

SUMMARY OF THE FIFTH ASIA-PACIFIC FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: 28-30 MARCH 2018

The fifth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) took place from 28-30 March 2018 in Bangkok, Thailand. Organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Forum is the Asia-Pacific regional preparatory meeting for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) that will be held at UN headquarters in New York in July 2018. The upcoming HLPF will be held on the theme “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies” and the fifth APFSD mirrored this theme.

During APFSD 2018, more than 750 registered participants gathered to debate regional perspectives on the follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), and to discuss ways to strengthen the implementation of the Agenda. The Forum was organized around sessions on:

- Regional perspectives on the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda;
- A High-level panel on “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”;
- Progress in the implementation of SDG 17 (partnership for the Goals) and promoting means of implementation;
- Parallel roundtables for in-depth review of SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 12 (responsible consumption and production) and 15 (life on land);
- Assessment of interlinkages across SDGs;
- Strengthening the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
- National perspectives and progress through the lens of the voluntary national reviews (VNRs);
- Review of the implementation of the Regional Roadmap for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda; and
- Partnerships for implementation of the SDGs.

The Forum was preceded by a youth forum, a civil society forum (People’s Forum) and several regional workshops on: human settlements indicators; building resilience through participation; leaving no one behind; and capacity building for countries submitting VNRs to the HLPF. On the sidelines of the Forum, 24 side events took place, and various reports were launched, including: “Transformation Towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies in Asia and the Pacific,” jointly published

by ESCAP, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP); and “Partnering for Sustainable Development: Guidelines for Multi-stakeholder Partnerships to Implement the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific,” developed by the UN University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability and ESCAP.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE HLPF AND APFSD

HLPF: The HLPF was called for by the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012, in its outcome document, “The Future We Want.” This universal intergovernmental high-level political forum replaces the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. Since 2012, the HLPF has held five annual meetings. The fifth session, held in July 2017, addressed the theme of “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world.” It carried out thematic reviews, reviewed the implementation of several SDGs, and also adopted a Ministerial Declaration. The 2018 session is scheduled to hold from 9-18 July 2018 in New York, USA, and will conduct an in-depth review of SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 and 17.

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APFSD: The APFSD is the largest platform on sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region. It is responsible for the regional review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs. As such, it is an important process for feeding information from Asia and the Pacific into the HLPF. The APFSD stimulates political commitment to and ownership of the post-2015 development agenda, inter alia, by: providing a regional voice on common priorities; sharing experiences among countries; engaging stakeholders; promoting integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. Functioning as a mechanism for sharing best practices and ensuring accountability, it discusses means of implementation to support developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region to achieve the SDGs.

1st APFSD: Organized by ESCAP and co-hosted by Thailand, the inaugural session of the Forum was held from 19-21 July 2014 in Pattaya, Thailand. The Forum took stock of the global discussions on the post-2015 UN Development Agenda focusing on: the development of strong regional inputs to inform global dialogue and decision-making, as well as national responses; and the identification of effective and inclusive means of implementation for a transformational development agenda. Based on the theme of the 2014 HLPF, “Achieving the Millennium Development Goals and charting the way for an ambitious post-2015 development agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals,” the Forum promoted strengthening the policy-science interface and regional accountability mechanisms for all stakeholders.

2nd APFSD: The second session of the APFSD took place at the UN Conference Centre in Bangkok, Thailand from 21-22 May 2015, under the theme “Strengthening integration, implementation and review for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.” Following UN General Assembly resolution 69/270, ESCAP organized the Forum to discuss, in particular: sustainable development challenges and opportunities in the region; monitoring and review mechanisms; perspectives on the post-2015 development agenda and the SDGs; the form and function of the APFSD beyond 2015; and the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the SDGs.

3rd APFSD: The third session of the APFSD, which took place from 3-5 April 2016 in Bangkok, Thailand, was the first regional forum on sustainable development to take place following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in September 2015. It convened under the theme “Regional priorities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific” to shape the regional response to the 2030 Agenda. It discussed: scientific and technological innovations for sustainable development; making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; and the development of a regional roadmap to implement the SDGs.

4th APFSD: The fourth session of the APFSD convened from 29-31 March 2017 in Bangkok, Thailand, under the theme “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing Asia-Pacific,” in response to ESCAP resolution 72/6 committing to the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and



Photo session of the high-level panel segment (photo by ESCAP)

the Pacific. The Forum focused on: regional perspectives on the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda (including in-depth review of SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14 and 17); and strengthening implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia-Pacific, including by further developing a draft regional roadmap for implementing this agenda in the region and defining the form, function and modalities of the APFSD.

REPORT OF THE 5TH APFSD

AGENDA ITEM 1: OPENING, ELECTION OF THE BUREAU AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

On Wednesday morning, 28 March, Ahsan Iqbal Chaudhary, Chair of the 4th APFSD, Pakistan, opened the session and welcomed delegates to the 5th APFSD with a brief review of the achievements of the Forum in eradicating poverty and attaining sustainability. He expressed his desire to make the APFSD the key platform for knowledge exchange and resilience-building in the Asia-Pacific region.

