

# **SOUTH ASIA'S MARCH TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

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## Foreword

The Development Papers Series of the ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office (ESCAP-SSWA) promotes and disseminates policy-relevant research on the development challenges facing South and South-West Asia. It features policy research conducted at ESCAP-SSWA as well as by outside experts from within the subregion and beyond. The objective is to foster an informed debate on development policy challenges facing the subregion and sharing of development experiences and best practices.

This paper prepared by ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office is based on the report of the Second South Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in collaboration with the NITI Aayog (successor of the Planning Commission in India) and the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), on 4-5 October 2018 in New Delhi, India. Designed to serve as the subregional preparatory meeting of stakeholders in South Asia to inform and support the Sixth session of the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD), the two-day event focused on the theme of the 2019 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), ‘Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.’ The Forum brought together over 200 participants, including high-level government officials, regional experts, civil society organizations, academia and other key stakeholders from South Asia to discuss priorities for implementation of the 2030 Agenda in South Asia and the scope for regional cooperation to accelerate the achievement of SDGs in South Asia. This paper summarizes the key highlights and conclusions from the South Asia Forum. The complexity, scope and level of ambition of the 2030 Agenda requires greater coordination and more collaborative partnerships across countries, especially in areas of SDG priorities which have spillovers, interlinkages and trans-boundary impacts, such as, food and energy security, disaster risk reduction and climate action.

I acknowledge the efforts made by ESCAP-SSWA staff who coordinated this meeting as well as prepared the report of the Forum which is the basis of this paper. I also acknowledge the assistance provided by our interns, Mr. Guillaume Derrien, Ms. Aishwarya Patel and Ms. Aveeva Dhillon.

We hope that this paper will contribute to the ongoing deliberations on how regional cooperation could be an important tool for means of implementation to complement the national strategies in achieving the SDGs, with due attention given to specific constraints and challenges faced by countries in South Asia

Nagesh Kumar  
Head, ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office

## **South Asia's March Towards Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals**

### **Abstract**

This paper, prepared by ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office, is based on the report of the Second South Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in collaboration with the NITI Aayog (successor of the Planning Commission in India) and a premier Indian think-tank Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), on 4-5 October 2018 in New Delhi, India. Senior government officials, international and regional experts, civil society representatives, think tanks, academia and other stakeholders discussed key challenges, progress and priorities for implementation of the 2030 Agenda in South Asia and opportunities that South Asian member States could pursue to increase regional cooperation for achieving the SDGs. This paper summarizes the highlights of the discussion at the event and the key conclusions and policy lessons. South Asian countries have an opportunity to tackle many of their common development challenges, and accelerate their progress towards the SDGs, through enhanced regional cooperation for building up productive capacities, strengthening statistical systems, enhancing market integration, improving connectivity, climate action, and tackling shared vulnerabilities and risks. Among the key takeaways from the Forum was the identification of potential areas for greater regional cooperation and articulating the need for a regional framework for achievement of SDGs in South Asia that will be prioritized and implemented as a mandate of ESCAP-SSWA and its work in the subregion

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## 1. Background

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) embody the strategic vision and aspirations of all countries for the future of development and its implementation will require implementation action at the global, regional, subregional, national and local levels, as indicated in General Assembly Resolution 70/1 on Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development comprising 17 Goals is particularly relevant for the countries of South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). Despite sustained high levels of economic growth in recent decades, South Asia lags behind on many social, economic and environmental development indicators. South Asia still accounts for 36% of the world's poor and unacceptably high rates of undernourishment, child stunting, child wasting and child mortality among the regions of the world. Given South Asia's weight in world population and its share in global poverty, the world will not be able to achieve SDGs without South Asia achieving them. South Asia too stands to gain much from the transformational opportunity provided by the 2030 Agenda to adopt inclusive and sustainable development pathways as an opportunity to end poverty and other deprivations.

As a regional commission for Asia and the Pacific, UNESCAP has been supporting the achievement of SDGs by its member States through technical assistance and through a regional follow up and review mechanism institutionalized in the form of Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) feeding into the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), as a part of the regional roadmap for SDG achievement adopted by the ESCAP member States.<sup>1</sup> In addition, ESCAP resolution 73/1 outlines the functions of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development as an inclusive regional intergovernmental forum which supports the preparations for the HLPF for sustainable development in the context of both the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly; discusses national and subregional perspectives and sharing of good practices; provides perspectives for implementing the 2030 Agenda; and assesses progress and provides opportunities for peer learning related to the HLPF thematic goals.

The South Asia Forum on SDGs (SAFSD) has been conceived as the subregional preparatory for APFSD and was launched in 2017 in Kathmandu.<sup>2</sup> SAFSD seeks to strengthen the policy environment that supports the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development by

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCAP resolution 72/6 on 'Committing to the Effective Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific', calls upon member States to cooperate at the regional level in the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

<sup>2</sup> For details, see <https://www.unescap.org/events/south-and-south-west-asia-forum-implementation-sustainable-development-goals-0>

ensuring subregional perspectives on follow up and review of the 2030 agenda are articulated and well reflected in all relevant regional and global processes. SAFSD specifically aims to:

- Enhance awareness and understanding on key challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the regional roadmap to support and complement the subregional agenda through sharing of experiences and knowledge.
- Provide a platform for expert discussions and reflections on subregional perspectives and good practices on the cluster of Goals under review at the HLPF and APFSD in the following year.
- Support capacity building for countries in the subregion ahead of their Voluntary National Review (VNR) presentations.
- Identify ways, through expert discussions to strengthen implementation efforts, stakeholder engagement, follow-up and review, linking national, subregional, regional and global processes.
- Identify needs and opportunities for regional cooperation and delivery by regional and subregional bodies and the United Nations Development System.

The SAFSD-2018 provided a unique opportunity to share perspectives on “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality,” the theme of the 2019 session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2019 and the sixth session of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) also in 2019.<sup>3</sup> It focused attention on SDG 4 on inclusive and quality education, SDG 8 on economic growth and decent work, SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, SDG13 on climate action, SDG 16 on peaceful, inclusive societies and justice for all and SDG 17 on global partnerships.

