ISAP2016
Plenary Session 2

Starting Strong on the SDGs in Asia:
A Framing Paper on National Readiness

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Key Messages

This paper series describes how four countries in Asia have prepared for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and recommends critical next steps. Key findings include the following:

- Governments need a quick, decisive start to realise the SDG's transformational vision. Starting from scratch is often unnecessary. Institutional responses to past sustainability initiatives and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) can provide a foundation for kick-starting initial actions.

- Asia's governments have generally started strong on the SDGs. Promising early efforts are illustrated below from several countries surveyed for this series:

  o Bhutan has aligned existing development plans with the SDGs. Its Gross National Happiness Commission will manage policy coordination and sustainability assessments. Awareness raising for civil servants and the public aim to consolidate support within and beyond government.

  o India has undertaken a comprehensive mapping of the SDGs against national programmes. Governmental and multi-stakeholder workshops have discussed implementation arrangements, while nodal and related ministries have been delegated responsibilities for different SDGs and targets. Indicators and capacity for monitoring remain priorities. Some state governments such as Assam are outpacing national efforts.

  o The Philippines' National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and the national sustainable development commission are poised to mainstream the SDGs. NEDA continues to host workshops to spread and deepen public support. The SDGs are integrated in the current Philippine Development Plan and relevant budgets.

  o In the Republic of Korea, Local Councils for Sustainable Development (LCSDs) have previously spearheaded sustainability activities. Their focus has frequently been on solving local environment problems rather than promoting more holistic views of sustainability. Determining the roles of national ministries in the domestic response to the SDGs will be critical to reflecting these holistic views in policy and practice.

- Four need areas require attention for countries to continue along a transformational path: 1) integrated planning and improved policy coherence; 2) enhanced capacity to mobilise and deploy financial resources; 3) more and better data, easily available to all, to track progress and ensure accountability; and 4) strengthened capacity to form multi-stakeholder partnerships.

1. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—consisting of 17 headline goals accompanied by 169 more specific targets—are expected to transform current human and economic development until 2030. Adopted by all 193 United Nations member states in September 2015, the SDGs provide an aspirational but challenging to-do-list for governments and society more broadly. Although only a half-year has passed since the formal start of SDGs implementation, many governments have already embraced this challenge, devoting considerable time and energy to moving down the aforementioned list of essential tasks. For some countries, this has meant proactive steps to reflect the new global agenda in national development plans and sectoral strategies. For others, it has entailed creating institutional arrangements to implement the above plans and monitoring protocols to assess forward progress. In short, many parts of the world have begun to get ready for the SDGs (Kroll, 2015; Pisano, Lange, Berger, & Hametner, 2015; SDSN, 2015).

This framing paper takes stock of the readiness activities for a diverse cross-section of countries in Asia. More concretely, the paper summarises early actions from Bhutan, India, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea, offering an informative "first glance" assessment of national readiness for SDGs implementation in a region where sustainability is urgently needed. That assessment suggests Bhutan has aligned its existing development plan with the SDGs, and benefited from well-functioning policy coordination and assessment mechanisms in its Gross National Happiness (GNH) Commission. It further highlights that India has identified nodal and related ministries for each SDG and determined relevant targets with indicators for several priority areas. Meanwhile, it demonstrates that the Philippines has sponsored a steady stream of public consultations and awareness raising on the SDGs, while earmarking budgets to inject funding into the new agenda. And it shows that Korea will likely need to work with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local governments to scale up the SDGs as traditionally much action on sustainable development has come from those actors.

This initial assessment is, on balance, promising; it is, however, not perfect. The paper finds that, while the four surveyed countries are off to a good start, additional attention is required to four following related need areas if countries are to make good on the transformational vision of the SDGs:

> 1. integrated planning and improved policy coherence to capture cost savings and operational efficiencies;
> 2. enhanced capacity to mobilise and effectively deploy financial and other resources;
> 3. more and better data, easily available to all, to track progress and ensure accountability; and
> 4. mutually beneficial partnerships between governments and non-state actors to support action in each of the above three areas.

