Sustainable Development Goals: Keeping the Promise Alive

South Asia faces persistent sustainable development challenges with high concentrations of poverty and inequality. Despite relatively high economic growth rates experienced by most of the subregional countries in recent decades, South Asia falls behind in many social, economic and environmental development indicators. The region has large gaps which it needs to close to achieve SDGs in health and well-being, education, gender equality and the provision of water, sanitation and energy. Its economic growth engines are not leveraging economic windows of opportunity to implement structural changes to improve acceleration towards middle and upper income levels. SDG achievement in economic development in the subregion requires structural reforms in labour, infrastructure, industrialization, urbanization and sustainable production and consumption. For environmental SDGs, South Asia also faces large gaps. The subregion is increasingly vulnerable to environment and climate change induced economic setbacks and disaster risks.

The 2030 Agenda, with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its core, is increasingly adopted in strategic prioritization and policymaking in South Asia, with most of the subregional countries having established mechanisms across multiple agencies to efficiently coordinate SDGs implementation. However, the complexity, scope and level of ambition of the 2030 Agenda requires better coordination and more collaborative partnerships across countries, especially in areas of SDG priorities, such as energy, disaster risk reduction and water, that have spillovers between countries or require multilateral solutions. Strengthening implementation mechanisms nationally can benefit from greater regional cooperation and initiative to revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development by fostering a renewal of such a partnership across regional countries.

The session will take stock of the subregion’s progress towards SDGs, and consider the most urgent sustainable development challenges as well as potential regionally coordinated policy actions to address shared responsibilities and vulnerabilities. The following key questions will be discussed in the session:

1. Identifying key common sustainable development challenges that South Asian countries face.

2. Responding to development challenges in an integrated manner by pursuing and adopting a set of policy actions and best practices to speed up progress across several SDGs.

3. Effectively implementing policies that strengthen South Asia regional cooperation and coordination mechanisms for SDG achievement.

Panel Organisers:
Mr Michael Williamson, United Nations ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office
Dr Shehryar Khan Toru, Research Fellow, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad
Email address: shehryar_toru@hotmail.com