## **2. Setting the Scene: Contextualizing the SDGs for South Asia**

In his opening remarks, Nagesh Kumar, Director, ESCAP-SSWA, highlighted the relevance of the SDGs for South Asia. He argued that with 36 percent of the world's poor and nearly half of undernourished children, the subregion held the key for global SDG achievement. Recognising the common challenges that South Asia faces, he expressed confidence that SDG achievement can be accelerated by focusing on seven broad strategic policy priorities already identified in the UNESCAP Report on *Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in South Asia*, which cover - creation of jobs through industry oriented structural transformation, universal provision of essential basic services and sustainable infrastructure, universal access to health and education and skills to harness the youth bulge, universal social protection and financial inclusion; sustainable

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<sup>3</sup> UNESCAP, ADB and UNDP have established a partnership to support the attainment of the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific through knowledge products, evidence based policy advocacy, monitoring of the SDGs and capacity development to strengthen regional follow-up and review and national implementation efforts. Under this partnership, an annual thematic report will support discussions at the APFSD and the HLPF, presenting regional perspectives.

agricultural productivity improvements; fostering women's entrepreneurship, and enhancement of environmental sustainability through low-carbon climate resilient pathways.<sup>4</sup> He highlighted that through these policy priorities, South Asia will not only achieve the SDGs but can also be an engine of global growth and the home of the world's largest middle class. He noted that regional cooperation, along with the reinvigorated global and regional partnerships and multi-stakeholder engagements, including civil societies, are key to achieving the goals.

Sachin Chaturvedi, Director-General, RIS, emphasized that the SDGs are no longer seen as an international agenda but have been strongly owned by the countries in the region. There is a remarkable convergence of vision in Government of India underlying the priorities for the SDGs which is evident from the Indian Prime Minister's clarion call of *Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas* ("Participation of All, Development for All"), which clearly highlights India's collective commitment to the 2030 Agenda. He emphasized that India's national development agenda and India's flagship programmes such as the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*, schemes and programmes for financial inclusion are in line with the 2030 Agenda of reaching the last mile and leaving no one behind. India has historically recognized the endogeneity of balanced economic growth as is evident through the Gandhian philosophy of *Sarvodaya* through *Antyodaya*, implying the welfare and progress of all through the empowerment and inclusion of the weakest in the society. Prof. Chaturvedi emphasized that for South Asia policies that promote regional cooperation are critical to achieving the goals in the region and India has shown its commitment, through initiatives like taking leadership role in the International Solar Alliance, recognizes the importance of cooperation for achieving sustainable development and prosperity for its people. Though challenges are immense, especially on SDG 1 on poverty eradication, countries in South Asia need to harness their strengths, build on their synergies and commonalities and change the prevailing negative narratives about South Asia.

Yuri Afanasiev, United Nations Resident Coordinator, India, underlined that Mahatma Gandhi is an illustration and inspiration of what the 2030 Agenda entails and the SDGs are all about. He highlighted the three main challenges for South Asia, particularly India, in the context of the 2030 Agenda - reducing multidimensional poverty, tackling persistent gender disparities and urgent climate action. Gender inequalities have prevented South Asia from achieving not only social indicators but also its economic growth potential. Low rates of female participation in the labour force - partly due to the informal sector and unpaid care work that must be captured in national accounting frameworks - need to be addressed through changes in policies, norms and societal contexts. South Asia, specifically India, needs to demand action on climate agenda since it poses the single largest existential threat to its entire population.

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, South and South-West Asia Office (UNESCAP SSWA) (2018). *Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in South Asia: Key Policy Priorities and Implementation Challenges*. New Delhi: UNESCAP. ST/ESCAP/2740.



In his keynote speech, H.E. Dr. Puspa Raj Kadel, Vice-Chairman, National Planning Commission, Nepal emphasized that timely and effective implementation of policies is key to achieving the SDGs. He stressed the importance of identifying synergies, system wide coherence and interrelationships among the goals, and highlighted the initiatives taken by the National Planning Commission in Nepal to achieve the SDGs. The Government of Nepal has been actively involved in internalizing and localizing the SDGs at all tiers of the government with monitoring and evaluation mechanisms being put in place for tracking progress on the goals along with budget expenditures to estimate their financing needs. He stressed the challenge of having robust disaggregated data at the subnational levels to monitor implementation of the SDGs.

In his inaugural address, H.E. Dr. Rajiv Kumar, Vice-Chairman, NITI Aayog, India appreciated the work done by ESCAP in organizing this dialogue where sharing of experiences of challenges and best practices would help other countries and pave the way for an effective mechanism for regional cooperation. He highlighted the strong sense of ownership the SDGs have generated among various stakeholders in India. South Asia, particularly India, would be the driver for achievement of the SDGs and realization of poverty free, prosperous South Asia. He reiterated that the SDGs have been completely synchronized with India's development schemes and programmes at the Central, as well as State Governments levels. Through programmes like the *Jan Dhan Yojana* (financial inclusion programme), *Ayushman Bharat* (National Health Protection Scheme), the Government of India is looking to bolster delivery of public services to the last mile and leverage the benefits of inclusion for the people at the bottom of the pyramid which is in sync 'no one is left behind'. Dr. Kumar noted that for achieving the SDGs in South Asia, a development strategy must be in place backed by accountability, transparency and good governance. In this context, the Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office (DMEO) in NITI Aayog is involved in real time monitoring and outcome-based performance evaluation.

As the designated nodal body in India to implement, monitor and coordinate the SDGs, the NITI Aayog has been organizing national and subnational consultations with stakeholder to build capacities of different actors responsible for implementing the SDGs, and also a periodic review of progress and contextualization and localization of the SDGs in India. He acknowledged the work done by ESCAP-SSWA office in identifying seven policy priorities in its recent report which are important to deliver SDGs and called for generating a ranking of states and districts on a matrix of indices based on them.

He noted that SDGs signal collective responsibilities of South Asia as a whole to its people and stressed that many of the goals cannot be achieved without greater and deeper regional cooperation in South Asia for instance, end poverty SDG 1, water management (river basins) (SDG 6), climate action (SDG 13), peace and justice (SDG 16) and global and regional partnerships (SDG 17). In this context, he cited the example of the South Asian satellite launched by India which provides granular data for weather monitoring and farmers in the subregion stand to benefit from better weather forecasting. Recognizing that business-as-usual approach will not help in meeting the

2030 Agenda, he encouraged the participants of the Forum to come together to “think out of the box” and identify innovative and effective solutions, for instance, regional monitoring system, cooperation on regional capacity building, that can serve as templates for better regional cooperation among countries in South Asia to provide policy momentum for action on SDG implementation. He argued that such initiatives at South Asian level will expedite the achievement of SDGs in the subregion.

### **3. Review of progress and achievements in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in South Asia**

Representatives from all the eight South Asian countries provided their national perspectives, highlighted the unique development challenges their countries face and identified institutional mechanisms and national strategies being undertaken to meet the 2030 Agenda, also indicating the priorities.

