

Concept note

Second Session of the United Nations Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment
for the Asia-Pacific Region (AP-SPBF)

PUTTING SUSTAINABILITY INTO GEAR IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Future Proofing Economies, People and the Planet

3 October 2023

Colombo, Sri Lanka

The event is organized by the Asia-Pacific UN Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment (AP-SPBF), in the context of the 5th Session of the Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of the Asia-Pacific Region.

The Roundtable will focus on the policy and investment measures required to empower a green structural transformation in the region – with focus on developing and least developed countries. It will also explore the barriers that need to be overcome, and the opportunities to be created to attract green direct foreign investment – covering public-private partnerships and investment in green infrastructure and the digital economy.

The outcomes of the Roundtable will inform the ministerial consultations and the work of the United Nations Environment Assembly, the UN's highest level decision-making body on the environment. Participating will be national delegations from the Asia Pacific region, in addition to business leaders, investors, development banks and civil society representatives.

The UN Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment (UN-SPBF) is the UN's premier multi-sector convening and engagement platform. It encourages "Technology, Partnerships and Integrated Solutions for Nature" as key points of interaction towards the achievement of the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals. More information: <https://un-spbf.org>

For more information, please contact:

Youssef Aboali: youssef.aboali@un.org, Ms. K. N. Kumudini Vidyalankara: kumudiniimex@gmail.com

Provisional Programme

09:00	Registration Morning Coffee & Networking Session
10:30	Opening
11:00	Session One Putting Sustainability into Gear in the Asia Pacific Region Empowering LDCs and Pacific Islands through Green Structural Transformation
13:00	Lunch
15:00	Session Two Harnessing the Power of Sustainable Infrastructure for an Equitable and Resilient Future
17:00	Closing

Roundtable in Brief

The Asia-Pacific region, a hub of exponential growth and urban expansion, is distinguished by its rich biodiversity and integral role in the international supply chain. This unique positioning enables the region to tackle climate change and sustainability challenges with innovation, resilience, and ambition.

The region, however, stands at a critical crossroad. The driving forces that have powered its extraordinary growth over the last three decades may not suffice in an age marked by persistent disruption. The region's share of global emissions has escalated from 35% in 2010 to 39% in 2019, necessitating an urgent acceleration in decarbonization efforts.

At the same time, the region is home to a multitude of islands and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) that confront unique challenges and opportunities arising from climate risk. The interplay of vulnerability to climate change and economic fragility in these geographies makes a compelling case for targeted action and investment, particularly in green sectors. Sessions will explore the opportunities and challenges they face in the context of international cooperation, investment, policy and means to fast-track green structural transformation and green technology empowerment

Morning Session

The morning session will address critical questions: how proficiently can businesses operating in the region navigate an evolving landscape, balancing the need to address pressing environmental and other risk, while contributing to sustainable development targets? And what regulatory frameworks, policies and incentives are shaping the region's future and empowering corporates and industry of various sizes to not only cope, but flourish?

The session will also address new government policies and legislations shaping the landscape.

The metrics for success extend beyond financial performance alone. Decarbonization, circular economy, human rights, and supply chain resilience, all constituents of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations, are becoming the new catalysts of change.

The concerns are manifold and include ensuring a fair transition to net-zero, facilitating development with due regard to social and ecological sustainability, adapting to changing employment dynamics, and leveraging inherent

opportunities. The impending challenges for businesses are two-fold: aligning their strategies, investments, and behaviors with sustainable objectives, and quantifying and demonstrating their impact.

A special component of the discussion will focus on fast tracking green structural transformation in LDCs and Pacific Islands, with focus on opportunities in Green Tech empowerment and financing.

Afternoon Session

The second session will focus on sustainable infrastructure as a driver for positive change. Sustainable investment in infrastructure, encompassing a wide range of essential structures like power plants, roads, water systems, agricultural systems and increasingly, digital technologies, forms the backbone of a nation's economic prowess.

For countries in the Asia-Pacific, developing infrastructure is an urgent necessity. To maintain growth, an estimated \$4.7 trillion investment is required over the coming decade, with 66% needed for novel infrastructure (Asian Development Bank, 2020). The implications on SIDs and LDCs will be unpacked and examined.

The debate concerning public and private sectors' roles in sustainable infrastructure finance, ownership, and management is intensifying. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as viable modalities, evidenced by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank's (AIIB) successful PPP projects (AIIB, 2020).

The potential for job creation through sustainable infrastructure investment is vast. Investing in the renewable energy sector alone could quadruple the number of jobs in this sector to 42 million globally by 2050, much of this growth expected in the Asia Pacific region, the current leader in renewable energy employment (IRENA, 2021).

As of the latest data, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) maintains that strategic investments in sustainable infrastructure remain vital in mitigating disaster-related economic losses. The precise return on investment might vary depending on specific regional and sectoral conditions, but the general principle of significant economic savings still holds (AIIB, 2021).

For more information, please contact:

Shuzhi Hou: shuzhi.hou@un.org, Youssef Aboali: youssef.aboali@un.org

About the UN Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment (UNSPBF):

The UN Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment is the United Nations' premier, fastest-growing multi-sector convening platform on the environment, 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. It informs powerful global processes including the UN Environment Assembly, the highest level decision-making body on the environment.

In October 2021, the Forum launched its first regional mechanism in Asia-Pacific in conjunction with the 4th Session of the Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities, hosted by the Republic of Korea. In August 2023, the launch of SPBF in the Africa region took place in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia as part of the 19th Ordinary Session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN). For more information please visit: <https://un-spbf.org/>