It should be stressed that addressing these four need areas will be mutually reinforcing. Partnerships

can increase the generation and accessibility of data; good quality data is a precondition for realising more integrated policies in practice; integrated policymaking can strengthen synergies and reduce costs of implementation; financial resources are needed in order to make partnerships productive and better aligned with societal objectives.

The rest of this introductory section lays out the rationale for why an initially promising start SDGs is as imperative as it is feasible in Asia. The second section summarises early actions by governments in Asia. The third section provides suggestions for countries based on the four need areas listed above. A final section concludes by pointing to the role of others in getting ready for the SDGs.

2. A Strong Start on the SDGs

Achieving the ambitious objectives of the broad SDGs agenda over just a fifteen-year period requires quick and concerted action (Lucci & Lally, 2016; Nicolai et al. 2015). A slow and fragmented start increases the risk of losing momentum and coming up short, since it could weaken stakeholders' commitment to the implementation process and lock in unsustainable institutions and practices. The longer the lag between the agreement and initial actions, the greater the likelihood that key actors' interest wanes and such lock-ins become more entrenched (Unruh, 2002). Implementation of earlier international agreements, such as the national sustainable development strategies (NSDS) that were a response to Agenda 21, offers precautionary tale in the perils of a slow and unsteady start. There are three reasons to believe that the SDGs could serve as a focusing event, generating more proactive responses (Birkland, 1998).

First, the development of the SDGs was a process that extended over more than two-year. Country representatives played an active role in shaping the agreement; governments could thus get a clear image of what the final agreement would look like from early stages. This helped build ownership and offered governments sufficient time to start preparing for implementation. In fact, countries such as Colombia did not wait for the ink to dry on the international SDGs agreement before it initiated preparedness activities.

Second, the two years of negotiations engaged a wide range of stakeholders in a uniquely inclusive process. Civil society was able to provide substantive inputs into the 2030 agenda in a fashion that strengthened ownership from non-state actors. The business community, working through networks such as Global Compact and World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), also left its mark on the agenda. Further, reflecting enormous growth in scientific knowledge on sustainability, researchers and scientists were able to offer unparalleled expertise on the design details and overall orientation of the SDGs.

Finally, previous experience with international agreements has left an institutional legacy that gives the agenda a critical supply of experience. The SDGs were drafted as the successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While progress with the MDGs was uneven, they are generally recognised for reducing extreme poverty, increasing school enrolment, and improving

health (UN 2015). The SDGs are based on a similar structure to the MDGs. Yet they aim to draw upon the MDG's succinctness and traceability with holistic and cross-cutting framing of earlier sustainable development agreements such as Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Program on Implementation (JPoI). Importantly, many developing countries already have institutional arrangements in place from the MDGs and may therefore be able to relatively quickly prepare institutionally to respond to the new goals (perhaps even more so than developed countries that are not so familiar with the goal architecture). Further, many countries have had experiences with sustainable development commissions (SDCs) or similar bodies from past sustainability initiatives. Where such bodies exist, they can also be reinvigorated (Olsen and Zusman, 2014).

In sum, a uniquely inclusive two-year process helped to create ownership over an agenda that could build on the institutional legacies of past development and sustainability initiatives. The combination of these factors provides fertile ground for a strong start on the SDGs. However, these potentially favourable conditions are simply potentially favourable unless they are met with commensurate strong action at the national and subnational levels. For many countries, national governments will arguably play the determinate roles in steering the agenda and enabling action from the public sector through to other societal actors. There is also recognition that early mover governments may help maintain momentum by inspiring others (Beisheim 2016). The following section therefore looks at the initial steps taken by some national governments in Asia.

3. Early actions in the Asia-Pacific region

To understand those initial steps, the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) and collaborating partners developed a series of national profiles on SDGs readiness for 2015 and 2016. The purpose of these studies was twofold: first, to collect and disseminate lessons about early SDG action so as to raise awareness and motivate action elsewhere; and second, to follow up on an earlier IGES study that traced the evolution of countries' institutional frameworks for sustainability following the aforementioned Agenda 21 and national sustainable development strategies (NSDS) through the late-1990s and early-2000s (Olsen & Zusman, 2013). The earlier studies found that the lack of stakeholder engagement mechanisms and insufficient monitoring and review weakened accountability and curbed incentives for implementation. The result was a cycling pattern whereby newly chosen leadership would introduce an impressive-sounding set of sustainability plans only to be followed approximately five years later by yet another set of nicely packaged plans. By looking at what governments and other actors are doing now, the hope is to better understand what institutional frameworks are being put in place to break this cycle and identify practices that governments and other stakeholders can take forward towards a longer term transformation at this pivotal juncture.