Panelists presented their Voluntary National Review (VNR) status (Afghanistan, India, Maldives presented in 2017, Bhutan, Sri Lanka in 2018 and Pakistan will be presenting in 2019), highlighted the lessons learnt from their VNR preparation, discussed their SDG implementation plans, strategic policies and the ways of implementation. They stated that they have already established institutional mechanisms across multiple agencies to align, contextualize and coordinate the implementation of the SDGs. They reported to have undertaken resource and data gap analysis for implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal), devised alignment and integration frameworks of the SDGs with national policies, plans and strategies (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India) and estimating financial costs/budget needs for achieving the SDGs (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal). Countries have established separate cabinets for SDGs (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), worked on the mapping of SDGs to their plan documents (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal), launched web- based SDG tracker that the public can monitor (Bangladesh), worked on data tracker dashboard up to the district level (India, Pakistan), and worked on narrowing down the indicators based on relevance and their encompassing nature (India).

Common challenges centered on weak stakeholder engagement, especially with the private sector; lack of data availability and disaggregation; differences in relevance of same indicators for each country; absence of robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms; paucity of technical and professional capacities; technology and financing constraints, among effective means of implementation for achieving the SDGs. Country specific challenges and emerging issues were also mentioned such as conflict, resource challenges and insecurity for Afghanistan, climate change vulnerabilities for Bangladesh, water shortages in urban areas, disaster risks and economic vulnerabilities for Bhutan, LDC graduation status for Bhutan and Nepal. Maldives highlighted the unique challenges it faces being a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) which exacerbates the impacts and vulnerabilities from external and internal shocks and provides limited opportunities

for exploiting economies of scale given its dispersed population and high transaction/project costs. Sri Lanka cited the lack of awareness about the main objective of the SDGs to “leave no one behind” and the absence of local indicators to help localize the SDGs in the country. India specified the challenges it confronted in having in place a national strategy to integrate the 2030 Agenda into the development priorities of a country which is vast and diverse, transcending to federal, subnational and local levels, a view that was also echoed by the representative from Pakistan. It was highlighted that there is an important need for transforming the data into an effective policy framework, developing stronger institutional arrangements, national and subnational capacity building community feedback loops, horizontal and vertical policy coherence, collaboration and cooperation across borders, sharing and learning from experiences of peers and developing sustained multi-stakeholder partnerships to mobilize resources for investing in SDGs. Given the ambitious nature of the 2030 Agenda, it was reiterated that participation of various stakeholders is critical, synergies have to be drawn between efforts towards the implementation process and new and pioneering innovations and technologies have to be harnessed, for instance, drone technology to monitor ocean activity in Maldives.

The countries recommended that it is necessary to move from nationalization to localization by mapping the SDGs to subnational and grassroot levels, form stronger partnerships, enable knowledge and technology transfer, build capacities and ensure financial support by donors and partners for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in South Asia. It was emphasized that implementation is very important to change the situation, governments must take the lead, but the achievement heavily depends on the contribution of all stakeholders: private sector, civil societies, individuals, and harnessing effective global and regional partnerships is crucial in achieving SDGs.

In the statement made on behalf of South Asian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), it was pointed out that economic growth should be fair, equitable, and inclusive and concerns were expressed on large data gaps and solutions for implementation. It was emphasized that the vulnerabilities of societies to climate change impacts must be managed across the entire 2030 Agenda and given the interconnected geography of countries in South Asia and their increasing vulnerabilities from multiple climate change threats, collective action and close collaboration to tackle climate change risks are necessary. While some countries have taken institutional and policy action on climate related issues, concerted efforts are still needed to ensure that they achieve their objectives and to address the specific vulnerabilities of different population groups and communities. South Asia has been identified as one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change impacts with an estimated loss of nearly 2 per cent of its economic output by 2050 due to climate risks and fall in living standards of over 800 million people which could push people back into poverty and hunger traps. There is an urgent need for a just and gender-responsive climate framework with adequate gender disaggregated data, a sustainable energy paradigm that prioritizes safe, decentralized renewable energy systems that benefit people and communities along with adequate climate finance for developing countries.

#### **4. Review of selected Goals for HLPF 2019 in South Asia**

Subregional, national perspectives and specific case studies were presented on the cluster of goals under review in 2019 at the HLPF through five break-out groups covering SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13 and 16. The conveners of the respective working groups introduced the Goals and targets and the key challenges faced by the subregion in achieving them, followed by brief remarks by a few key panelists and an open discussion with all participants in respective groups. The working groups covered the following questions in a national context and in relation to the case study “Who are the primary stakeholders in concern?”; “What are the barriers and systemic issues?” and “What are the solutions, policies and interventions at different levels?”. The working groups reported to the plenary session through their conveners.

The common themes that arose in all the working groups include: people identified as vulnerable groups, such as women, people belonging to marginalized communities, like dalits, adivasis (tribals), were the primary stakeholders along with the governments and private sector. There were stakeholders specific to the working groups, for instance, people with disabilities for SDG 4 on inclusive education and SDG 16 on peaceful societies; unemployed youth, migrants, workers in the informal sector with no social security, trade unions and small and medium enterprises for SDG 8 on economic growth and employment; people who are dependent, including children and the elderly, rural and indigenous local communities for SDG 13 on climate change and people belonging to minorities such as transgenders for SDG 16.

Barriers and systemic issues consistent across the working groups centred around quality of institutions, weak monitoring and lack of disaggregated data, paucity of resources, poor infrastructure, lack of effective implementation and coordination mechanisms, lack of effective targeting of public policies and persistent deeply entrenched social and institutional structures which perpetuate discrimination based on gender, caste, and other social identities. The common barriers that emerged across the working groups ranged from social barriers - lack of identification of minority communities and discrimination of vulnerable groups; geographic barriers – access to basic services, quality of infrastructure, access to education, labour markets and social justice; economic barriers – distribution of wealth, targeting of beneficiaries and public financing; political barriers – lack of political will and capacities, absence of cross-border cooperation and lack of participatory community-led approaches.