In a video message, Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General, raised concerns about the growing evidence of slow progress on human rights, social justice, and environmental protection in recent years, recalling that only one-third of the SDGs in the region are on “the right path.”

Don Pramudwinai, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Thailand, expressed Thailand’s full support to the APFSD as an effective platform for countries within the region to exchange knowledge. He highlighted three elements that his country regards as crucial to attaining the SDGs: enhancing disaster prevention systems; empowering local communities; and strengthening science, technology and innovation. He concluded by reemphasizing the APFSD as a place for building international partnerships to allow an effective SDG implementation in the Asia-Pacific region.

In a keynote speech, Shamshad Akhtar, Executive Secretary, ESCAP, emphasized that with the APFSD now meeting for the fifth time, it has grown into a mature forum that effectively supports Asia-Pacific countries in fostering the transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies. Noting that while the

region has jump-started the implementation of the SDGs, there is still uneven progress towards the goals to be reviewed at HLPF 2018.

Akhtar highlighted the need for innovative options to bridge SDG gaps faster and to enhance the region's resilience to risks emanating from mega-trends, such as climate change, growing urbanization and aging populations. She further pointed to ESCAP's capacity building activities, including on statistical baselines and multi-hazard warning systems, and praised the work of the Rapid Response Facility and the Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade for providing member States with tax policy advice.

Speaking on behalf of civil society, Joan Carling, activist, the Philippines, highlighted that indigenous peoples are not anti-development, but oppose development that leads to displacement, conflict, hunger and inequality. She called for concerted action from all to: guarantee accountability of State and corporate actors; promote policy coherence; and ensure the participation of vulnerable groups, such as indigenous peoples, workers, women, the disabled, LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer), and youth.

Delegates elected Rajiv Kumar, Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog, India, and Levan Davitashvili, Minister of Environment Protection and Agriculture, Georgia, as Co-Chairs, and all ministerial level attendees as vice-chairs of the Bureau. The meeting agenda (ESCAP/RFSD/2018/L.1) was adopted without amendment.

AGENDA ITEM 2: REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Under this agenda item, delegates considered four documents: Regional and sub-regional perspectives on the transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies (ESCAP/RFSD/2018/1); Assessment of progress in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 and 17 at the regional level (ESCAP/RFSD/2018/INF/1); and Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Goal data availability report (ESCAP/RFSD/2018/INF/2). This agenda item was discussed during four sessions, summarized below.

SESSION 1: HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT SOCIETIES: The aim of this high-level panel was to discuss the best pathways towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Opening, chair of the session David Ranibok Adeang, Minister of Finance and Sustainable Development, Nauru, explained that the panel discussion would focus on the capacity and policy needs for communities to become more resilient.

Shamshad Akhtar moderated the panel and asked panelists to present examples of successful resilience building in their countries and to outline solutions for effective policy responses.

Faimalotoa Kika Iemaima Stowers, Minister for Women Affairs, Social and Community Development, Samoa, emphasized the implementation of early warning systems and the development of educational programmes to cope with natural disasters.

Rajiv Kumar, Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog, India, reflected on India's top actions to empower people and build resilience, underlining some of his country's programmes related to: improved monitoring schemes in selected districts; development of policies to provide health insurance for the "bottom 400 million"; improved roads in rural areas; a national strategy on nutrition; and schemes to electrify all Indian villages.

Levan Davitashvili shared examples of institutional changes in his country, noting plans to build social, economic and environmental resilience particularly through: education; labor force transformation; making the government more efficient and less bureaucratic; and strengthening opportunities for civil society input on environmental assessments.

Alexander Bedritsky, Advisor to the President and Special Representative of the President on climate and sustainable development, the Russian Federation, described how his country set up indicators to evaluate SDG fulfillment. Noting the development of low-emission strategies, he highlighted significant potential for carbon sequestration in soils.

During the second round of questions, Davitashvili underscored that to prevent ecological disasters such as floods and landslides often affecting his mountainous country, an effective national monitoring system for early warning has been built. Stowers shared her country's experience in improving the understanding of risk drivers, identifying the main vulnerable groups, and increasing local communities' awareness of potential disasters through training programmes.

Kumar clarified risks related to poverty, commodity prices, financial systems, and natural disasters. Measures taken by the country to address these include: cooperating with other



Young people gather at an exhibition on the sidelines of the APFSD. (photo by ESCAP)

countries within the region to minimize vulnerability to financial shocks; enhancing prediction and prevention methods for disasters such as tsunamis and flood events; and providing direct transfer of financial assistance to the poor.

In the ensuing discussion, Bambang Susantono, Asian Development Bank (ADB), highlighted that the Asia-Pacific region is faced with a number of complex challenges and risks, notably the ones linked to climate change. He stressed the need for resilient infrastructure, gender mainstreaming, and integrated approaches; and noted that the ADB aims to strengthen regional cooperation not only between governments, but also at the level of corporate actors and civil society.