To these ends, IGES and collaborators used an analytical framework based on six main areas deemed critical to setting a firm foundation for initial SDGs actions:
1. Existing national development planning framework

2. Coherence between SDGs and national goals
3. Overview of implementation arrangements
4. Financial, capacity and technological means of implementation (MOI)
5. Challenges to progress
6. How challenges could be overcome

Before summarising the highlights of those profiles, it merits underlining that the contributors came at this task from different vantage points. Most notably, while some worked for government, others did not. In all cases, the aim was to acquire the best and most recent information.

2.1   Bhutan

With its novel approach to quality of growth and development, this small land-locked country in the Himalayas often serves as exemplar for other countries seeking alternatives to traditional development models. In Bhutan, that alternative is guided by the holistic and inclusive philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH). The holistic approach has helped to facilitate the mainstreaming of the recently approved SDGs into the country's development planning: 134 out of 169 SDG targets have already been included in Bhutan's Eleventh Development Plan. Bhutan is also taking the initiative on some of the softer elements of SDG implementation by supporting sensitisation programmes for government officials and awareness raising for the general public. In addition, Bhutan has begun to capitalise on the strong synergies between the SDGs' emphasis on tracking results and the country's own multi-tiered national planning framework; the strong relationship will increase accountability up and down the chain of command. Overall, Bhutan's initial response to the SDGs is encouraging and the country appears to be ready to take meaningful next steps.

2.2   India

In India, the government is actively preparing for successful implementation of the SDGs and has held several rounds of consultations with government ministries and other stakeholders. NITI Aayog–the successor of the Planning Commission of India—has been charged with the overall coordinating responsibility for the new goals. In this capacity, it has already undertaken a mapping of the SDGs and (as noted in the introduction) identified a nodal ministry for each SDG. Similarly targeted attempts have been initiated to link the SDGs with centrally sponsored schemes (CSS); the CSS make up a key mechanism for the Indian central government to finance and thereby shape development initiatives at the state levels. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has been given a central role with regards to indicators and monitoring, and the process to identify relevant and feasible indicators is ongoing. An official committee of parliamentarians has been formed to raise awareness on the SDGs among legislators. Further, some state governments have moved more quickly than the central government on the SDGs. The state of Assam, for example, has already set up a nodal cell for coordination and established working

groups to draw up action plans. While there is considerable progress financing, technology, data, and interregional diversity remain concerns moving forward.

2.3 The Philippines

Based on experiences in the 1990s and 2000s, the Philippines already serves as a model for inclusive approaches to sustainable development. The country has institutions such as the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and a national sustainable development commission, both of which remain relatively active and can help in mainstreaming the SDGs. Accordingly, the NEDA consulted with the public early in the process and is organising broad awareness-raising workshops on the 2030 Agenda and SDGs for the general public. Many SDGs already figure in the current Philippine Development Plan and in relevant budgets. As such, the Philippines case may suggest that the need for significant influxes of additional finance to implement the SDGs is overblown; a possibly greater need is reallocating existing resources to more sustainable ends.

2.4 The Republic of Korea

For more than two decades, Korea has been translating the global drive for sustainable development into domestic actions. Much of the action has been initiated at the local level through partnerships known as Local Councils for Sustainable Development (LCSD). These efforts have been aided by a relatively effective set of institutions that enabled public participation at the local level. Since much of this activity has been channelled through local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the concentration has been on safeguarding local national resources and protecting ecosystems as opposed to promoting the wider socio-economic dimensions of sustainable development. There is hence a significant opportunity for the SDGs to help the national government to raise the profile and broaden the appeal of sustainable development. The likelihood that the national government will be able to capitalise on this opportunity nevertheless seems to be hamstrung by institutional arrangements that, for the time being, placed the SDGs under the charge of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) without a focal point for domestic action. A significant commitment to promoting green growth as opposed to sustainable development among environmental agencies and low levels of awareness among leaders are other significant hurdles. In light of these constraints, the best near-term hopes for the SDGs in the Republic of Korea might be continued commitment at the local levels that gradually expands to higher levels of decision-making.

