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**United Nations ESCAP Asia Pacific Business Forum 2022**

**First half Date TBC**

**Background**

Business has a critical role to play in driving the green transformation that will be required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and solve the climate emergency. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how vulnerable economies and societies are to external shocks. As the world is looking to get out of the pandemic and build back better, it is clear that collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders will be critical to address the common challenges faced by humanity. In particular, private sector sector action and partnerships need to be leveraged for building an Asia-Pacific region that is more resilient, sustainable, inclusive and just.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the 17 SDGs, and the Paris Agreement in 2015 provided a common agenda and direction, emphasizing the importance of transformative change needed in all three dimensions of sustainability – environmental, social and economic. The agreements also highlight the important role of the private sector in achieving the required change. COP26 in Glasgow will only add to the urgenct demand for affirmative actions and supportive policies to enact the changes needed to meet the targets and goals set.

However, six years having passed since the Paris Agreement and the UNSDG’s adoption, progress towards achievement of the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific remains off-track, in particular due to the economic strive the Covid pandemic has caused. Addressing sustainable consumption and production and climate action - areas where the private sector is a key player, has forced many economies to park those issues whilst focusing on their economic recovery. And while an increasing number of Asia based companies and financial institutions are starting to show leadership by implementing responsible business practices by adhering to ESG reporting compliance and committing to net-zero emission trajectories for their operations and/or investments, too many companies still see sustainability more as a cost than as an opportunity and a way to future proof their business. This needs to change NOW. With less than 9 years to go until 2030 – the year when the SDGs should be achieved and by which time carbon emissions should be cut in half[[1]](#footnote-2) – strong and decisive action by the private sector will be imperative.

Achieving the transformation needed will require new technologies, processes and business models to be developed. These transformational opportunities need to be seized now, in building back better from the Covid-19 crisis, to build back stronger, sustainably and smarter. The Asia-Pacific can be, and is becoming, a driver of new technologies that will allow business to innovate in every industry, to simultaneously reduce costs and improve productivity, while reducing their impact on the environment. The region has the scale, the investment vision and the long-term thinking to lead, and to contribute to the global transformation to a green future.

The ESCAP Sustainable Business Network (ESBN)[[2]](#footnote-3) thus calls for an **Asia Pacific Green Deal**, defined as a regional approach that puts business at the centre of action, working in partnership with governments and communities to develop the new technologies and innovate the new business models that will deliver on the promise of sustainable development.

Against this background the **Asia-Pacific Business Forum 2022** will be organized on the topic of an “*An Asia Pacific Green Deal? Building back better towards a green future*” to discuss the need for change, and to rally business action across sectors and geographies in the region.

The Forum will focus on the following potential **pillars of an Asia Pacific Green Deal for business**:

(i) zero-carbon, affordable and resilient energy system

(ii) smart, low-carbon and climate-resilient mobility and infrastructure

(iii) green and circular economy

(iv) green finance and

(v) innovations for sustainable development.

***Objectives and Outcome***

The Forum will provide the forum for indepth analysis and discussions together with its strategic partners around the five emerging pillars of the Asia Pacific Green Deal for business. For each of these the Forum will,

* Promote action by Asia-Pacific business to help accelerate action;
* Underline the leading role of business in achieving the five pillars of the Green Deal;
* Highlight key business opportunities;
* Showcase best practices to demonstrate application of green principles;
* Solicit support from participating businesses for the principles of the United Nations Global Compact and related Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles aimed at integrating economic, social and environmental responsibilities into business operations;

The Forum is expected to adopt an outcome statement/declaration based on the pillars outlined above, calling for an an Asia Pacific Green Deal for business with commitments from participating businesses.

**About the Asia-Pacific Business Forum**

The Asia-Pacific Business Forum (APBF) has been organized by ESCAP since 2004, in collaboration with different member States and business associations. The Forum has served as a valuable multi-sectoral dialogue between government, business and community leaders on key economic and business challenges. Over the past few years, the forum has been organized in close collaboration and with strong involvement of members of the ESCAP Sustainable Business Network (ESBN) and Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC).