Haoliang Xu, UN Development Programme (UNDP), cited examples from the Philippines, India, Bangladesh and Japan to illustrate how resilience thinking, new technologies, and working with different constituencies are critical in promoting sustainable development. With regards to disaster risk reduction, he specifically mentioned how the designation of evacuation routes, cellphone mediated alerts, and educating school children can significantly reduce human fatalities.

Lisa Dacanay, Institute for Social Entrepreneurship in Asia, called for the support of social entrepreneurs, noting that they can create wealth and reduce poverty.

From the floor, Fiji underscored the need for regional level support for member States' transitions to resilient societies, highlighting that some countries have greater needs than others. Bangladesh emphasized his country's long history of building resilience, and noted activities relating to, inter alia, enforcing environmental safeguards, investing in public health, and reducing income inequalities.

SESSION 2: PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG17 AND PROMOTING MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION:

Levan Davitashvili opened the session. Ahsan Iqbal Chaudhary, Minister for Planning, Development and Reform, Pakistan, moderated the panel. Hong Joo Hahm, Deputy Executive Secretary for Programmes, ESCAP, underscored the need for partnerships to achieve the SDGs and called for strengthening both the quantity and quality of indicators to assess progress.

Tojiddin Jurazoda, Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Tajikistan, shared his country's experience in implementing SDG 17 and underscored national priorities related to energy security, overcoming challenges related to the country being landlocked, food security and quality nutrition, and job creation. He concluded by pointing to measures aimed at providing better conditions for businesses, including tax reforms, legislation on public private partnerships, and the establishment of free economic zones.

Shireen Sandhu, Director, Global Development Policy, Multilateral Development and Finance Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, highlighted the APFSD as a good opportunity to consider progress and challenges related to the preparation of her country's VNR. She underscored consultations with civil society through 300 case studies, which informed the progress of the 2030 Agenda in her country, adding that "we must collect data to assist us to tell our story."

Chhime Tshering, Director, National Statistics Bureau, Bhutan, highlighted the importance of reliable data and presented some of his country's initiatives on national ecosystem mapping and restructuring of the national data bureau to enhance data collection and dissemination processes.

Ji-hyun Park, Minister and Permanent Representative to ESCAP, Republic of Korea, underscored that, with the country conducting its VNR in 2016, significant progress has been made on leveraging domestic indicators on sustainable development. She further highlighted positive outcomes of the country's initiative on smart cities, stressing the importance of mobilizing the private sector and promoting innovative financial solutions for the implementation of the SDGs.

In his final remarks, moderator Chaudhary stated that the Asia-Pacific region has immense development opportunities and noted the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as an opportunity for boosting social development within the wider South and Central Asian region.

During statements by member States and stakeholders, the Philippines emphasized that the issue of data availability is a central concern for her country. She pointed to the lack of disaggregated data, and delineated her country's efforts to continue gathering comprehensive data to monitor progress on SDG implementation, including by leveraging it from businesses, academia and civil society.

The Russian Federation highlighted its efforts to promote international cooperation that leads to greater mutual respect, accountability and transparency. India outlined national and sub-national coordination efforts that aim to mobilize stakeholders to implement the SDGs and periodically review progress. Thailand delineated his country's "whole of society" and "whole of government" approach to build mutual trust among stakeholders towards the implementation of the SDGs. He further pointed to the "sufficiency economy philosophy" as a guiding principle for Thailand's development cooperation.

Myanmar highlighted the country's Central Statistical Organization as a national focal point for SDG assessment. She said the country has played an important role in setting up partnerships on water resource management within the region and is drafting a new national water law on which it will solicit public input. Nepal called for international support for domestic efforts to achieve the SDGs, noting in particular, the potential of smart technology, low-carbon engineering, and financial incentives. Sweden, as a development partner of the Asia-Pacific region, stressed the urgent need to empower women and minority groups, and to strengthen their participation in decision making in order to build resilience.

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) stated that the organization plays an important role in supporting the Asia-Pacific region in the aftermath of natural disasters, notably in the form of cargo delivery and refugee transfer. A participant from the Philippines delivered a statement on behalf of 200 civil society organizations, an outcome of the People's Forum that preceded the fifth APFSD, outlining key concerns of civil society, including: insufficient attention to the issue of social

inclusion; unequal power structures disadvantaging workers; insufficient environmental protection; and, above all, the growing number of human rights violations in the region.

SESSION 3: PARALLEL ROUNDTABLES FOR IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF SDG GOALS 6, 7, 11, 12, AND

15: Designed to establish a shared understanding of regional progress on the SDGs up for review at the 2018 HLPF, five parallel roundtables took place to address current challenges and develop policy recommendations.

SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation): Maki Hayashikawa, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Sunniva Bloem, Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN (FAO), and Cristina Martinez, International Labour Organization, moderated the session.

The first panelist, Eunhee Lee, UNESCO, highlighted safe drinking water, pollution and unsustainable water use as specific key challenges for addressing SDG 6 within the Asia-Pacific region. Shaila Shahid, Gender and Water Alliance, Bangladesh, stressed that water touches upon all aspects of human life and listed key challenges within the region such as: safe drinking water in rural areas; unsustainable water withdrawals; data management; financial constraints; and water-induced disasters and climate change.