2.5 Overall Assessment

The overall picture that emerges from this initial assessment is generally favourable. In less than a year, all four countries have begun to identify links between the SDGs and their development plans. Further, all four countries have assigned implementation responsibilities across multiple government agencies. In three of the four cases, there have also been highly visible efforts to raise

awareness of the agenda for the general public. In two of the four cases, budgets have been reoriented to help cover the costs of implementation—though provisions of additional MOI are highlighted as important in at least two of those cases. Interestingly, the country that appears to have the most work left to do is the Republic of Korea; this may speak to the challenges for many developed countries of responding to the new development agenda at the national level without the MDG experience.

Table 1: Summary of National Readiness for the SDGs

	Bhutan	**India**	**Philippines**	**Korea**
Existing planning framework	Five year development plans	Five year development plans	Six year development plans	Five year development plans
Coherence between SDGs and national goals	Strong synergies with GNH	Moderate synergies with existing goals	Strong synergies with previous development plans	Some synergies with green growth
Implementation arrangements	GNH commission and multi-level implementation structure	NITI Aayog and some proactive state govs	NEDA well positioned to mainstream SDGs	MOFA will need to work with MOE and other agencies Local governments and NGOs could support national efforts
Financial and other MOI	TBD	Alignment with existing budget	Alignment with existing budget Some resources already allocated	TBD
Challenges	Technology	Finance, Capacity, Tech	--	Assigning implementation responsibilities

Not only these four Asian countries are taking early action; countries at all stages of economic development have stepped to the plate. Japan, for example, recently established a dedicated SDGs headquarters in the Cabinet Secretariat, headed by the Prime Minister and charged with overseeing and coordinating SDGs implementation both domestically and internationally. Malaysia is currently in the process of establishing a national governance structure for the SDGs, including a high-level

steering committee and SDG roadmap, which will include national indicators, a database and internet portal, and a framework for strategic communications. Nepal, still recovering from the devastating earthquake in 2015, has established a parliamentary committee to oversee the implementation of the SDGs, while Pakistan and Bangladesh have partnered with UN organisations to assess statistical capacity and availability of data for tracking progress.

Another encouraging sign at the regional level in Asia is that the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) has already taken some steps to assist countries in the region with addressing challenges in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Most notably, UNESCAP has held the annual Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD) for the past three years. This event is seen as the regional equivalent of the global body for follow-up and review that is overseen by the High Level Political Forum (HLPF). The recent appointment of a Deputy Executive Secretary for Sustainable Development may also suggest that UNESCAP is taking substantial steps to integrate of the 2030 Agenda throughout its divisions and to support its member states in the implementation of the 2030 Development Agenda.

4. Stepping Up Action – Four Need Areas for Transformation

It is encouraging that less than a year after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda many governments and key organisations are aligning their national strategies and plans with the SDGs, and assigning implementation responsibilities. These are necessary initial actions, but not sufficient. Governments now also need to consider what appropriate next steps to take-- especially how to respond to the 2030 Agenda's call for transformative change. Achieving the SDGs transformational vision requires a break with business-as-usual; new ways of working—planning and decision-making in the interest of the common good, of mobilising and allocating resources, and of forming partnerships. Such a comprehensive set of institutional reforms can be politically challenging and will not happen overnight. But it is exactly for these reasons that it is important to start with reform efforts soon. This section identifies four key areas where institutional reforms and capacity strengthening are likely to be critical for governments to be able to deliver on SDGs commitments: 1) integrated planning and policy coherence; 2) mobilising financing; 3) enhancing data and transparency, and 4) building multi-stakeholder partnerships.