The working group on SDG 4 identified that major issues are delays in transfers of resources to schools, lack of harmonization of methodologies and definitions for data on education indicators, low quality of education reflected in poor learning outcomes and employability. Among the barriers for the achievement of SDG 8, the group identified systemic issues in the general growth patterns followed by South Asian countries with low share of manufacturing in the subregion’s GDP, reflecting weak industrial base which has prevented growth in alternate occupations for workers displaced from agriculture and fast-growing services sectors of the subregion that has

failed to generate adequate employment opportunities due to low labor-output ratio and high skill requirements. Increasing automation is a major threat to livelihoods and current policy responses to offset the downsides of technological progress are grossly inadequate. The working group on SDG 10 highlighted that structural difficulties for vulnerable groups due to dependence on indirect taxes and the fact that the rich is not taxed enough, socially backward regulations, rural-urban divide and migration related problems are the main barriers. For the working group on SDG 13, the trade-offs between economic growth and climate change, industrialization and sustainability, rapid urbanization, changing land use patterns, lack of capacity of local partners to respond to climate related risks, lack of regional approaches and synchronization of policies were some of the systemic issues. For the working group on SDG 16, barriers and systemic issues related to lack of reliable civil registration and vital statistics, reliable data and reporting on crimes and homicides, discrimination in the labour market in terms of job opportunities and job security, lack of access to a fair and equitable justice, no legal/birthright identity, lack of representation of the minority communities, and lack of freedom of expression.

A range of policy interventions and solutions were discussed across the working groups, including the following- ensuring access and equity at all levels of society; inclusion of vulnerable groups through universal schemes for health, education, labour markets, financial inclusion, etc.; job creation through better market linkages, industry-oriented skilling and vocational training; investments in employment intensive manufacturing, ICT and other sectors; strengthening evidence based policy making; capacity building of stakeholders including human resource development; forming partnerships and engagement with stakeholders through collaboratives such as network of universities, labour associations, etc. In terms of structural transformation, industry promoting measures must be accompanied by sectoral diversification, procedural reforms for better ease of doing business, greater usage of labour augmenting technologies and better monitoring of labour standards in the informal sector to ensure decent employment opportunities for diverse skill-sets, and for overall resilience of the subregional economies. On climate change actions, there is a need for multilateral and unilateral practices, solutions and mechanisms with linkages between states and countries, but solutions for climate change cannot be driven only at national level, the situation in South Asia requires cross-border solutions and collaboration. Countries need to be more proactive in integration implementing the policies not only national level but also at subregional level. Industry, community led approaches and public-private partnerships are crucial for climate action to mobilise resources. There should be a greater emphasis on leadership, ownership, awareness, knowledge and financing along with greater people's participation and political consensus. For achieving peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16), potential solutions could come from the compulsory inclusion of a 'disability plan' within each country's VNR, the creation of a constitutional ban on 'origin', a strengthening of the democratic process. To help solve problems such corruption, fraud and tax evasion, regional cooperation should be strengthened, monitoring should take place more into the private sector, and a more decentralized system at the grassroot level should be adopted.

## **5. Review of selected Goals for HLPF 2019 in South Asia: Reporting by the Working Groups and the Way Forward**

Central themes, common messages and other key perspectives were discussed on the cluster of goals under review at the HLPF in 2019, by the conveners of the respective Working Groups followed by the panel discussion.

It was noted that the SDGs selected for HLPF 2019 – goals related to education (SDG 4), employment (SDG 8), equality (SDG 10), climate action (SDG 13), peace and justice (SDG 16) – cannot be treated in isolation from rest of the SDGs, and therefore while focusing on the selected goals it is important to consider their interfaces with other facets of sustainable development. Issues related to inequality are of special significance as inequalities are observed to perpetuate and accentuate many different developmental challenges. It is critical to analyze inequality at a disaggregated and granular level to understand the root-causes behind it. Inequalities in terms of education and health are generally found to be of higher proportions in the South Asian countries and could potentially aggravate income inequality and vice versa. Persistence of rural-urban divide in quality of educational and health services has been observed to have perpetuated other forms of inequalities in South Asia. Given such close interlinkages, it is not advisable to follow a selective approach to SDGs. Therefore, the HLPF agenda in the future must adopt a more holistic approach to SDGs, rather than focusing on their subsets or specific goals without recognizing their interlinkages. Overall there is a need to formulate policies at the regional level, in particular, to combat climate change and its related effects and a need to integrate it in the overall process in a global regime that will provide sufficient financial and technical support for mitigation and adaptation efforts in the developing countries.

The panel noted that the various Focus Group discussions on selected goals have reported certain common policy themes, such as paucity of data for a disaggregated analysis into the cause and nature of barriers hindering each of the goals. Statistical capacity must be improved to enable regular monitoring of progress at the sub-national, national and regional levels. Lack of effective governance was another common theme which emerged while analyzing issues related to the selected goals. In terms of addressing governance issues, collective efforts at the regional level is required, by way of pooling resources and sharing knowledge, and also by way of creating regional institutions. However, political traction for regional cooperation is found to be weak in South Asia. The panel noted that interrelations between SDGs provide new opportunities for fostering intergovernmental cooperation in the subregion to address common policy challenges. SDGs provide basis for forging a regional alliance for addressing lack of effective governance, motivating all stakeholders to come together irrespective of nationality. Given historical experience, alternative platforms for cooperation at various levels should be facilitated in addition

to existing regional platforms such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). With its multi-sectoral agenda of work, alliances with regional institutions, convening authority and mandate for fostering regional cooperation, UNESCAP is well placed to facilitate such alternative platforms which can be used for knowledge sharing, capacity-building and for various form of collaborative initiatives for achieving the SDGs in South Asia.

## **6. Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality: Subregional Perspectives**

The theme of the APFSD and the HLPF in 2019 is centred upon “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. The intricate and reinforcing relationship between empowerment, inclusion and equality was discussed in this session and inputs collated in the form of subregional priorities, good practices and initiatives for informing subregional thematic profiles that could feed into larger regional and global processes such as the APFSD and the HLPF in 2019.

The session began by emphasizing on the multidimensionality of global justice, it was reiterated that any form of exclusion should be addressed following a right-based/duty-based approach uniting around one goal “One planet for everyone”. Along with the central concepts of the HLPF 2019 theme, the elements of empowerment and the importance of an inclusive approach to promote equality of outcomes for relevant SDGs were noted. The four key elements of an empowerment and inclusiveness approach to policy making, covered rights and justice, norms and practices, participation and voice, and resources and capabilities. A framework towards empowerment and inclusiveness needs to address human rights, access to justice, quality of institutions, participation in all aspects, voice for communities and groups, strengthening capacity, access to critical resources, and improved education and health.

