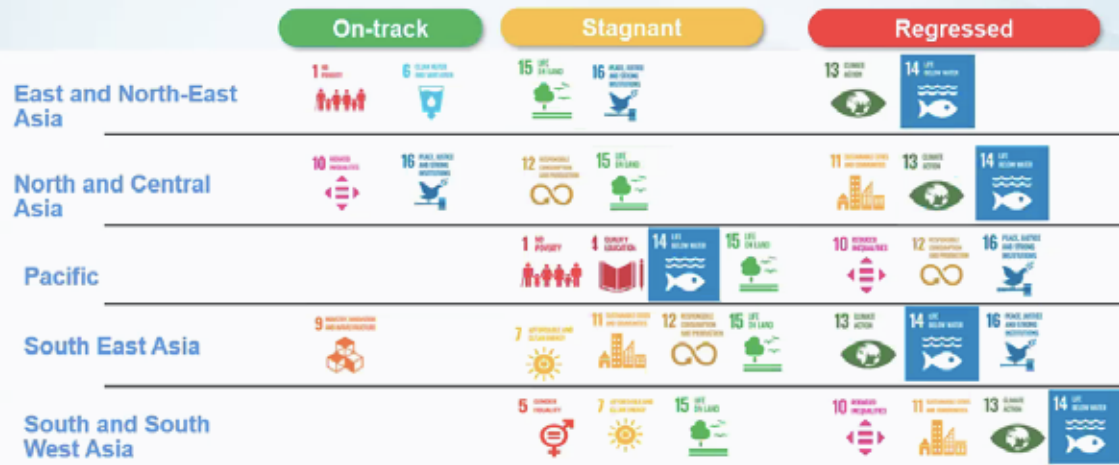


# ASIA PACIFIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2022



Ajay K Jha  
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Asia Pacific CSOs believe that we are still amidst major global crises and unless structural reasons and systemic barriers are addressed, building back better from the pandemic will be a pipedream. Inequality, emissions and hunger has been rising consistently; civic space, democratic freedoms and participation of the CSOs has been declining since we signed the 2030 Agenda. Rate of poverty reduction has been declining. Efforts towards a sustainable recovery have failed people, and more than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the humanity is yet to first shot of the vaccine. The pandemic has made stark the structural fault lines of our economy, governance and society. The circumstances demand an unprecedented response for recovery from the pandemic and expediting implementation of the SDGs through stronger, inclusive and cooperative multilateralism, and national efforts.

Asia Pacific report on the progress of the SDGs released by UNESCAP recently shows that SDGS will not be achieved in the region before 2072 at the current pace. No sub region or no country is in the position to achieve the SDGs by 2030 at the current pace. There is continued regression on the Sustainable Consumption and production (SDG 12) and climate action (SDG13); however, many more goals show a trend of regression or lack of progress. Agenda 2030 is a failed promise for girls in the rural areas, women, refugees, people with disability and race, caste and ethnic groups who are at the bottom of the pyramid.

Majority of the countries in the region have witnessed unsustainable mounting sovereign debts and increased illicit financial flow and shrinking ODA and access to trade thereby losing fiscal and policy space and are struggling for recovery. The onerous trade agreements with provisions like ISDS are further bleeding states with impunity. The crisis has induced increased corporatization and hegemonization of natural resources through slew of neoliberal policies, dilution of environmental and social safeguards; social protection has further weakened and women's unpaid care work has increased manifolds. Scarce jobs have further consolidated exploitation of labour. For many millions the advent of decade of action signals a false dawn.

The region is also at the receiving end of runaway climate crisis and disasters, rapid biodiversity loss and air pollution as well as plastic pollution. Asia accounts for one-third of the weather, climate, water related disasters, accounting for nearly half of the deaths and one-third of economic losses during 1970-2019. A large majority of the population in the region is dependent on climate sensitive sectors. Asia pacific is the richest region in biodiversity, however, according to recent projections, 42% of biodiversity in the South East Asia may be lost by end of the century and at least half of them will be global extinction. East Asia and Pacific and South Asia are the most polluted sub regions accounting for 2 million deaths in each every year. SIDS and especially pacific countries also bear the brunt of plastic pollution even though they contribute negligibly through altered marine ecosystems and economy, reduced income from oceans and micro plastic pollution. We are dismayed that these regional priorities never figure in the global thematic discussions in the HLPF and there are no commensurate efforts in the Agenda 2030 to address these urgent concerns.

While the resources are scare for making a sustainable and resilient comeback from the crisis the region also witnessing

increased militarization and ever looming threat of war. Many countries are in perpetually militarized state and engage in wanton violation of human rights, rights of indigenous peoples and marginalized populations as well as deploying patriarchy as a political tool. The aggression of Russia on Ukraine has effect of legitimizing possession of nuclear weapon as deterrence and the presence of eight nuclear powers in the region, with extremely low thresholds for use of nuclear weapons, does not bode well for peace. Countries in the region association with rival imperialist groups and increased geo-political tensions put dark shadows over achievement of lasting peace, eradication of poverty and hunger, and sustainability in the region. Establishment of peace remains a sine qua non for achieving the Agenda 2030 in the region.

The VNR process needs to go beyond the capitals and needs to be more inclusive with participation of broad range of stakeholders including the affected and marginalized populations. The HLPF needs to ensure that member states understand the importance of having national and regional processes. Despite the fact that majority of countries have already presented their VNRs, the “peer learning function” of the VNR is unfulfilled as countries only discuss their best efforts, glossing over critical challenges, failure and policy gaps. As we are moving towards third cycle of the VNRs “National” character of the VNR needs to take centre stage.

The Ministerial Declaration have largely failed the aspirations of the people by being traditional rather than calling for transformative changes, lack of ambition and outcomes oriented actions. The member states have questioned settled concepts and agreed language on fundamental issues of human rights, child rights, gender empowerment, and have been seen divided when more ambitious efforts are called for.

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