3.1 Integrated Planning and Policy Coherence

One of the distinguishing features of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs is the strong emphasis on policy integration and coherence (IGES, 2015; Waage & Yap, 2015; Boas et al. 2016). The agreement states that the goals and targets are "indivisible"; the commitment to integration and coherence is further evidenced in a separate target on the need to "enhance policy coherence for sustainable development" (SDG 17.14). This suggests that efforts to achieve one goal or target needs to

consider their influence on other goals and targets. It also means that policies need to be better aligned so that they do not conflict with each other. Finally, it requires that decisions consider not merely near-term but also longer-term consequences. The SDGs are hence a call to ensure that decisions are taken from a holistic and longer-term perspective, leading to greater coherence, stronger synergies, and more robust and ultimately sustainable outcomes.

Arguably the first step needed to take this more integrated approach is a change in the perspective of those charged with implementing the SDGs. Decision-makers, at times unknowingly, suffer from single-issue myopia. Working in the division of a line agency can have the effect of conditioning one to achieve that division's main objective with limited regard for influences on other divisions, never mind different agencies. This is partially a function of design; administrative agencies were created to build deep knowledge on particulars. There is hence a natural tendency to see the world from where one is positioned on the organisational chart. To quote an oft repeated aphorism: where one sits is where one stands (Miles, 1978). This tendency is frequently reinforced by standard operating procedures (SOPs) that breed cultures of familiarity and strengthens bonds to those who work within the same close-knit environments. It is therefore no wonder that achieving effective policy integration and sectoral coherence has proven difficult in practice (Bizikova et al., 2015, UNDP-UNEP, 2009).

Breaking free of a sectoral tunnel vision will require equipping decision-makers with new tools and approaches to planning. There is some room for optimism in this regard. The past decade has seen the proliferation of modelling frameworks that help decision-makers see the added benefits or co-benefits of mitigating climate change such as cleaner air, improved health, and better jobs (IGES, 2015). A similar phenomenon is underway with the emergence of so-called "nexus approaches" that aim to account for the positive and negative feedbacks between energy, food and water planning. Further, there is also a recent emergence of landscape approaches from the forestry and land use sectors that are based on the multi-functionality of natural ecosystems (Reed, van Vianen, & Sunderland, 2015). At the core of each of these changes in perspective, lies more integrated decision-making that goes beyond simple economic gains and losses. Bhutan's pursuit of GNH, an intriguing example in its own right, employs a screening tool based on 26 criteria to consider not only the value of a healthy natural environment but citizens' wellbeing and the protection of national culture for all major policy proposals (Ura, 2015).

Another part of the solution is more structural in nature. Too often the administrative structures that shape the way that decisions are made prevent a broader perspective from emerging and taking root. The recent work of the Government of Indonesia on Green Planning and Budgeting (GPB) show an alternative model for how environmental objectives can be mainstreamed across the government (GOI, n.d). When fully implemented, the GPB scheme will ensure that the government's strategic plans and budgets reflect environmental risks associated with climate change and the loss and degradation of the country's natural resources. Institutional mechanisms for more integrated decision-making and better coherence are thus clearly necessary but may require complementary reforms to be fully effective. Increased transparency of decision-making processes and meaningful

involvement of stakeholders with diverse experiences and perspectives can help give life to new ideas and increase accountability (IGES, 2015).

As governments begin working on the SDGs agenda, they are likely to pick a few prioritised goals as an initial point of departure. The initial selection could also open the door for piloting integrated approaches. One way of designing this pilot would be to offer preferential treatment to proposed areas of work where there are significant synergies between two or more indicators. The types of preferential treatment may vary across countries but two possible options could include adjusting funding levels and/or fast tracking approval process for multi-benefit proposals. This will likely be challenging but not unprecedented. For example, in the area of climate finance, the gold standard certification scheme can be used to demonstrate that a project will mitigate GHGs and lead to other environmental and social co-benefits. Premiums are then paid for the emission reductions that go beyond mitigating GHGs to achieving other sustainable development priorities.

In piloting this approach, governments may also want to think a little outside-the-box about the structure of their organisations. In many government agencies, it is common for staff to change posts every two or three years, especially at the early stages in their careers. A possible approach to making this practice supportive of more integrated planning and policy coherence would be to deliberately move staff from a division that has synergies with a previous division. This might, in turn, help to create clusters of common knowledge and increase the likelihood of cross-issue collaboration. At more senior levels, similar exchanges between agencies with underexploited overlapping interests may offer the similarly mutually beneficial results. Pairing these institutional changes with multi-benefit evaluation of proposals could also reinforce both sets of reforms.