The panelists emphasized the importance of establishing linkages between different dimensions of empowerment, achieving inclusive societies, and gender and social equity. In the discussion on rights and justice, there are elements of empowerment and entitlement that have to be considered. There is a value of empowering women through education and legal inclusiveness, positive discrimination is justified if people are unequally placed in the population. Mapping and localizing the most vulnerable groups should be considered in order to redefine norms and practices. Achieving SDGs for the bottom 40% of South Asia's population is critical to achieving the SDGs globally given that South Asia is home to 25% of the world population. SDGs cannot be achieved unless all stakeholders are involved, in particular, at the grassroots level. In this context, it becomes important to bring about awareness and sensitization about the SDGs through consultations at the national and subnational levels. Recognition of hitherto excluded population groups, respecting identities, cultures and practices, representation, restitution and reclamation form the 5R approach to promoting inclusion and equality. In the context of resources and capabilities, SDGs cannot be left to the state actors alone, all four pillars of democracy – judiciary, legislature, media, civil society- and diverse stakeholders, including also the private sector, must be engaged in the

implementation of the SDGs. However, solutions towards inclusiveness and equality should be taken not only at national level but also at the international level given the interrelatedness of the goals which have spillover effects. Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) spread over 58 countries of which 6 are South Asian countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) towards ending inequality is one example of the international level actions. In its efforts to influence the global discourse on inequality and ending poverty, GCAP has done an SDG gap analysis in Pakistan, organized an SDG Forum partnering with provincial governments in Nepal, conducted civil society reports in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka and is undertaking a study on identifying 100 hotspots of the most vulnerable population groups across India in partnership with the Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (WNTA).

The session identified the need for research and collaboration on forward looking analyses to map key vulnerabilities and intersection of these vulnerabilities, having disaggregated data- indicators and statistics- to capture vulnerabilities, identifying champions of development for SDG implementation, sharing of learning experiences, transfer of skills, technical expertise and forming effective partnerships to address vulnerabilities across borders.

## **7. Means of implementation of SDGs in South Asia: Identifying key gaps in finance, technology, and capacity-building**

With a focus on key challenges and opportunities for strengthening global partnerships and enhancing the means of implementation for achieving the SDGs in South Asia, the session highlighted the importance of developing technological ecosystem in South Asian countries, South-South cooperation for capacity building and technology transfer, innovative ways of financing, greater resource mobilization both at national and subregional level, and better knowledge sharing for providing the means of implementation for achieving the SDGs.

New and innovative sources of finance are required for bridging South Asia's severe financial deficit for its development. In this regard, the panel agreed that the conventional models of financing need to be revisited, conceptualizing financing as a collective effort in which participation of various tiers of governments (subnational and federal/national), private sector, other non-governmental stakeholders, intergovernmental donor agencies etc. needs to be secured. Multi-donor investments and crowd-financing are emerging as mainstream methods of development financing. Financing sources of most of the LDCs of the subregion would undergo changes as they are slated for LDC graduation in the near future. ODA, Aid for Trade (AfT) and other forms of development finance for LDCs in the subregion need to be increased. Domestic resource mobilization albeit necessary, cannot be a substitute for ODA for LDCs. As ODA and allied sources available for LDCs are increasingly under pressure of downscaling, the spillover effects of economic development and poverty reduction in terms of overall global peace and



prosperity, should be highlighted to prevent curtailing of international development finance allocations for the LDCs. In this regard, SDGs need to be recognized and promoted as global public goods. Private sector financing for SDG friendly investments remains scarce with high rates of interest. Countries in South Asia should look to project their anticipated increases in real per capita income if the SDGs are implemented successfully, then, based on expected income growth can opt for bridge finances out of domestic resources to bridge the resource gap in the interim. Financing of future growth needs to be linked to the current financing of SDGs.

One of the main challenges is to make financing available at reasonable terms. Various options of blended finance must be looked at in this context, with the aim of attracting more commercial investments into developmental projects. Home country/host country measures may also help to mitigate investment risks for finance coming into LDCs. Governments need to take lead by providing a facilitative environment by creating special purpose vehicles for development projects, facilitating underwriting or guaranteeing of such projects through public sector financial institutions, and by regulatory reforms, transparent monitoring and evaluation to improve credit rating.

Financing of technology is a critical issue facing developing countries in the context of SDGs. The nexus between technology-IPR regime and financing has not been properly addressed in the SDG discourse. Currently, a majority of IPR rents, for instance, on renewable panels, accrue to developed countries. South-south cooperation is required to find cost-effective solutions to meet the requirements of technology sourcing for developmental purposes. While technology transfer is important, adaptation of technology to suit local conditions and constraints is another major challenge. More investments should be channelized to low-cost alternative technologies. The efficient use of the technology depends heavily on the skilled people and decentralized hybrid solutions. Besides fiscal reforms, measures are needed for alignment of R&D projects, for building synergies through collaborative research, and for avoiding wastage and duplication.

More than one-third (62 targets) of the SDG targets are that of means of implementation. More awareness and understanding are required about the means of implementation targets. Implementation costs of each goal has to be assessed in greater detail. SDGs are to be projectized based on such cost-benefit assessments. Projectization would provide clearer picture of financing requirements, and subsequently allow a better evaluation of financing sources. Cost-benefit assessment exercises would also help adopt policies for bridge financing or inter-temporal financing, whereby current implementation costing could factor in projected future benefits of SDGs in financial terms.

## **8. Means of implementation of SDGs in South Asia: Indicators, data, statistics and follow-up and review**

The importance of measurable data and statistics for implementation of SDGs was emphasized. To assess the statistical capacity preparedness and monitoring frameworks needed to strengthen national statistical systems, the challenges national statistical agencies or central statistical organizations (CSOs) face in delivering data required for the SDGs were highlighted in the session. Compared to the MDG targets, SDGs are more complex, with unclear and ambiguous definitions, no agreed protocols or standards on the tier III indicators, which are very difficult to capture, with no policy signals for developing countries of South Asia to guide statistical requirements. Current indicator frameworks do not go far enough to deliver on statistical needs for SDGs. Indicators need to be appropriate for the target. Otherwise there are risks that improved results on an inappropriate indicator could be wrongly interpreted as progress towards the target and this could have policy implications as well. While indicators are only one component of assessing the progress on targets, there is a need to develop a comprehensive evaluation framework for the SDGs which could include other aspects in assessment of targets. ‘Leaving no one behind’ creates an important challenge for statisticians who generally relied on sample surveys.