During breakout group discussions, participants highlighted some key points including: enhancing the implementation of existing policies and laws in the water sector, supported by monitoring and accountability schemes; and improving the management of recycled water and other forms of water.

SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy): Hongpeng Liu, ESCAP, moderated the session, which started with Sergey Tulinov, ESCAP, presenting the goal's profile. Short presentations from Pranab Baruah, Global Green Growth Institute; Takahiro Hasegawa, Ministry of the Environment, Japan; and Sohel Ahmed, Grameen Shakti, provided inputs for the discussions.

Participants then broke into working groups to discuss issues such as promising innovations, means of implementation, and interlinkages between SDG 7 and other goals.

SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities): Stefanos Fotious, ESCAP, moderated the session. Recalling that cities are both centers for social transformation and pockets of vulnerability, he noted the slow pace of slum reduction in urban areas and the reduction of clean air in mega cities, an human right issue and yet increasingly compromised by unprecedented pollution.

Kinlay Dorjee, Mayor of Thimphu, Bhutan, highlighted actions in his country to make sure that cities contribute to the pursuit of the happiness index, underscoring policies, inter alia, on: waste management; rapid public transports; expansion of resources for affordable housing; and incentives for encouraging urban populations to remain physically active to prevent the rise of non-communicable diseases.

Norliza Hashim, Urbanice Malaysia and Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government, Malaysia, reflected on urban issues in highly populated areas and stressed that the

SDGs must be streamlined into economic plans, describing Malaysia's efforts in this regards. She called for "localizing" the language of high-level platforms to ensure an impact at the local level and celebrated the rising profile of local councils in fostering urban design and innovation.

In breakout groups, participants highlighted several elements of progress on SDG 11, including: policies on social housing; localization of the SDGs; empowerment of sub-national governments; decentralization of fiscal decisions; greater attention to the root causes of rural migration; promotion of local peer-to-peer learning; and participatory budgets.

SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production): Moderator Mia Mikic, ESCAP, presented the SDG 12-related results of an ESCAP-led survey of stakeholders' perception of progress made towards the SDGs. According to the survey, the region was found to, overall, have regressed on Goal 12 but had made good progress on: national action plans and public procurement; environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste; and corporate sustainability reporting. The survey also highlighted issues requiring increased attention: material footprint and resource use; waste reduction and management; consumer information and education; sustainable tourism; and fossil fuel subsidies.

Roundtable participants then heard inputs from two panel speakers and a discussant from civil society. Arab Hoballah, SWITCH-Asia SCP Facility, emphasized the need to localize the delivery of sustainable consumption and production (SCP), highlighting the key role of small and medium enterprises and consumers. He further pointed to factors necessary for the transition, including: creating knowledge; incentivizing innovation; designing sustainable products; changing consumer behavior; and enhancing governance mechanisms.

Noer Adi Wardoyo, Ministry of Environment, Indonesia, said that, while top-down approaches such as green procurement and waste management regulation are promising, systemic change can only be reached by engaging consumers.

Alka Awasthi, Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants Society: cautioned against relying on large-scale technical solutions; called for increased consideration of the transformative potential of small projects; and pointed to the role of the political economy in promoting unsustainable lifestyle practices.

Participants then broke into working groups to discuss, among other things, best practices and the interlinkages between SDG 12 and the others.

SDG 15 (life on land): The session, moderated by Jaco Cilliers, UNDP, started with Kenichi Shono, FAO, outlining the goal's profile. Before breaking into thematic working groups, participants heard inputs from two panelists and a discussant from civil society: Hak-Kyun Maeng, Ministry of Environment, Republic of Korea; Sonali Senaratna Sellamuttu, International Water Management Institute; and Nukila Evanty, RIGHTS Foundation.



An overview of the session “Assessment of Interlinkages Across SDGs” (photo by ESCAP)

At the end of the day, delegates witnessed the launch of the report “Transformation Towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies in Asia and the Pacific,” jointly published by ESCAP, ADB and UNDP.

SESSION 4: ASSESSMENT OF INTERLINKAGES ACROSS SDGs: Levan Davitashvili chaired the session. Eun Mee Kim, Institute for Development and Human Security at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, moderated it. Rapporteurs shared the results of the roundtable work from the previous day.

SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation): Ashok Kumar, NITI Aayog, India recommended:

- ensuring policy coherence and inter-sectoral coordination within and between countries by enhancing synergies and minimizing trade-offs between sectors and the SDGs;
- safeguarding good access to water and sanitation for all with a particular focus on women, children and the poor;
- promoting water-related innovations and green jobs across countries; and
- enhancing incentives and compliance for sustainable water management and sanitation.

SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy): April Porteria, Centre for Environmental Concerns, the Philippines, highlighted as key action points:

- enhancing energy access, including in rural and remote areas;
- improving energy efficiency in industry and households;
- strengthening regional infrastructure connectivity to foster economies of scale and enable wider dissemination of renewable energy;
- reforming the energy sector to encourage decentralized production; and

- ensuring that energy policies primarily respond to the needs of local communities and stimulate small renewable energy projects that are resource efficient, environmentally sustainable, and promote job creation.

SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities): Bernadia Tjandradewi, United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific, shared key messages from the group discussion, calling for:

- improved data and information, including disaggregated data, which remains a challenge for assessing progress in achieving the SDGs and for ensuring local level accountability;
- further documentation of innovative policies at the local level and action to strengthen the inclusion of local communities, especially associations representing the urban poor;
- greater development of national multi-stakeholder coordination platforms; and
- enhanced analysis of the interlinkages between all SDG targets and SDG 11.

SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production): Reporting back to plenary, Karma Tshering, National Environment Commission, Bhutan, shared key messages from the roundtable discussions, calling for:

- shifting to an integrated and inclusive circular economy approach integrating SCP into core economic agendas and sectoral plans;
- identifying interlinkages, potential synergies and trade-offs between SDGs at the target level;
- promoting inter-ministerial dialogues and multi-stakeholder consultations to foster integrated approaches; and
- promoting SDG 12 as an enabler of other SDGs.

SDG 15 (life on land): Reporting back to plenary, Douglas Nanayakkara, Ministry of Sustainable Development and Wildlife, Sri Lanka, highlighted key recommendations from the roundtable, including the need to:

- clarify land-tenure arrangements;
- integrate information from diverse sources - including local, indigenous and traditional knowledge - to support ecosystem-based management;
- mainstream biodiversity conservation across all sectors and ministries, including ministries of finance, planning, and agriculture; and
- achieve land degradation neutrality.

After the statements of the roundtable rapporteurs, two panelists took the floor. Caryl Anne Barquilla, International Forestry Students Association, highlighted that young generations are growing up in a world marked by widespread environmental degradation. She called for everyone to “be the change, educate yourselves and get involved.”

Tony Wong, Chief Executive, Center for Water Sensitive Cities, presented on operationalizing the integration of the SDGs, stressing that the SDGs are interconnected, and cities and towns concentrate and magnify many of the key challenges captured in the goals. He highlighted key steps in localizing and operationalizing linkages between SDGs, including: understanding context-specific linkages; identifying opportunities for synergistic outcomes and priority issues; adopting a combination of structural and non-structural approaches to urban planning; and fostering co-financing and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

The session continued with country and stakeholder statements providing examples of success stories and lessons learned. Nepal reported that his government created new committees for implementing policies to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Fiji highlighted its dedication to: improve access to water and sanitation; enhance urban waste management; and, with international investment and support, improve renewable energy capacity.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) delineated its work in the region, including: promoting dialogue on water issues between neighboring countries, such as in the trans-boundary Brahmaputra river basin; and supporting cooperation between the Republic of Korea, China, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea on the restoration of the Yellow Sea ecosystem.

ICAO highlighted the aviation industry’s goals on carbon offsetting and carbon neutral growth. The International Fund for Agricultural Development stressed the contribution of small-scale farmers to food production, emphasizing that natural resources (such as water) should be managed in a way that addresses the needs of small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples. The Women constituency recalled that women are disproportionately affected by natural disasters and climate change; and called on member States to deliver on the aspiration of the 2030 Agenda to mark a paradigm shift towards a world free of discrimination.

Delegates then watched a video launching the SDG Help Desk, an online platform developed by ESCAP, which serves as a knowledge repository and provides access to, among other things, data portals and e-learning resources.



Karma Tshering, Bhutan, discusses the Voluntary National Review process in his country. (photo by ESCAP)

AGENDA ITEM 3: STRENGTHENING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Under this agenda item, delegates considered three documents: the Synthesis report on the voluntary national reviews submitted by Asia-Pacific countries at the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2017 (ESCAP/RFSD/2018/2); Progress with regard to the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific; (ESCAP/RFSD/2018/3); and Partnerships in Asia and the Pacific for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ESCAP/RFSD/2018/INF/3). This agenda item was discussed during 3 sessions, summarized below.

SESSION 5: NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND PROGRESS THROUGH THE LENS OF THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS:

Stefanos Fotiou, ESCAP, moderated the session, which consisted of rounds of discussions between countries who have already presented their VNRs and countries preparing to do so for the 2018 HLPF. The first round saw a debate between Japan, Georgia, Australia and Armenia.

Kotaro Katsuki, Japan, described the steps taken for his country's "whole of government" approach in preparing the VNR, highlighting the establishment of a SDG headquarter with the support of civil society and the private sector. Underscoring the crucial importance of transparency and accountability in delivering on the SDGs, George Sharvashidze, Georgia, pointed to his country's use of an electronic system to monitor progress achieved by government agencies.

Shireen Sandhu, Australia, acknowledged data-related challenges, and highlighted her government's efforts in identifying what data is currently available and to what extent it can serve to monitor progress on SDG implementation.

Vahram Kashoyan, Armenia, pointed out that the VNR process constitutes a stress-test, which reveals national and international level gaps and allows for the identification of legislation that hinders progress on the SDGs.

Reacting to the panelists' statements, Climate Watch Thailand spoke from the floor highlighting that without the broad engagement of civil society and grassroots movements, SDGs cannot be achieved. She emphasized the importance of accountability and transparency, and concluded that the SDGs need to ensure inclusiveness.

