

developing recommendations to simplify these procedures based on established international standards.

The launch comes as an increasing number of countries both from within and outside the Asia-Pacific region have requested support from ESCAP to conduct BPA of trade procedures as part of trade facilitation reform efforts. BPA is considered the first necessary step to simplify trade procedures. Moving goods across borders requires meeting

extensive commercial, transport and regulatory requirements. A lack of understanding of the overall international supply chain leads to inefficient operations and often creates unnecessary delays and costs. In this context, the study of the "as-is" business processes through the use of a BPA project provides a way to better understand and potentially improve trade across borders.

You can access the e-learning series via: <http://bit.ly/bpa-course>

FIJI

## ESCAP supports government expenditure planning for sustainable development



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Senior representatives of the Ministries of Finance and National Planning from Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu met in Nadi, Fiji from 15 to 19 February to develop strategies to improve medium-term expenditure planning for sustainable development.

The five-day workshop co-hosted by the ESCAP Pacific Office and the Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre (PFTAC) focused on improving medium-term government budgeting to achieve national development plans, and participants discussed ways of enhancing budget transparency, improving the quality of government spending; and managing fiscal risks including debt repayment.

An important objective of the workshop was to help develop guidelines on good practice for strengthening medium-term expenditure planning and better linkages to national budgets.

For more visit <http://bit.ly/sro-pacific>

MARCH EVENTS

## Upcoming at ESCAP



[Third Session of the Working Group on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022](#)

Bangkok, Thailand  
2 March to 4 March 2016

[Workshop on Knowledge and Policy Gaps in Disaster Risk Reduction and Development Planning](#)

Bangkok, Thailand  
8 March to 9 March 2016

[ARTNeT-LES Seminar on the New Generation of FTAs and their Implications on Health Systems and Policies](#)

Bangkok, Thailand  
11 March 2016

[Training Course on Information Economy Statistics for the Asia-Pacific Least Developed Countries](#)

Bangkok, Thailand  
14 March to 18 March 2016

[Forum on Public Private Partnership \(PPP\) Policy Frameworks for Myanmar](#)

Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar  
17 March 2016

[Third Meeting of Legal and Technical Working Groups of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-Border Paperless Trade Facilitation](#)

Bangkok, Thailand  
21 March to 23 March 2016

[Second Meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-Border Paperless Trade Facilitation](#)

Bangkok, Thailand  
23 March to 25 March 2016

[Multi-stakeholder Dialogue on Strengthening Local Capacities for Climate-Resilient Agriculture in Myanmar's Dry Zone](#)

Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar  
24 March to 25 March 2016

[Capacity Building Workshop on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation](#)

Bangkok, Thailand  
25 March 2016

[Committee on Social Development, Fourth Session](#)

Bangkok, Thailand  
28 March to 30 March 2016

[Asia-Pacific Workshop on Building Capacity to Develop Youth Policies](#)

Bangkok, Thailand  
29 March 2016

[First High-Level Follow-up Dialogue on Financing for Development in Asia and the Pacific](#)

Incheon, Republic of Korea  
30 March to 31 March 2016

[Calendar of meetings 2016](#)