3.2 Data and Transparency

A prerequisite for integrated planning and policy coherence is improving the quality and quantity of data. Such data would also enhance monitoring outcomes and strengthen accountability. Without reliable data, easily accessible to all, it is impossible for citizens to see whether governments are delivering on their pledges. The need for better data to support development efforts was recognised by the High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which stressed the need for a "data revolution" (UN, 2013). The MDGs, the predecessor of the SDGs, were designed to be measurable—formulated around a small number of quantitative indicators where data of reasonably good quality was produced on a regular basis for most countries. The SDGs, in contrast, started with a different philosophy and more encompassing political vision—represented by the 17 goals and 169 targets—and to be followed by the identification of indicators. As a result, many SDG targets remain difficult to measure. A set of 230 indicators has been proposed, but roughly half require currently unavailable data. For many of the proposed indicators, there are not even agreed definitions and methods (Dunning 2016). In addition, the SDGs ambition to "leave no-one behind" means that many datasets need to be much more fine-grained than is typically the case currently.

As for data and indicators, more importance is often attached to economic and social data. When

combined with the fact that environmental phenomena are typically difficult to measure and quantify, it is not surprising that indicators for environmental areas tend to be of poor quality and limited in coverage. Therefore, governments will likely need to ramp up investments in environment-related statistics system. Developing countries will need financial and technical assistance for data management in general and for environmental data in particular. However, adequate capacity will take time to build, especially since this is not only a matter of training individuals but also about reforming existing institutions and establishing new ones. It should nevertheless be emphasised that the current lack of high-quality data is not a reason for inaction. Many decisions can be taken based on estimations and proxy indicators and data should be used while improving the statistics system. Even so, also with significantly enhanced capacity, the official statistics offices are not likely to be able to generate necessary data, and to make it accessible and useful to a wide audience of users from the outset.

Complementary initiatives, based on partnerships with civil society, academia, and private sector that are increasingly leveraging new information technologies, are thus expected to play important roles. An interesting initiative in this regard is the Social Weather Stations (SWS) in the Philippines, which conducts comprehensive surveys on a quarterly basis. SWS, founded in 1985, is a non-profit social research institution that monitors the situation in the country, covering various aspects of poverty, quality of life, economic sentiment, and satisfaction with governance (Mangahas, 2016). The SWS surveys are regarded as the world's most rapid tracking of self-reported poverty, providing timely information for both policymakers and society at large. Another noteworthy example is the Global Forest Watch (GFW), a multi-stakeholder international partnership for interactive online forest monitoring. Combining satellite imagery with uploaded observations from the ground it provides timely data on forest loss and threats to forests. In Indonesia, GFW has helped the government track and address forest fires (Slezak, 2015). This initiative is now being expanded, branching out to incorporate high-resolution global data on freshwater.

In relying more on non-government partners for data collection (and so as to discourage over or under reporting), it will be important that there are accountability checks. These could be done at the national level by empanelling groups of experts to review selective samples of data over feasible temporal and spatial dimensions. At the international level, it may also be possible to draw upon peer reviews and borrow lessons learned from measurement, reporting, and verification processes used in the climate negotiation. Similar to those negotiations, there should be a good faith effort to making peer and international reviews non-punitive and invasive. Initiatives such as the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) that was created to "assess the state of biodiversity and of the ecosystem services it provides to society" may serve as useful resource in its own right as well as a model for evaluating the status of environmental media.

3.3 Mobilising Finance

A third key area is mobilising finance. When considering finance, the first question is often how

much money would be needed to achieve the 17 SDGs. It is not difficult to imagine that a massive sum of resources will be required to transform the world as envisaged in the 2030 Agenda. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) estimates achieving all the SDGs will cost USD1.4 trillion a year, while the Economist puts the figure at between USD2 trillion to 3 trillion a year over 15 years (The Economist, 2015). Meanwhile, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) reports that "at today's level of investment –public and private—in SDG-related sectors in developing countries points to an average annual funding shortfall over 2015-2030 of some USD2.5 trillion remains" (UNCTAD, 2014). Part of the wide variation in estimates is attributable to the breadth of the task at hand. The SDGs encompass such a wide array of developmental issues and are frequently written in such general terms (e.g. Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all), that it is difficult to draw a line between SDG-related and non-related activities. The matter of policy trade-offs and conflicts that may actually lower costs in one area while raising them elsewhere adds another layer of complexity.