The second round saw a discussion between Bhutan, India, Kiribati, and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat speaking on behalf of Samoa. Ashok Kumar, India, emphasized the importance of high-level commitment and addressing interlinkages between the SDGs. On his country's experience in preparing its VNR in 2017, he pointed to: national consultations engaging a multitude of stakeholders; efforts on capacity building and localizing the goals; and the strong engagement of sub-national governments and the Parliament.

Charmina Sali, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, on behalf of Samoa, highlighted the critical role of all stakeholders, and underlined the need to promote inclusivity, support SDG ownership, and leverage existing resources for national consultations.

Karma Tshering emphasized the importance of data for monitoring progress on the SDGs, and noted gaps in the availability and reliability of indicators. He lamented lack of funding for data monitoring and capacity building. Aoniba Riaree, Kiribati, emphasized her country's limited capacity and financial means for conducting its VNR and expressed gratitude for the support of international organizations, such as ESCAP and UNDP.



A lively discussion on the sidelines of the APFSD 2018 (photos by ESCAP)

Reacting to the panelists' statements, Kaarina Immonen, UN Resident Coordinator in Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), highlighted the importance of setting up country-level SDG indicators, defining clear timelines, promoting stakeholder engagement, and integrating the SDGs into local national plans.

The third round saw a discussion between Lao PDR, Indonesia, Singapore and the Republic of Korea. Addressing a question raised by Anouparb Vongnorkeo, Lao PDR, about ownership and adapting SDGs to national circumstances, Umi Yanti Febriana Silalahi, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia, said political leadership is important to enforce coordination among various stakeholders.

Responding to a question by Shirah Nair, Singapore, on how to deal with societal aging, Yeonjin Lee, Republic of Korea, pointed to measures encouraging childbirth, promoting childcare systems, and enhancing senior pension benefits. Following up on the panelists' statements, Toily Kurbanov, UN Volunteers, praised the presence of a strong volunteering spirit within the Asia-Pacific region, and said people from all walks of life should be included in order to convey the full spectrum of community voices.

The fourth round saw a discussion between Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Viet Nam and Thailand. Answering a question on finance and goal implementation by Douglas Nanayakkara, Sri Lanka, Shamsul Alam, Bangladesh, delineated measures such as integrating the SDGs into the country's five-year plan, and assigning targets to specific ministries.

Responding to a question by Nguyen Thi Thanh Nga, Viet Nam, about involving all stakeholders, especially vulnerable groups, Pichit Boonsud, Thailand, referred to holding public consultations, conducting preparatory meetings with all government agencies for drafting the VNR, and holding forums in universities inviting youth to participate in the process.

SESSION 6: REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REGIONAL ROADMAP FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA: Faimalotoa Kika Iemaima Stowers chaired the session convened to assess progress on the regional roadmap for implementing the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific, adopted at the fourth APFSD and endorsed by ESCAP member States at the 73rd Session of the ESCAP Commission (resolution 73/9). Delegates first watched a short video featuring ESCAP member States presenting ongoing efforts to implement the roadmap. Examples included: the design of elementary school curricula on climate change in Indonesia; grid intensification and extension for rural electrification in India; and programmes to promote women in business in Papua New Guinea.

In a keynote input, Kaveh Zahedi, Deputy Executive Secretary for Sustainable Development, ESCAP, highlighted that the roadmap was the first inter-governmentally agreed, member State-driven, regional guide for implementing the 2030 Agenda. Recalling that the ESCAP Secretariat strives to support member States in achieving the SDGs, he outlined a number of activities undertaken over the past year. These included: the publication of knowledge products such as reports on disaster risk reduction



Kaveh Zahedi, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCAP, presents at the session on the regional roadmap to achieve the 2030 Agenda. (photo by ESCAP)

and sustainable energy; the provision of technological support and capacity building through the Rapid Response Facility; and multi-stakeholder engagement activities such as the Sustainable Business Network, and the midpoint review of the Asian and Pacific decade of persons with disabilities.

In the ensuing interventions by member States, Samoa underscored that realizing gender equality and empowering all women and girls are critical to achieve the SDGs, and praised civil society for holding governments accountable. The Republic of Korea highlighted the importance of statistical data for evidence-based decision making. Viet Nam described national initiatives on SDG consultations and declared that the biggest challenges relate to mobilizing finance and monitoring progress.

The Islamic Republic of Iran emphasized opportunities and challenges related to the nexus between food production and water. He stressed severe droughts affecting his country mainly due to climate change, noting this compromises national food security.

Cambodia highlighted that it is integrating the SDGs into its 2019-2023 National Plan and aims to present its VNR in 2019. The country vowed to enhance the inclusion of the private sector into the formulation of national strategies for SDG implementation.

China reported that the set up of a cross-ministry coordination system, pollution control programmes, and accountability evaluation systems for local officials, led to early results on achievement of the SDGs. India stressed strengthening legislation to ensure the implementation of national policies, and highlighted efforts aimed at social inclusion in the VNR process. Singapore acknowledged that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach for different countries to achieve the SDGs, considering their national circumstances. Sri Lanka described its experience in forming data collection tools through a stakeholder consultation process.