Representatives from the Central Statistical Offices of India and Sri Lanka highlighted that mapping exercise has been undertaken in their respective countries to categorize indicators based on data availability and identify data gaps. The need for strengthening administrative data and making better use of it to support Survey data and increased use of data which exist within and also outside the system, through collaborations and innovative partnerships with educational institutions, universities, academia, knowledge networks and civil society was suggested. Ways have to be seen in which data from non-conventional sources such as micro-level research studies, behavioural data, social experiments, citizen generated data and other qualitative data can be mainstreamed. Among various data challenges, the panelists identified issues of periodicity, data coverage to fulfil requirements of the indicators, data disaggregation and need for strengthening research capacities of national and local statistical offices. Evaluation and monitoring process needs to guide the development of indicators and modern and better technology has to be used to supplement existing data systems. For managing the vast data needs for meeting the 2030 Agenda, strengthening statistical capacities in South Asia and developing partnerships at local, subnational, national and regional levels hold critical importance and sharing of good practices, successful innovations and lessons learned would help, for instance, the repository of success stories and failures in South Asia being brought out by the Evaluation Community of India.

The representative from the South Asia group of civil society highlighted that most of the tier III indicators are related to environmental sustainability, climate change and means of implementation. Monitoring mechanisms for review and follow up are missing at the national level. The subregional, regional and global review mechanisms have mostly been reporting

platforms. The panel felt that ESCAP-SSWA could facilitate an Advisory Group on VNRs to assist countries in preparation of VNRs capable of reflecting progress. The Advisory Group could come up with an outcome document with recommendations to countries which they can choose to follow, or not. ESCAP-SSWA could also help facilitate Working Groups on thematic areas which could be self-organized working groups to look at the SDGs where South Asia is regressing or any thematic area which is of common concern to South Asian countries where the subregion is lagging and suggest policy priorities.

In response, the twining exercise facilitated by UNESCAP was mentioned which pairs a country that has presented its VNR with a country which is about to prepare its VNR for sharing of lessons and guidance. Through the the Rapid Response Facility, UNESCAP also provides technical support to assist countries with implementation of the SDGs. The SDG Helpdesk maintained by UNESCAP in collaboration with its partners is a one-stop online repository of training modules, e-tutorials, data portals, toolboxes, and knowledge resources to assist capacity building and peer learning among countries for implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

## **9. Regional cooperation for accelerating achievement towards the SDGs**

Regional/subregional cooperation and coordination can support and complement the effectiveness of national mechanisms for achieving the SDGs in South Asia. The session examined the importance of inclusive and effective multi-stakeholder partnerships and the need for greater policy coherence and inter-sectoral coordination within and between countries given the multidimensional, cross-sectoral and interlinked nature of the SDGs. Trends of regional, subregional and South-South and triangular cooperation evolving in support of the 2030 Agenda were explored. Furthermore, the importance of the regional commissions like UNESCAP and the United Nations Development System was highlighted in supporting countries in South Asia in the achievement of SDGs.

South Asia accounts for a very low share of world GDP and wealth against its high share of world population. The subregional countries share many common development challenges for which common solutions could be found, and thus the scope of regional cooperation for development is very high in South Asia. The subregional organizations such as SAARC, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) which are meant to foster regional cooperation, are not delivering to their potential leading to increased frustration, pointing to the need for creating alternative platforms. SDGs provide a common non-political development agenda, to which all South Asian countries are committed to as signatories, which can be utilized to reinvigorate regional cooperation for achieving common goals. MDGs did not have a regional framework built into them. But based on the successes of the MDGs, SDGs have already got a strong sense of national ownership. SDGs provide us a strong opportunity to pursue regional

cooperation as a development strategy. The word “region” is mentioned explicitly in many SDG targets, including in the targets on SDG 17 on means of implementation. While the VNRs of South Asia countries do recognize ‘regional’ aspects, greater sensitization about ways and means of achieving the SDGs through regional cooperation is required.

Common development challenges across South Asian countries include increasing inequalities and marginalization of poor and vulnerable sections of the population. Structural transformation led by services growth with inadequate employment generation, and stagnation in the agriculture sector with highest number of dependents, is increasingly found to be unsustainable. The SDGs provide an opportunity to develop a regional framework. The 13<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit of 2005 had endorsed the SAARC Development Goals (SDGs), as recommended by the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA), which could not be carried forward due to several systemic failures. Learning from this experience can help to better design a new regional framework in the context of the SDGs. A number of regional networks of various stakeholders including think-tanks exist in the subregion, which can be tapped for design and implementation of the new framework.

In terms of coverage of regional cooperation, knowledge networks and sharing of good practices is one of the key areas. Facilitation of a regional institutional architecture for governance and accountability should be a fundamental priority. The framework should be able to provide a regional outlook towards external environment. Cooperation must also be extended to address data generation and access issues. Case studies on good practices and regional policy dialogues should be conducted regularly. Regional cooperation framework should be inclusive by involving various non-governmental stakeholder groups besides governments. Diplomacy at the track-II level would support and complement intergovernmental cooperation initiatives. Track-II process would help to keep up the momentum of cooperative initiatives and would help to prevent retracting from commitments in times of political crises. The participants requested ESCAP-SSWA to continue working on these issues through its policy advisories and facilitate meeting of policy makers as well as other stakeholders for sharing of best practices.

For strengthening regional cooperation and for the development of a regional framework for this purpose, it is important to contextualize the SDGs against the current policy priorities and initiatives of the South Asian countries. A major initiative in this regard is the formation of an Intergovernmental Working Group mandated by the SAARC ministerial meeting on poverty alleviation in 2015. However, the process at the SAARC level requires technical and knowledge support from subregional think-tanks, international organization like ESCAP with expertise in regional cooperation and other key stakeholders. Non-state actors, regional networks and think tanks, universities etc., need to convene and cooperate to develop a common work programme, with facilitation from ESCAP-SSWA given its convening power, multisectoral expertise, and mandate for fostering regional cooperation for development. The network could collaborate

around themes such as developing a repository of good practices, data portals, explore opportunities for scaling up, developing a common regional outlook towards rest of the world and devising accountability mechanisms through peer review processes. Possible challenges in this context could come up in terms of the geo-political risks faced by countries in South Asia and mobilization of resources. As deliverables, the network could work on a South Asian data dashboard, organize policy dialogues, prepare case studies on subregional issues and look into issues of aggregation and the merit and value added in creating a new set of regional indicators.

The panel also highlighted the role of civil society organization (CSOs), noting the contributions of CSOs and subregional think-tanks towards framing of the SAARC or South Asian Development Goals. Participation of CSOs can make regional cooperation more inclusive and representative, and thereby broadening the coverage of regional cooperation to address all aspects of sustainable development.