The inagural Asia Pacific Business Forum in 2004 was held in Shanghai and it is proposed, subject to the agreement of the Chinese Government, to return to China to host the next Forum in Shenzhen under the theme “*An Asia Pacific Green Deal? Building back better towards a green future*” in the first half of 2022 exact date TBC.

APBF 2022 will provide a platform to discuss and identify priorities for green transformation in Asia Pacific, including opportunities for investment in green infrastructure and technologies, to showcase best practices and announce actions to be taken forward by Asia-Pacific business, led by the ESBN & PBEC in collaboration with the ESCAP secretariat.

The call to action and pledges and commitments made at the Forum will signal the beginning of a plan of action by Asia-Pacific business to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

***Format and venue***

An important feature of the Asia-Pacific Business Forum is broad participation from across the region. Therefore, given ongoing travel limitations, it is proposed to organize APBF 2022 in a hybrid format, with the ‘live’ part of the event held physically, and live-streamed on an online conferencing platform. The hybrid format will mean that some speakers will be at the live event and some participate by video link, with questions from the floor as well as online. The hybrid format will enable recruiting high-level speakers, speaking in a mix between traditional plenary and panel discussions and more innovative and interactive session formats. It will allow participants and speakers to join the Forum from all around the world and, in particular, to ensure a broad participation across the Asia Pacific region. The World Green Organisation will organize an industry exhibition on sustainable solutions, to be held separately at the Forum venue.

The programme will involve prominent keynote speakers advocating for greening of the region, with speakers representing a balanced background in terms of geography, gender and sectors. Each panel session will discuss key actions needed to further engage Asia Pacific business in practical steps to green the region.

The physical part of the Forum is proposed to be held in Shenzhen, China. It is hoped that by the time of the Forum in 2022, circumstances would allow for some amount of high-level live participation from business leaders both in China and some other countries in the region. China’s commitment to green transformation and climate action, as confirmed in recent policy announcements[[3]](#footnote-4), is fundamental if the region is to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Holding an Asia-Pacific Business Forum on the theme of a “Green Deal” presents an opportunity to engage both Government an business representatives in identifying required actions and potential regional solutions.

Shenzhen is proposed as the location to launch the proposed Green Deal dialogue, as it is a centre of regional (and global) technological innovation and has grown to become a hub for regional (and global) systems of finance, most recent wealth connect with Hong Kong and Macao, trade and investment, with ambitions to be a leading green city in Asia. Shenzhen has the added advantage that it is a twin city to Hong Kong, China where many business headquarters as well as a number of members of the ESCAP Sustainable Business Network and PBEC are based. Moreover, the Hong Kong, China Government has informally indicated its support to partner in the project and to deliver high-level involvement in the event.

***Organization and funding***

An Organizing Committee, co-chaired by ESCAP, the ESBN & PBEC, will be set up to oversee the organization of this event, including development of the programme, identification and recruitment of speakers, and logistical arrangements. The Organizing Committee will hold virtual meetings every two weeks to discuss and agree on the organizational aspects of the forum. From the ESBN side, the Green Economy Task Force Coordinator, Albert Oung, will lead a project team supporting the organization of the event, supported by David Morris, Vice Chair of the Sustainable Business Network. From the ESCAP side the Director of the Trade, Investment and Innovation Division will lead the co- organization of the event supported by the Divisional and wider ESCAP team. The Organizing Committee will also include William Yu, CEO of the World Green Organisation; Deborah Biber, Chair of the ESBN Digital Economy taskforce; Michael Walsh CEO of PBEC and Lee Ju Song, former Executive Director of ICC Asia. Once the host government has nominated a local partner organization and representative, they too will play a critical role in the Organizing Committee and in supporting the hosting, logistics and other aspects of the event management.

ESCAP will provide the online platform and technical faciltitator for event, including website, registration, online conferencing platform and transmission to Youtube.

The host government will be expected to provide the venue and related logistical support, including audio-visual services and streaming from the venue, and arrange for a high level Chinese government representative (Minister or higher) to open the Forum, as well as other support to be negotiated with the host government partner organization by the ESBN co-chairs on the organizing committee in close coordination with ESCAP.

Participation in the Forum will be free. ESBN & PBEC will actively seek company sponsorships for lunches and coffee breaks and related hospitality at the venue, including from ESBN & PBEC members, unless provided for by the local Government.