IUCN emphasized the significance of nature conservation for sustainable development and highlighted the organization's role in supporting countries in sharing best practices and forming collaborations to address societal challenges, climate change, and health issues. The UN Population Fund stressed the importance

of guaranteeing women's reproductive rights and access to education and health services; and said that ensuring the rights of children, youth, and women, who set the foundation for future generations, is the cornerstone for attaining the SDGs.

The UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) delineated its efforts in assisting member countries localize goals, set up coalition channels and form common visions. LGBTIQ delivered a consolidated statement from the People's Forum, highlighting its disappointment with the regional roadmap for failing to include more concrete references to international trade, and recommended, among other things, increasing official development assistance, combatting illicit financial flows, and improving impact assessments on trade agreements in the Asia-Pacific region. Youth urged states to ensure better monitoring and implementation of a truly transformative agenda.

Kaveh Zahedi provided final remarks, stressing the need to enhance the speed and scale of implementing the regional roadmap.

SESSION 7: PARTNERSHIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

OF THE SDGs: Thinley Namgyel, Secretary, Gross National Happiness Commission and Vice-Chair of the fifth APFSD, Bhutan, opened the session. Kazuhiko Takemoto, UN University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability, moderated the "Davos Style panel discussion" outlining three pollution-related scenarios for panelists to reflect on.

Kinley Dorjee, Mayor of Thimphu, Bhutan, stated that pollution is a new challenge for his country, noting growing solid waste and rising greenhouse gas emissions as critical threats to sustainability in his country.

Urantsooj Gombosuren, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, noted rising challenges related to heavy metals penetrating the food chain and impacting human health and food security. To ensure that no one is left behind, she called for a redefinition of "vulnerable groups" and for the respect of human rights, recalling increasing attacks on indigenous peoples and journalists. Gombosuren also highlighted participatory budget planning and legal provisions guaranteeing freedom of information as mechanisms contributing to successful civil society engagement.

Pointing to Bangladesh's upcoming graduation from Least Developed Country status, Asif Ibrahim, Vice Chairman, Newage Group of Industries, Bangladesh, highlighted the environmental consequences of his country's rapid industrialization. As examples of successful collaboration between government and private sector actors, he pointed to: stakeholder consultations during the development of Bangladesh's 7th five-year plan; cases of tannery relocations from inner cities to peripheral zones; and the initiative of the Partnership for Cleaner Textile.

Toily Kurbanov emphasized that partnerships aimed at achieving sustainable development need to be conceived as an inclusive processes with long-term perspectives, practical milestones and deliverables on the short run.

Orakanoke Phanraksa, Global Young Academy, pointed to the potential contribution of young scientists in supporting data collection for monitoring progress on the SDGs.

The session continued with countries making statements on best practices addressing sustainability and resilience for partnership. Democratic People's Republic of Korea acknowledged advances in regional cooperation and called for

countries within the region to enhance trust towards a "common destination," despite differences in governance systems. Bangladesh highlighted the potential of regional cooperation initiatives, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the One-Belt-One-Road programme, to foster knowledge transfer, technology sharing, and job creation.

India highlighted partnerships with social groups, academia, and UN organizations to enhance data management, capacity building, and technology assistance. China underscored the South-South Cooperation Initiative as an effective supplementing mechanism for global partnerships within the UN framework.

The Disabled Group highlighted that 15% of the global population lives with some form of disability, calling for better access to communication, basic urban services, including housing and transportation facilities, all crucial for the success of the SDGs. Workers and Trade Unions stressed that partnerships should be beneficial to all and not only to large corporations, calling for respect for workers' rights, social protection and a just transition towards clean energy. The Women constituency condemned the dominant model of partnership, which to date, heavily relies on large corporations, and called for more accountable and just partnerships.

NGOs: lamented the voluntary nature of monitoring mechanisms; said human rights must be at the core of SDG partnerships; and called for participatory impact assessment of the SDGs. Indigenous Peoples said the theme of traditional knowledge was overlooked in the document under agenda item three (ESCAP/RFSD/2018/3) and called for partnerships "with people and not for people." The Sustainable Development Foundation emphasized that the SDGs should enhance the protection of human rights and called upon governments to work in partnership with all major groups.

AGENDA ITEM 4: OTHER MATTERS

Delegates raised no other matters.

At the end of the day, delegates attended a session launching the report "Partnering for Sustainable Development: Guidelines for Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships to implement the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific," a joint publication of the UN University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability and ESCAP.

AGENDA ITEMS 5 AND 6: REVIEW AND ADOPTION OF DRAFT REPORT, AND CLOSING

Following the circulation of the draft report, which included the Chair's summary of the fifth APFSD as an annex (ESCAP/RFSD/2018/L.2) for review, plenary reconvened. Levan Davitashvili opened the floor for comments, clarifying that the draft was not a negotiated text and therefore only factual corrections would be accepted. The Forum adopted the Chair's Summary without amendments.

