

Keynote speech

Hongjoo Hahm

Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP

Joint conference of the Sector Network Transport, Environment, Energy and Water in Asia (TUEWAS) & Sector Network Natural Resources and Rural Development in Asia (SNRD Asia)

June 1, 2016

Implementing the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific – What Will it Take?

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen

Introduction

- In September of last year, global leaders adopted the pathbreaking and transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Universal, people-centered and inclusive, the Agenda promotes peace and prosperity and will touch the lives of young and old, the poor, women and the vulnerable through a holistic and rigorous integrated approach to end poverty, everywhere, in all of its dimensions.
- The 2030 Agenda, based on 17 goals and 169 targets, is ambitious, but poverty eradication cannot be achieved without joint progress in economic growth, social development and ecological sustainability. It is a bold and inspirational new agenda that will guide us to more sustainable development, to meet our present needs without risking the wellbeing of future generations.
- Such development is urgently needed in the countries of Asia and the Pacific. Although our region has an impressive track record of economic growth and poverty reduction, too many people still live in poverty, social disparities are widening and growth remains inefficient and wasteful.
- Inequalities are pervasive across many of the areas that now constitute the SDGs: In Asia and the Pacific, 2.6 billion people are trapped in poverty; 490 million people in our region still go hungry; more than 420 million still have no access to electricity and nearly 1.7 billion lack access to improved drinking and sanitation. At the same time, inefficiencies in resource use are also persistent: the developing countries in our region require, on average, about 5kg of material to produce one unit of GDP, where industrialized countries need less than one fifth of this. Our CO2 emissions are increasing, while fossil fuels continue to dominate the regional energy mix and many countries of this region face extremely high levels of water stress.

- The majority of the global population lives in Asia and the Pacific. Our region is hosts many of the fastest growing and largest cities, and there is no doubt that the emerging and large middle-classes of Asia and the Pacific will drive global consumption patterns.

Addressing systemic issues to achieve the SDGs, and the role of ESCAP

- Our region thus has a responsibility to lead sustainable development. But what are the conditions to do so successfully? I would like to focus first on some of the systemic issues that need to be addressed to ensure the SD agenda will be successful, and highlight some of the work that ESCAP in these areas.
- At the outset, I would like to highlight one important difference between the MDGs and the SDGs: while MDGs rested on an old model of development where rich nations provide development assistance to poorer countries, the SD agenda represents a new social contract between the governments, leaders and their people. To ensure the success of this contract, cooperation of all stakeholders, countries, states, governments, organisations and the private sector is crucial.
- This means that governments have to embed good governance and inclusion in policy execution and implementation. Thus, the capacity of governments to engage multiple interest groups with widely varying perspectives is critical. We can observe that global society is evolving to a polycentric governance system of collective action in which no individual, organization or government has full control of the development decisions and outcomes for all stakeholders. In this system, solutions will not be found top-down or bottom-up but through a combination of both. This also has implications on our role as the UN, where we now called to facilitate the tapestry of relationships, to strengthen the relationship between duty bearers and their people, and to help governments serve their people better. At ESCAP, we have for instance supported the establishment of the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (RCEM) and continue to work through this mechanism.
- Second, multistakeholder engagement requires trust that in turn will be facilitated by transparency. To assess achievements and identify priority areas governments need access to high quality, reliable data but insufficient statistics and data currently present a challenge for Asia and the Pacific. Our region has, on average, data available for only half of the indicators that have been defined for the Goals. The data we do have is often 3-4 years old, disaggregation is typically limited to sex and urban/rural location, and differences in measurement methods make it challenging to compare across regions.
- Member States need to build the capacity of the statistical systems to get baseline statistical indicators right and also tap new data sources, in close collaboration with private providers on innovative and Big Data – an area ESCAP is actively engaged in as we are pursuing the development of new knowledge products such as indicator dashboards, country profiles and trend analyses and engage in capacity development to national statistical offices.

