

## INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE INAUGURAL REGIONAL SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SCIENCE-POLICY-BUSINESS FORUM ON THE ENVIRONMENT

5 OCTOBER 2021

*Pathways for a Sustainable, Equitable and Inclusive Rebound from COVID-19 and Climate Shocks  
That is Good for People, Planet and Economies*

### ABOUT THE SCIENCE POLICY BUSINESS FORUM – ASIA PACIFIC

The Science-Policy-Business Forum is the UN Environment Programme's premier multi-sector convening platform, encouraging 'Technology, Partnership and Integrated Solutions for Nature'.

The Forum is a catalyst for nature-positive solutions and works towards a fairer, more equitable world.

It builds on the power of partnership to scale up solutions, ones that are driven by advances in science and technology, empowering policies, and innovative financing.

On 5 October 2021, the Forum launched its first regional mechanism in Asia-Pacific. Over 500 people participated in highly interactive sessions, including 50 Expert speakers from all key sectors.

The Asia-Pacific Science Policy Business Forum (AP-SPBF) aims to bring a regional, multi-sector perspective to the work of the international community on the environmental dimension of the SDGs, and harness region-focused solutions and partnerships to contribute to the global context.

The Asia-Pacific Science-Policy-Business Forum – held under the theme 'Towards a Healthy Rebound for People, Nature and Economies' – is convened in conjunction with the 4th Session of the Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities, hosted by the Republic of Korea.

### THE SCIENTIFIC IMPERATIVE FOR URGENT MULTI-SECTORAL ACTION

- Climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution are three interconnected issues that threaten achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and hence threaten human well-being for current and future generations.
- Ambitious and coordinated action by governments, businesses and people around the world can prevent and reverse the worst impacts of environmental decline by rapidly transforming key systems including energy, water, and food so that our use of the land and oceans becomes sustainable.
- For the most vulnerable nations, the fight against climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss is an existential fight for survival. Every effort has to be made to work together to leave no one behind.

- The upcoming COP-26 for climate change, and COP-15 for biodiversity must acknowledge these interconnections and develop harmonized targets and actions.
- The transition to a low carbon economy, and biodiversity restoration and conservation will require transforming our relationship with Nature, and transforming our economic, financial, and productive systems, and re-assessing our norms and value systems.

## INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Forum underscored the following:

### On Big Data and Technology Deployment

- The need to improve environmental big data management and analytics, to produce ‘knowledge’ out of Big data, that is open to all, noting that we have “oceans of data but only drops of information.”
- The Forum recommends to use Big Data and exponential technologies to deliver societal solutions that:
  - help consumers adopt sustainable lifestyles;
  - help producers measure and disclose environmental impacts;
  - help investors assess environmental risk; and.
  - help regulators monitor real-time progress
- AI and technology can transform industry to a more sustainable path. But policies and financial tools are required to power the transformation.
- Citizen science, which can contribute to assessing 35% of the SDG environmental indicators, and to catalyse action towards the SDGs, need to be enabled.
- The Forum underscored the importance of earth observation technology, including to indigenous people, “the guardians of biodiversity,” among those most affected by climate change.
- The Forum also recommended bridging the gender gap in technology, by involving women early in all earth observation data projects.
- The government of Estonia announced the Data for the Environment Alliance “DEAL” to empower access to technology and Big Data, including in cooperation with regional actors. The Forum will facilitate the rolling out of the initiative and creating close coordination and support to UNEP’s work on the Big Data Strategy and World Environment Situation Room.

### On Marine Plastic Pollution

- Estimates suggest that plastic waste costs the world more than USD 2.2 trillion each year in terms of environmental and social damage. Greater transparency, through tracking and traceability – pre-requisite for informed action and greater accountability— are essential to managing and mitigating pollution.

- Lack of accurate data about the flow of materials from production to disposal, how virgin plastics production is funded, and the responsibilities, strategies, and commitments of stakeholders leads to a misallocation of resources and ineffective actions.
- Investment in Big Data integration and management – including through the use of AI and frontier technologies and empowering citizen science- can provide greater access to accurate data and analytics.
- Providing capacity for recycling and circularity down-stream, especially in developing and least developed countries is essential to managing the risk.
- More adequate investment and private financing is required to scale up efforts to change industry practices, include producing less plastic from virgin feedstock, collecting more plastic waste, and increasing recycling.

### **On Accelerating the Deployment of Green Economy Strategies Across All Sectors**

The Forum underscored:

- The need to complement the use of GDP as a measure of economic activity by using inclusive wealth in decision-making (i.e., built, human and natural capital), which is a much better measure of sustainable economic growth.
- Public-private partnerships can be instrumental to achieving sustainable change; but methodologies and tools need to be reviewed for better efficiency and adaptability to local needs and contexts.
- Public procurement wields enormous purchasing power, accounting for an average of 12 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in OECD countries, and up to 30 percent of GDP in many developing countries. It plays a key role in achieving Sustainable Consumption and Production and in addressing the three pillars of Sustainable Development.

UNEP's work on sustainable procurement must be strengthened to leverage this enormous purchasing power globally for the good of economies and the planet.

The Science Policy Business Forum will launch a new initiative to support this work and create a movement to:

- 1- Raise awareness
  - 2- Mobilize multi-sectoral action
  - 3- Empower the deployment of technologies and strategies for Big Data management and integration; leveraging the work of the Forum's Working Group on Big Data and the Big Data for the Environment Initiative
- Productive sectors require to be managed more holistically, i.e., energy, agriculture, and water, as each influence and depend on each other.
  - Nature-positive investment and to scale up and mainstream sustainable private sector investments.

- We need to promote a healthy diet, reduce food and water waste, and adopt a “One-Health” approach that seeks to simultaneously secure optimal outcomes for human health, animal health, and health of the environment.

**The Asia-Pacific region is of great strategic importance, it :**

- Includes several countries with strong economic growth
- Includes eight of the most populous countries in the world: China (1), India (2), Indonesia (4), Pakistan (5), Bangladesh (8), Japan (11), Philippines (13), and Vietnam (15);
- Includes seven of the seventeen mega-diverse countries: India, China, Indonesia, Australia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, and Philippines
- Includes six of the top 15 emitters of carbon dioxide,

Therefore, the Asia-Pacific region has a significant influence on the demand for energy and natural resources, and impacts on climate change and biodiversity.

Industrialized countries, who are responsible for most of the environmental damage to date, must take the lead. But without concerted action by countries in the Asia-Pacific region the world cannot successfully address any of these issues.

These issues are not just for governments. The private and finance sectors has a major role to play and a responsibility to fulfil. All sectors of society must be engaged and actively involved.

We need to create multi-sectoral cooperation, where all voices are heard.

The time for action is now.