As with previous forums, the first milestone will be securing commitment from the host government and, from that time, working closely with the partner organization nominated by the host government to plan and implement the Forum, including attracting key sponsors and high-level speakers. Subject to the decision of the Government of China, it is proposed that the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) in Shenzhen would be a suitable local partner in organizing the Forum.[[4]](#footnote-5)

***Tentative programme***

The below is a skeleton programme, to be further developed (aligned with the logical framework in Annex)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Day 1  Pre-forum | ESCAP Sustainable Business Network annual meeting (virtual plus in person), including taskforce meetings | |
| Day 2 | APBF Day1 | |
| Morning | Opening remarks by representatives of ESCAP, ESBN, PBEC and host  High level keynote (Minister or higher representative of China) | |
| Morning | High-level panel: Achieving a low-carbon sustainable Asia-Pacific – policy priorities and the need for business leadership | |
| Afternoon | Advancing a zero-carbon, affordable and resilient energy system   1. Increasing access to green and renewable energy 2. Moving away from fossil fuels, challenges and prospects | Developing smart, low-carbon and climate-resilient mobility   1. Transitioning to low-carbon transport and freight 2. Energy efficient buildings – challenges and solutions for the region |
| Day 3 | APBF Day2 |  |
| Morning | Achieving circularity, reducing waste and addressing the plastic challenge   1. Reducing waste and addressing the oceans plastics challenge 2. Increasing circularity and advancing a sharing economy | Accelerating and scaling up innovations for sustainable development   1. Transforming heavy industry – emerging innovations 2. Digital economy tools for advancing sustainability |
| Afternoon | Leveraging the power of finance   1. Increasing and promoting access to green finance, 2. Advancing responsible banking and sustainable capital market | Increasing resilience through PPP   1. ICT and space technology for sustainable development 2. Building resilience to drought, controlling desertification and land degradation |
| Afternoon | Closing panel: A Green deal for business in Asia – way forward | |
| Day 4 | ESCAP PPP network meeting (TBC) | |

**Annex 1**

**A potential framework of actions to advance an Asia-Pacific Green Deal for business**

This document outlines a potential framework for action towards an “Asia-Pacific Green Deal” For business. It presents initial proposals on what needs to happen in the region – and related to that – what business needs to do, as a basis for defining what the ESBN could do, and to inform the framing the APBF programme. Inspired by and aligned with the “Asia-Pacific Green Deal” paper of the Green Economy taskforce, it is proposed for further joint development by the ESCAP secretariat and ESBN EC/taskforces.

The following areas are proposed as a way to align the various areas identified in the paper with the work of the ESCAP Secretariat, and linking it to ESBN taskforces.

(i) zero-carbon, affordable and resilient energy system

(ii) smart, low-carbon and climate-resilient mobility and infrastructure

(iii) green and circular economy

(iv) green finance and

(v) innovations for sustainable development.