- The MDGs focused on selected goals related to human development and did not provide much guidance on the means of implementing these goals. In contrast, the SDGs have specific targets related to MoI, and also include a dedicated goal related to MoI. These represent an important area of work for us at ESCAP. Leveraging the implementation of the SDGs requires unlocking finance, science, technology and innovation, trade and capacity development to facilitate global partnerships for sustainable development.
- For instance, sufficient financial resources are needed. Our report “Financing for Transformation” estimates that the Asia-Pacific region will need to invest between \$2.1 trillion and \$2.5 trillion per year to fund a comprehensive agenda for sustainable development. The region has good potential to tap private capital, with global liquidity at close to \$100 trillion and sovereign wealth funds worth about \$3 trillion, but these need to be harnessed effectively.
- We also need to facilitate technological catch-up. Innovation gaps in Asia and the Pacific remain very large. According to the Global Innovation Index, more than a quarter of the countries ranking in the bottom 10% are from Asia-Pacific. However, Asia is also home to some of the world’s technology leaders. The challenge is to bridge this gap and enable countries at all levels of the development spectrum to take advantage of available technologies and develop a robust culture of innovation.
- Successful development is also associated with strategic integration into trade. The performance of several of the SDGs is linked to breakthroughs in trade-related policies. Emphasis has to be placed on promoting universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory, and equitable multilateral trading system.
- And finally, the 2030 Agenda calls for urgent attention towards capacity development, including through south-south collaboration. This includes the need to enable countries to find and adapt the best policy options for sustainability. Partnerships and regional platforms, such as those provided by the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, provide great opportunities for our region to share best practices and compare lessons learned.
- Our member States have recognized the value of the Asia Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD) as the region’s anchor intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder platform, by (i) Supporting countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda, in particular developing countries and countries with special needs, including through capacity development; (2) Providing a regional perspective on implementation of the sustainable development agenda, identifying regional trends, consolidating and sharing best practices and lessons learned; (3) Supporting the follow-up and review of progress on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the regional level.

Localizing the agenda

- Our experience from the MDGs shows that localizing the agenda is critical. Those countries that adapted the global agenda to the national context by developing national goals and targets had the most success in achieving the MDGs.
- We know from the interventions of our member States at the 72nd Commission session that was concluded just recently, that many countries in our region have a head start: Many member States are setting in place coordinating institutions or inter-ministerial mechanisms to steer the multidimensional sustainable development agenda and are beginning to integrate sustainable development into national strategies, plans and budgets.
- The implementation of these national sustainable development plans will often benefit from support provided by international development partners, especially in countries with special needs, and we greatly appreciate that GIZ supports many of our member states in their efforts and the excellent work it does there.
- In this context I am pleased to highlight the project "Integrated Resource Management in Asian Cities: The Urban Nexus" as an example of very successful partnership between ESCAP and GIZ. Since 2013 the project has been assisting 10 cities in 6 countries in developing integrated solutions to pressing urban challenges, with GIZ providing technical assistance and ESCAP promoting policy dialogue within and among countries for long-term policy change. We are very pleased that this partnership will now enter a second phase up until the end of 2018, with a special focus on advancing the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda to be adopted at Habitat III later this year.
- Another area of effective collaboration between GIZ and ESCAP that I would like to highlight is disaster risk reduction. Tackling disasters is essential for reaching the several of the SDGs, including food security, infrastructure, cities and human settlements, climate change and ecosystems. Specifically, we have collaborated on strengthening early warning systems in countries including Cambodia, the Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka and we recently expanded this partnership to also focus on transboundary river basin floods, flash floods and landslides. In 2015 alone, floods caused more than US\$ 11 billion in economic damage, much of which can be attributed to large-scale transboundary floods. Strengthening floods early warning is therefore a high development priority in the region, which is being addressed jointly by ESCAP and GIZ.
- Localization of the sustainable development agenda is also the focus of a joint project between ESCAP and GIZ that was recently submitted to the Ministry of Development Cooperation (BMZ) and that aims to mainstream the implementation of SDGs into sectoral national and subnational development plans and policies in selected pilot countries and for a number of sectors, including agriculture and food and fair trade. We look forward to a favorable outcome, as this project would help us to jointly move our support to the member States of this region forward.

Conclusion

- At the outset I said that the 2030 agenda for sustainable development is an ambitious agenda. However, I would also like to stress that the agenda allows for optimism: the design and formulation of the 2030 Agenda was supported through an unprecedented, multilateral, intergovernmental and inclusive process that listened to priorities and voices of different stakeholders, including more than 3.5 million people from this region alone.
- Now, besides adequate financial means, we need strong political vision, commitment, action at country level, and coordinated actions at international level to ensure that poverty is abolished and “no one is left behind” in the achievement of the agenda. Strong partnerships, such as between our two organizations, ESCAP and GIZ, will be important to achieve the agenda and we look forward to continued and fruitful collaboration.