Putting aside this significant variation, the feasibility to raise even low level estimates is the most pressing issue. The Economist points out that as donor governments currently fail to provide 0.7% of GDP in aid, spending that much money for SDGs verges on fantasy (The Economist, 2015). The ODA of the DAC countries was USD147 billion in 2015; to cover necessary costs to implement the SDGs with ODA would require an utterly implausible 20-fold increase from current outlays. So if the world is serious about achieving SDGs, additional financing must come from elsewhere.

The good news is that the richer the developing countries become, the less dependent they become on ODA; lower income countries should aim to increase non-ODA finance by, for example, attracting more foreign direct investment and collecting tax to become more self-reliant on their own development. But this is easier said than done. Low income developing countries often lack the capacity to collect tax and due to, inter alia, poor governance and political instabilities that create conditions that are unfavourable for foreign direct investment.

In this context, blended finance, which uses development finance to attract private capital, may be a useful way forward. Advocated by such organisations as the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and World Bank, blended finance leverages development finance such as ODA to mobilise private financial flows to markets in developing countries. Some mechanisms have already taken shape; one such example is the World Bank's Global Financing Facility (GFF) in support of Every Woman Every Child. Blended finance is also characterised by the results-based approach and strives to attract sustainable investments. There are also bound to be returns for private investors as in conventional markets and if the designed mechanisms function well, they would become more viable.

There may also be efforts to provide additional support for developing funding proposals for projects that are aligned with the SDGs. There are already several efforts to strengthen SDGs readiness. Making funding requests and proposal development an integral part of those efforts is likely to attract more interest from developing countries. In a similar vein, programmes that aim to

leverage climate finance to achieve both climate and other sustainability objectives could offer a practical channel for support. Already, the Green Climate Fund—the UNFCCC funding mechanism that is scheduled to help allocate up to USD100 billion by 2020—includes language in its funding proposal template that asks about co-benefits and the transformational impact of a possible proposal. The recent creation of a new Sustainable Development Mechanism as part of the architecture for last year's Paris Agreement suggests potentially even stronger links between the SDGs and climate finance moving forward.

3.4   Building Multi-stakeholder Partnerships

Another key for countries seeking to implement the 2030 Agenda will be taking advantage of multi-stakeholder partnerships. The growing reliance on partnerships is also consistent with a two-decade old trend in international environmental policy to move beyond the state and engage civil society organisations and the private sector. In fact, three of the key functions relate to issues raised earlier in the paper: namely, 1) improving data and enhancing accountability; 2) increasing the quantity and quality of financing and other support; and 3) promoting policy coherence and integrated planning (Nelson 2002; Pattberg et al. 2012; Beisheim and Liese 2014; Seth 2015; Harrington 2015).

The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is expected to play the lead role in the global follow-up and review processes (FUR) for the SDGs with the support of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). One of the key need areas will be developing and collecting data to track progress on the SDGs. Partnerships that work with countries to improve their data will also be uniquely positioned to work across countries to share lessons learned and identify feasible proxies (especially for data in resource-scarce environments). Global and regional multi-stakeholder partnerships can also enhance transparency and accountability by serving as an honest broker when evaluating performance (Espey, Walęcik, & Kühner, 2015). They can further offer a trusted network of support that can help improve on this performance. Data-centric partnerships will hence be essential to move forward with SDG implementation.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships will also be crucial to filling financial as well as technological and institutional shortfalls. As noted previously in the paper, the amount of resources required to implement the SDGs will far exceed current allocations of public finance. Partnerships will therefore be critical to raising new and harnessing existing funds. To a significant degree, this has already begun to occur at the domestic level; Korea's local council on sustainable development (LCSD) is a clear case in point. But there will also need to be greater activity at the international level. In this connection, there are already a number of potentially valuable networks that could help strengthen the implementation of the SDGs. This includes networks such as the aforementioned WBCSD. When these networks partner with globally-recognised civil society organisations and governments, they become a powerful engine for change.