## **10. Key conclusions and the way forward**

Deliberations clearly highlighted the criticality of collaborating across borders and developing a regional framework towards achieving the SDGs in South Asia. The discussions among various stakeholders suggested that there is much potential of regional cooperation and coordination in implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda among the South Asian countries. Given the massive investment required for achieving the SDGs, harnessing public-private partnerships, greater engagement with the civil society and collaborations with international organizations such as the United Nations and other development partners are needed.

Sanyukta Samaddar, NITI Aayog, India, highlighted the importance of the Forum in including the voice of the civil society in the consultations. She reiterated the need for UNESCAP to engage various stakeholders, including the government and civil society and also the private sector, to cut across boundaries and foster healthy dialogue and open consultations for sustainable and inclusive development. She summarized the common challenges faced by the countries in South Asia in terms of high social exclusion, inequalities of access and opportunities, gender-based inequalities, climate change, limited disaster resilience, limited financial and human capital, and lack of reliable, affordable, disaggregated data to inform policy interventions. Ms. Samaddar mentioned the significance of strengthening regional value chains and peer group learning to prioritize and customize common uniformly accepted and achievable targets and indicators for the South Asian region.

Sachin Chaturvedi, RIS, pointed out the growing interest in SDGs and drew attention to important research issues such as raising critical resources and sustained financing for the SDGs, applicability and relevance of indicators to targets and impact assessment and strategies for

localization of priorities. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is premised on a strong sense of national ownership, revitalized global and regional partnerships and a spirit of global solidarity.

Nagesh Kumar, ESCAP-SSWA, discussed the way forward, highlighting the process leading to the APFSD and HLPF 2019, including consolidating subregional inputs for the APFSD 2019. He stressed that providing such regional and subregional platforms and dialogues, including through the South Asia SDG Forum, is a key mandate of UNESCAP and that South Asia needs to continue with this dialogue in order to explore what mechanisms could be used and what are the key elements to achieve the SDGs. UNESCAP will continue to support these initiatives to assist countries in South Asia in achieving their sustainable development priorities.

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## Annex 1

### Programme

Day 1: 4 October 2018	
9:00-09.45	Registration and Tea/Coffee
Inaugural Session	
09.45- 10.45	<p><b>Session 1: Setting the scene</b></p> <p><i>Opening Remarks:</i></p> <p><b>Dr. Nagesh Kumar</b>, Director &amp; Head, UNESCAP South and South West Asia Office (UNESCAP-SSWA)</p> <p><b>Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi</b>, Director-General, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS)</p> <p><b>Mr. Yuri Afanasiev</b>, United Nations Resident Coordinator, India</p> <p><i>Keynote Address:</i> <b>H.E. Dr. Puspa Raj Kadel</b>, Vice-Chairman, National Planning Commission, Nepal</p> <p><i>Inaugural Address:</i> <b>H.E. Dr. Rajiv Kumar</b>, Vice-Chairman, NITI Aayog, India</p>
10.45-11.15	Group Photo and Tea/Coffee Break
11.15-13.30	<p><b>Session 2: Review of progress and achievements in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in South Asia</b></p> <p><i>Moderator:</i> <b>Amb. Gyan Chandra Acharya</b>, Chairman, SAWTEE Centre for SDGs, Kathmandu and former UN Undersecretary General</p> <p><i>Presentations by Country Representatives (7 minutes each):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mr. Nabi Sroosh</b>, Director General of Policy and RBM, Ministry of Economy, Afghanistan</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Mohd. Mizanur Rahman</b>, Dy. Secretary, ERD, Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh</li> <li>• <b>Mrs. Sonam Tshoki</b>, Program Coordinator, Development Cooperation Division, Gross National Happiness Commission, Bhutan</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Samir Kumar</b>, Joint Secretary, Drinking Water and Sanitation, Govt. of India, and <b>Ms. Sanyukta Samaddar</b>, OSD, NITI Aayog, India</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Saadh Aishath</b>, Dy Director-General, Ministry of Environment &amp; Energy, Maldives</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Khomraj Koirala</b>, Joint Secretary, National Planning Commission, Nepal</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Ilyas Mehmood Nizami</b>, Counsellor, High Commission for Pakistan, New Delhi</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ms. Thilini Nimesha Mendis</b>, Assistant Director-General, Department of Planning, Sri Lanka</li> </ul> <p><i>Statement on behalf of South Asian CSOs: Ms. Shaila Shahid</i>, Senior Programme Coordinator – Gender and Climate Change, International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), Bangladesh</p> <p><b>Open discussion</b></p>
13:30 – 14:30	Lunch
14:30- 15.45	<p><b>Session 3: Review of selected Goals for HLPF 2019 in South Asia</b></p> <p><b><u>SDG 4:</u></b> “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”</p> <p><b>Convenor: Dr. N. Saravana Kumar</b>, Joint Secretary (ICC), Ministry of Human Resource Development, India</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mr. Shailendra Sigdel</b>, Statistical Advisor for South Asia, UNESCO, India</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Ramakant Rai</b>, Convenor, National Coalition for Education (NCE), India</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Thilini Nimesha Mendis</b>, Assistant Director-General, Department of Planning, Sri Lanka</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Noopur</b>, Executive Director, National Coalition for Education (NCE), India</li> </ul> <p><b>Open discussion</b></p> <p><b><u>SDG 8:</u></b> “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”</p> <p><b>Convenor: H.E. Prof. Bishwambher Pyakuryal</b>, Founder, Institute for Strategic and Socio-Economic Research (ISSR), Kathmandu and Ambassador of Nepal in Sri Lanka</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Prof. Selim Raihan</b>, Executive Director, SANEM, Dhaka</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Meenu Vadera</b>, Executive Director, Azad Foundation, New Delhi</li> </ul> <p><b>Open discussion</b></p> <p><b><u>SDG 10:</u></b> “Reduce inequality within and among countries”</p> <p><b>Convenor: Dr. Mustafizur Rahman</b>, Distinguished Fellow, CPD, Dhaka</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mr. Amitabh Behar</b>, CEO, Oxfam India</li> <li>• <b>Ms. B. Chinthani</b>, Institute of Policy Studies, Sri Lanka</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Beena Pallical</b>, National Coordinator- Campaigns, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), New Delhi</li> </ul> <p><b>Open discussion</b></p>