The **Asia Pacific Business Forum 2022 (APBF 2022) is an important opportunity to consolidate business perspectives and accelerate business solutions towards a Green Deal.** The Forum is intended to promote regional solutions, showcase best practices and to stimulate new thinking in key identified priority areas of actions. The below framework can serve as a way to structure APBF discussions, and link them to ESBN actions following the forum, thus strengthening the ESBN’s programmatic impact and build momentum behind critical regional actions.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Impact:**  The public and the private sector collectively transform the region towards carbon-neutral, climate-resilient and efficient economies. | |
| **Policy Area 1 – ENERGY:**  **Advancing a zero-carbon, affordable and resilient energy system:** The energy system is decarbonized in accordance with the commitments of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, while reliable and affordable access to zero-carbon energy is provided for all. | |
| Major outcomes | * Clear and ambitious renewable energy, energy efficiency and emission targets are adopted and placed at the center of post-pandemic recovery policies and national development plans. * Unabated fossil fuel generation is phased out through the removal of fossil fuel subsidies and the introduction of adequate carbon pricing and relevant incentives. * Innovative technologies and initiatives on zero-carbon energy and energy efficiency are implemented and expanded to ensure reliable and zero-carbon energy supply is accessible and affordable for all. This includes the improvement and digitalization of power grid to manage the renewable energy supply and demand more efficiently. * Existing and emerging threats are addressed in the energy systems such as climate risks, cybersecurity threats and the management of critical raw materials for renewable energy generation. * Energy markets are harmonized and interconnected through the removal of renewable energy trade barriers and stronger collaboration between public-private sector and between countries. |
| Potential business contributions | * Commit to net-zero / science-based emission reduction targets for all scopes (1-3). * Put an end to the funding and construction of new coal power plants. * Increase the demand for zero-carbon energy by sourcing it in business operations and production. * Electrify energy end-use wherever possible in buildings, transport, and production. * Work with governments, civil society, and communities to implement the commitments of the Paris Agreement and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. |
| ESCAP divisions | Energy |
| ESBN taskforces | * ESBN Task Force: Green economy |
| ESBN activities | * To be developed |
| **Policy Area 2 – TRANSPORT / MOBILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE:**  **Developing smart, low-carbon and climate-resilient mobility and infrastructure:** Greenhouse gas emission of the transport sector in Asia and the Pacific is reduced further and faster while its resilience to future crises is further strengthened. | |
| Major outcomes | * Low-carbon mandates and targets are embedded in urban development policies and plans, prioritizing the expansion of public transport, electric vehicles, and necessary urban infrastructure for active mobility. * Supply of sustainable alternative fuels is developed and replaces fossil fuels while electric vehicles and necessary infrastructure are made available in the transport system. * Sustainable practices and environmental standards are adopted and used in the financing and development of transport system and infrastructure. * Energy efficiency standards for new buildings adopted, retrofitting of old buildings incentivized, and more energy efficient ways of heating and cooling buildings incentivized. * New industry 4.0 technologies are adopted to lower emissions of construction sector (cement, steel, etc.), and build resilience of supply chain to climate risks and future pandemics. * Expanded risks by climate-induced disasters and biohazards are incorporated in the development of infrastructure and transport system. |
| Potential business contributions | * Convert to use electric vehicles and alternative fuels in business operations. * Quantify carbon emissions in supply chains and consider the transition to different modes of transport. * Align business operations and practices with new environmental standards and expanded risks from climate-induced disasters and biohazards. * Climate-proof the supply chains and infrastructure to ensure its resilience to climate-induced disasters and future pandemics. * Develop materials to reduce carbon footprint of buildings, and financial products to increase the funding to and speed up the transformation to energy efficient buildings (e.g. insurance products) |
| ESCAP divisions | Transport  Environment and development  ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction |
| ESBN taskforces | * ESBN Task Force: Green economy * ESBN Task Force: Disaster and Climate risk reduction |
| ESBN & PBEC activities | *(To be developed)* |
| **Policy Area 3 - GREEN AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY:**  **Transforming towards green and circular economy:** Environmental impacts and resource use of economic activities are minimized through circular production and consumption while new opportunities for employment and income growth are provided through sustainable business model. | |
| Major outcomes | * New markets are developed for climate neutral and circular products including through targeted subsidies, incentives, and accelerated investments in research and development. * A sharing economy is incentivized towards re-using, re-purposing, and re-cycling. * Digitize and adopt new industry 4.0 technologies to lower emissions and develop more sustainable and resilient supply chains, with transition maps for industry bodies. * More ambitious, smart upstream and downstream waste management industry is innovated with new infrastructure, technologies and certification standards. * Collaboration is strengthened to address cross-boundary waste problems, including enforcement of international norms and standards related to marine plastic pollution and waste management by governments, businesses, civil society and communities. * Increased investments in sustainable agriculture, landscape restoration, fisheries management, and maritime industries, to protect resources while generating livelihood opportunities for local communities. * Business regulations are reformed allowing for more increase transparency and accountability of businesses for their carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions. |