In closing remarks, Shamshad Akhtar stressed the importance of fostering resilience in the Asia-Pacific region and commended all actors involved in APFSD 2018. She observed that the Chair's Summary will be presented at the 74th Commission session of ESCAP and to the global dialogues on sustainable development, notably the 2018 HLPF. She concluded the meeting stating that "much work remains to be done" and reaffirmed the role of the APFSD as a key platform for advancing sustainable development in the region. Co-chair Davitashvili closed the meeting at 3:34pm.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Second Asian and Pacific Energy Forum: The Asian and Pacific Energy Forum is a ministerial level platform for promoting regional cooperation for enhanced energy security and the sustainable use of energy in Asia and the Pacific. The Forum will review the progress achieved in the region in addressing energy security challenges, use scenarios to access future outlooks and discuss policy options for keeping the region on track towards SDG 7. The Forum will also assess the interlinkages between SDG 7 and other SDGs. **dates:** 3-5 April 2018 **location:** Bangkok, Thailand **contact:** Energy Division, ESCAP **e-mail:** escap-energy@un.org **www:** <http://www.unescap.org/events/apef2>

ECOSOC Partnership Forum 2018: ECOSOC will convene the Partnership Forum on 4 April 2018, in New York, US, under the theme “Partnering for Resilient and Inclusive Societies: Contributions of the Private Sector.” The event will discuss innovative business practices aimed at promoting inclusion and participation of vulnerable populations and explore partnerships with the private sector to harness the potential of big data in the achievement of the SDGs. **date:** 4 April 2018 **venue:** UN Headquarters **location:** New York City, US **contact:** Sumi Han **email:** han4@un.org **www:** <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/node/4965587>

Eighth Regional 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific: The 8th Regional 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific is co-organized by the Ministry of Housing and Affairs, India, the Ministry of the Environment, Japan, and the UN Centre for Regional Development, under the theme, “Achieving Clean Water, Clean Land and Clean Air through 3R and Resource Efficiency- A 21st Century Vision for Asia-Pacific Communities.” **dates:** 9-12 April 2018 **location:** Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India **contact:** National Productivity Council **phone:** +91 11 24607310 **www:** <http://india3rforum.in/index.php>

3rd Asia-Pacific Rainforest Summit: The Summit will focus on “Protecting Forests and People, Supporting Economic Growth” and provide a platform to discuss activities to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and progress in the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change. **dates:** 23-25 April 2018 **location:** Yogyakarta, Indonesia **contact:** aprs-info@cgiar.org **www:** <https://www.cifor.org/asia-pacific-rainforest-summit-2018/>

74th Session of the ESCAP Commission: The 74th session of the Commission will focus on the theme “Inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” and be comprised of a senior officials segment, held from 11- 12 May, and a ministerial segment, held from 14-16 May. The session is an opportunity for leaders and high-level officials to discuss key trends and emerging drivers and consequences of inequality, as well as the measures being taken to reduce inequalities both at the national and regional levels through collective endeavors that reinforce a multilateral approach to shared challenges. **dates:** 11-16 May 2018 **location:** UNCC, Bangkok, Thailand **contact:** Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section, ESCAP **phone:** +66 2 288-1865 **www:** <http://www.unescap.org/commission/74/>

Asia Clean Energy Forum: ACEF is one of the leading clean energy events in Asia and focuses on identifying, discussing and addressing the key clean energy challenges faced in the region. ACEF is jointly organized by the ADB, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Korea Energy Agency. Since 2006, ACEF has been bringing together a diverse mix of project developers, financial institutions and investors, non-profit organizations, entrepreneurs, government officials, donors, and civil society and academia, to exchange experiences on accelerating progress to build a clean energy future for Asia. **dates:** 4-8 June 2018 **location:** ADB Headquarters, Manila, the Philippines **contact:** Asia Clean Energy Forum **phone:** +63 2 632 4444 **email:** cleanenergy@adb.org **www:** <http://www.asiacleanenergyforum.org/>

Regional Consultation on South-South Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific: The UN General Assembly resolutions 71/318 and 71/244 mandated the UN Secretariat to convene the second High-level UN Conference on South-South Cooperation on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA+40). The overarching theme is “Role of South-South cooperation and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: challenges and opportunities”. The Regional Consultation Meeting on South-South Cooperation for Asia and the Pacific, jointly organized by ESCAP, the UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) and the Government of Thailand, will gather regional inputs for the global High-Level Conference. **dates:** 27-29 June 2018 **location:** Bangkok, Thailand **contact:** Strategy and Programme Management Division, ESCAP **phone:** +662-288-1935 **email:** escap-ssc@un.org **www:** <http://www.unescap.org/events/regional-south-south-cooperation>

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2018: The sixth session of the HLPF, convening under the auspices of ECOSOC, will take place from 9-18 July 2018 on the theme “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.” HLPF 2018 will conduct an in-depth review of SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15. SDG 17 is also considered each year. In addition, 47 countries are expected to present their VNRs. **dates:** 9-18 July 2018 **location:** New York City, US **www:** <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2018>

GLOSSARY

APFSD	Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
HLPF	High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
LGPTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
SCP	Sustainable Consumption and Production
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
VNR	Voluntary National Review
UNDP	UN Development Programme