	<p><b><u>SDG 13:</u></b> “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”</p> <p><b>Convenor:</b> <b>Mr. Sonam P. Wangdi</b>, Secretary, National Environment Commission, Bhutan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dr. Abid Suleri</b>, Executive Director, SDPI and Member, Prime Minister’s Economic Advisory Council, Pakistan</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Anil Kumar Jain</b>, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Hanieh Moghani</b>, Senior Legal Advisor, CENESTA, Iran</li> </ul> <p><b>Open discussion</b></p> <p><b><u>SDG 16:</u></b> “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”</p> <p><b>Convenor:</b> <b>Dr. Posh Raj Pandey</b>, Chairman, SAWTEE, Kathmandu</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ms. Nupur Sinha</b>, Executive Director, Centre for Social Justice, Ahmedabad</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Jyotsna Mohan</b>, Regional Coordinator, Asia Development Alliance, India</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Trinanjan Radhakrishnan</b>, Project Coordinator- Sustainable Development, Oxfam India</li> </ul> <p><b>Open discussion</b></p>
15:45 - 16:00	Tea/Coffee Break
16:00 – 17:30	<p><b>Session 4: Plenary- Review of selected Goals for HLPF 2019 in South Asia: Reporting by the Working Groups and the Way Forward</b></p> <p><b>Chair:</b> <b>Ms. Rina Ray</b>, Secretary, Department of School Education &amp; Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development (tbc)</p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> <b>Prof. Amitabh Kundu</b>, Distinguished Fellow, RIS</p> <p><b>Reporting on Working Groups by Convenors</b></p> <p><i>SDG 4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”</i></p> <p><i>SDG 8: “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” and</i></p> <p><i>SDG 10: “Reduce inequality within and among countries”</i></p> <p><i>SDG 13 “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”</i></p> <p><i>SDG 16 “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”</i></p> <p><b>Panel Discussion on the way forward:</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya</b>, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Ashok Jain</b>, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Government of Telengana, and Formerly Adviser, NITI Aayog</li> </ul> <p><b>Open discussion</b></p>
<b>Day 2: 5 October 2018</b>	
09.45 – 11.15	<p><b>Session 5: Subregional perspectives on the 2019 APFSD and HLPF theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”</b></p> <p><i>Chair: Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi</i>, DG-RIS</p> <p><i>Presentation: Mr. Bishwa Nath Tiwari</i>, Programme Specialist – HDR, UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub, United Nations Development Programme</p> <p><i>Panelists/ discussants (5 minutes each)</i></p> <p><b>Prof. Mustafizur Rahman</b>, Distinguished Fellow, CPD, Dhaka</p> <p><b>H.E. Prof. Bishwambher Pyakuryal</b>, Founder Institute for Strategic and Socio-Economic Research (ISSR) Kathmandu and Ambassador of Nepal in Sri Lanka</p> <p><b>Shri V.K. Pipersenia</b>, Former Chief Secretary, Government of Assam</p> <p><b>Mr. Pradeep Baisakh</b>, Asia Coordinator, Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP), India</p> <p><b>Ms. Annie Namala</b>, Executive Director, Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion and Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (WNTA)</p> <p><b>Open discussion</b></p>
11:15– 11.30	Tea/Coffee Break
11.30 – 13:00	<p><b>Session 6: Means of implementation of SDGs in South Asia: Identifying key gaps in finance, technology, and capacity-building (SDG 17)</b></p> <p><i>Moderator: Dr. Abid Suleri</i>, Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad and Member, Prime Minister’s Economic Advisory Council, Pakistan</p> <p><i>Keynote: Dr. Rathin Roy</i>, Director, National Institute of Public Finance &amp; Policy, New Delhi</p> <p><i>Panelists (5 mins each):</i></p> <p><b>Amb. Gyan Chand Acharya</b>, Chairman, SAWTEE Centre for SDGs, Kathmandu and former UN Undersecretary General</p>

	<p><b>Mr. Sonam P. Wangdi</b>, Secretary, National Environment Commission, Bhutan</p> <p><b>Dr. Sadhana Relia</b>, Head, International cooperation (Multilateral / Regional), Department of Science and Technology, Ministry of Science and Technology, India</p> <p><b>Mr. Nazir Kabiri</b>, Senior Adviser to the Finance Minister, Afghanistan</p> <p><b>Mr. James Mathew</b>, Dy. Director General, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India</p> <p><b>Ms. Sweta Saxena</b>, Chief (MPAS), Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division, ESCAP</p> <p><b>Open discussion</b></p>
13.00-14.00	Lunch
14.00-15.15	<p><b>Session 7: Means of implementation of SDGs in South Asia: Indicators, data, statistics and follow-up and review (SDG 17)</b></p> <p><i>Chair:</i> <b>Mr. K.V. Eapen</b>, Secretary, Ministry of Statistics &amp; Programme Implementation, India</p> <p><i>Keynote:</i> <b>Prof. T.C.A. Anant</b>, Delhi School of Economics and former Chief Statistician and Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, India</p> <p><i>Panelists (5 mins each):</i></p> <p><b>Mr. Siddhartha Kundu</b>, Director, Social Statistics Division, Central Statistics Office, MOSPI, India</p> <p><b>Ms. D.D.G.A. Senevirathne</b>, Director (Statistics), Department of Census &amp; Statistics, Sri Lanka</p> <p><b>Dr. Rashmi Agrawal</b>, Evaluation Community of India, New Delhi</p> <p><b>Mr. Ajay K. Jha</b>, Director, CECOEDECON</p> <p><b>Mr. Riccardo Mesiano</b>, Sustainable Development Officer, Environment and Development Division, ESCAP</p> <p><b>Open discussion</b></p>
15.15-15.30	Tea/Coffee Break
15.30-16.45	<p><b>Session 8: Regional cooperation for accelerating achievement towards the SDGs</b></p> <p><i>Chair:</i> <b>Dr. Nagesh Kumar</b>, Director, UNESCAP-SSWA</p> <p><i>Keynote:</i> <b>Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya</b>, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka</p> <p><i>Panelists:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Dr. Abid Suleri</b>, Executive Director, SDPI and Member, Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, Pakistan</li> <li><b>Mr. Dadhi Ram Bhandari</b>, Director, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Mr. Daya Sagar Shrestha</b>, Executive Director, NGO Federation of Nepal</p> <p><b>Mr. Samiuddin Ahmed</b>, UNV, ESCAP</p> <p><b>Open discussion</b></p>
16.45-17.15	<p><b>Wrap up and closing session: The way forward</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ms. Sanyukta Samaddar</b>, OSD, NITI Aayog, India</li> <li>• <b>Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi</b>, Director-General, Research System for Developing Countries (RIS)</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Nagesh Kumar</b>, Director, UNESCAP-SSWA</li> </ul>