| Potential business contributions | * Investing in clean, safe, non-toxic, and sustainable production cycles to reduce energy demand and resource use across the value chains. * Providing transparent and reliable information on its carbon footprints and emissions to consumers. * Ensuring that the workforce, especially youth and women, benefit from new employment opportunities generated by new sustainable business models. * Providing necessary support to micro, small, medium enterprises, especially those led by women to transition to sustainable business models. |
| ESCAP divisions | Environment and Development  Trade, Investment, and Innovation |
| ESBN taskforces | * Green economy * Youth and Women entrepreneurship * Digital economy |
| ESBN & PBEC activities | * To be developed |
| **Policy Area 4 - FINANCE:**  **Mobilizing green finance:** Public and private investments are directed away from fossil-fuel based and heavy polluting sectors to create and finance new opportunities in decarbonizing the economy, improving energy efficiency, and developing new markets for sustainable products. | |
| Major outcomes | * Green finance instruments for sustainable investing are developed, such as the expansion of national sovereign green funds, impact investing, and carbon trading markets. * Fossil fuel subsidies are eliminated while carbon tax is introduced, allowing for financial resources to be redirected towards investments in renewable energy and energy transition. * Adequate carbon pricing is adopted to incentivize a shift towards zero-carbon energy and increase the uptake of renewable energy, energy efficient technologies, and lower carbon footprint products. * Private investments are shifted from fossil fuels to zero-carbon energy sources and low-carbon footprint sectors. This is coupled with public investments in areas where it is difficult to mobilize investments and where critical markets are negatively affected by the pandemic. * Inward and outward foreign direct investment policies prioritize and facilitate channeling investment into sustainable projects. |
| Potential business contributions | * Channel investments from fossil-fuel based operation to zero-carbon energy sources and commit to end funding to coal and other fossil fuels. * Committing to Principles of Responsible Banking, Principles for Responsible Investment, joining Net-Zero Asset Owners Alliance, or related net-zero alliances for asset managers, insurers and banks, and inspiring others to do likewise. * Work with governments to introduce new green finance instruments to finance green projects and speed up green transformation of other sectors. |
| ESCAP divisions | Macroeconomics and Financing for Development |
| ESBN taskforces | * ESBN Task Force: Sustainable and inclusive finance (ex. banking and finance) |
| **Policy Area 5 – INNOVATION:**  **Accelerating and scaling up innovations for sustainable development:** Innovation and new technologies are promoted to accelerate energy transition, decarbonize transport system, and develop sustainable business solutions and models. | |
| Major outcomes | * Public and private investments are directed to develop and adopt at larger scale clean technologies which can drive down the cost of existing solutions and change industry dynamics. Examples include new technologies for energy storage and digitalizing power grid. * Digitize and adopt new industry 4.0 technologies to lower emissions and develop more sustainable and resilient supply chains, with transition maps for industry bodies. * Support is provided to micro, small and medium enterprises by the public sector and financial institutions, including through new financing instruments, to accelerate the uptake of new technologies and innovative business models. * Technological transfer and exchange of best practices are promoted between countries and markets. * The business and research networks in the region are leveraged to foster research, innovation, and start-ups in the new green economy. |
| Potential business contributions | * Ramping up private investment in new technologies and innovations which can accelerate the energy transition, decarbonize transport system and transition to circular economy. * Supporting technological transfer and sharing of knowledge and experience to developing economies. * Supporting the upskilling of the workforce to adopt and benefit from new technologies and innovative solutions. |
| ESCAP divisions | Trade, Investment and Innovation |
| ESBN Focal point | * ESBN Task Force: Digital economy |
| ESBN & PBEC activities | * To be developed |

1. According Climate Analytics (2019) *Insights from the IPCC special report on 1.5°C for preparation of long-term strategies*. emissions need to be reduced to 45% of 2010 levels by 2030. <https://climateanalytics.org/media/climateanalytics_ipcc-lt-leds_report_april_2019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. esbn.unescap.un.org [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. At the United Nations General Assembly on 22 September 2020, China’s leader, Xi Jinping, announced that China aims to halt the rise of its carbon emissions by 2030 and strive for “carbon neutrality” by 2060. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. As a reference, in the case of the 2019 Asia Pacific Business Forum, the formal host was the Papua New Guinea Government, through the Department of Commerce and Industry, and the working partner and representative on the Organizing Committee was the Investment Promotion Authority, which provided the venue, the Prime Minister for the opening address and other logistical support such as transport and security. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)