Finally, multi-stakeholder partnerships could potentially play a critical role in promoting policy coherence and integrated planning. This is partially because, by definition, multi-stakeholder

partnerships engage with different government actors who have a shared interest in working toward a common goal. In working towards that goal, there will often be a need to build cooperative relationships with different sectoral agencies at different levels of decision-making. In this way, partnerships can serve as the institutional glue that bring agencies closer to a whole-of-government approach. At the same time, partnerships can also provide the analytical tools and resources needed for more integrated or nexus approaches to planning. For example, the very notion of a nexus approach for food water and energy gained ground because it was featured in meetings sponsored by the World Economic Forum (WEF). It has subsequently gained support as knowledge providers have developed the tools needed to demonstrate resource savings from a more holistic approach to planning.

To be sure, guaranteeing that partnerships can serve these three functions will not be easy. Some have been sharply critical of partnerships--for instance, critics see partnerships as weakening the rights of representative democracies to plan and implement their own national programs (The Global Policy Forum, 2014). Others have lamented that the multi-stakeholder partnerships are not always well-aligned with national government efforts (Bester, 2015). Finally, there have been justifiable concerns that partnerships are being used to retract previously pledged commitments to allocate 0.7% of ODA. (Seth 2015). To some extent, the SDGs process itself can help allay some of these concerns. More concretely, the SDGs process can help to ensure that partnerships operate in a manner that stays within the boundaries of an internationally-agreed development agenda and is, itself, transparent and accountable in how it works with governments. Some thoughtful work has already been conducted on how the United Nations can make sure partnerships work with governments in ways that can help achieve the SDGs.

5. Conclusion

This framing paper began with the observation that the initial response to the SDGs from governments will have an important bearing on the overall success of the 2030 development agenda. A slow start could undermine progress at a time when enthusiasm and interest levels are likely to be highest. It could also allow vested interests and unsustainable institutions to lock in business as usual development. Fortunately, the well-designed uniquely inclusive process that led to the agreement over the SDGs and past experience with the MDGs and other sustainability initiatives have created conditions for strong initial responses from countries. The reviews of four very different countries in Asia are largely consistent with this picture. All four countries have begun to make connections between their development plans and the SDGs; assigned implementing responsibilities to relevant agencies; and raised awareness within and without government. In some cases, financing and budget lines have also been assigned to priority SDGs. Making good on the transformational vision of the SDGs needs nonetheless greater attention to integrated planning and improved policy coherence; data to ensure accountability; mobilization of   financial and other

resources; and mutually beneficial partnerships.

As countries begin to work on these next steps, it merits underlining that readiness is a concept that does not apply solely to national governments. It is also relevant, as is suggested in some of the profiling, to state and local governments. This may especially be the case in large countries such as India that likely employs several million people at the national government level. In these cases, "localising" the agenda to bring it down to state, city and community levels will be essential to policy integration and coherence that is taking place on different scales.

Further, readiness is equally important for the private sector: if companies are going to actively integrate the SDGs into operational and production processes, they too will need to identify priorities, contemplate organisational reforms, re-allocate resources and measure and monitor progress. The same applies to lending agencies that will need to look both internally and externally to respond effectively to the new development agenda. Readiness will also be essential to the performance of regional and international organisations in demonstrating a willingness to internalising the SDGs.

Last but not least, the role of the average person will be of the utmost importance, especially since the 2030 Agenda is a voluntary and non-binding agreement. In this connection, SDGs are likely to gain more traction if people can see some relationship between their own purposeful response and improvements to their communities, towns and cities. One could imagine a certain time and effort donated per month by citizens towards one or two such locally relevant SDG actions. Donation programmes could be incentivised by local governments not only monetarily but by using other community benefits that transcend self-interest. The SDGs are hence a truly global agenda. As such, they require a truly global commitment to early action.

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This paper has been prepared for discussion at

the International Forum for Sustainable Asia and the Pacific (ISAP2016).