Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

OUTLOOK

The prospects for achieving the goal are mixed. Progress will be boosted by entry into force of the Paris Agreement, along with efforts to scale up financial resources and technological innovation. Given the high growth of greenhouse gas emissions in the region, topping 4 per cent on average, and the high levels of human and economic vulnerability to climate change impacts, the urgency of increasing mitigation and adaptation actions cannot be overestimated.

THE PHOTO

Mangrove shoots planted on Tarawa, an atoll in the Pacific island nation of Kiribati, in an attempt to mitigate the impacts of rising sea levels

Photo credit: Eskinder Debebe/United Nations
INSIGHTS

• SDG 13 focuses on strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity, integrating climate change into national planning, improving awareness and institutional capacities on climate change and mobilizing climate finance. Actions contributing to the achievement of this goal span at least three other internationally agreed agendas and frameworks—the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

• SDG 13 does not explicitly address the drivers of greenhouse gas emissions or the vulnerabilities of societies to climate change impacts—these must be managed across the entire 2030 Agenda.

• Many countries have already taken significant institutional and policy action on climate conditions, but concerted efforts are still needed to ensure that they achieve and exceed their objectives and focus on the specific vulnerabilities of different population groups and communities.

• The goal of mobilizing $100 billion annually by 2020\(^3\) from public and private sources to support climate action in developing countries is a political benchmark for assessing progress on climate finance. There is some evidence that industrialized countries are making progress towards this goal. But the investment needs far exceed this amount, and the Paris Agreement sets a goal that all finance flows should be consistent with a pathway towards low-emission and climate-resilient development—in the context of sustainable development priorities. There are huge opportunities to make progress towards this goal in Asia and the Pacific, including through partnerships with small and medium-sized enterprises, with direct public and private finance towards solutions to climate change.

BRIGHT SPOTS

Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity

• As of March 2017, 39 ESCAP member countries had ratified the Paris Agreement and submitted their Nationally Determined Contributions containing their climate change agendas and priorities.\(^4\) Many of these Nationally Determined Contributions include an adaptation component. While the actions to which countries are committing are significant, more will need to be done in subsequent iterations to succeed in avoiding the worst impacts of climate change.

• As of 2015, 18 ESCAP member countries had national disaster risk reduction strategies.\(^5\) There have been considerable advances in preparedness and early warning activities—at least 14 countries now have an operational national early warning system for weather- and climate-
related hazards, and approximately the same number maintain a disaster loss database. Many countries in the region also have a strong tradition of community-based disaster risk management.

Integration of climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning

- Some 26 countries in the region explicitly mentioned sector-based policies to achieve their climate change goals in their Nationally Determined Contributions, and 17 countries stated that they had or were developing long-term low-emissions development strategies, suggesting that these countries are intent on integrating climate change measures into their policies, strategies and planning.

- Many countries in the region are engaged in the National Adaptation Plan process, which is expected to result in the integration of adaptation into medium-term planning and budgeting. Sri Lanka was one of the first countries to submit its plan to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Education and awareness raising

- There is a range of government, civil society and private sector activities across the region. Several countries have incorporated climate education into the formal school curriculum, including Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Tuvalu and Viet Nam. Progress on this target will depend partly on the level of action taken under article 6 of the UNFCCC (and based on Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration) on the importance of achieving education, training and public awareness and participation in environmental decision-making at both the global and local levels.

Climate finance

- As of October 2016, the Green Climate Fund, a mechanism within the UNFCCC to assist developing countries in mitigation and adaptation responses, had raised $10.3 billion in pledges. As of 2016, the Green Climate Fund had approved $1.2 billion for 27 projects, of which nine are in Asia and the Pacific. The key issue is going to be how to ensure that allocation and disbursement are scaled up significantly.

- The 2016 Biennial Assessment of Climate Finance Flows noted that industrialized countries reported $25.4 billion in 2013 and $26.6 billion in 2014 in bilateral public finance to the UNFCCC, representing an increase of about 50 per cent. Industrialized countries also released a road map towards the $100 billion goal in which they stated that they will seek to increase public finance from the current level of about $41 billion to $67 billion by 2020 and to leverage additional private finance.

- The use of green bonds—debt instruments targeted to green investments—as an alternative to conventional bank project finance has taken off in the region. In total, the region generated around $308 billion in climate-aligned bonds, or 44 per cent of the global total.
HOTSPOTS

Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity

- The region, which bears the brunt of the world’s large-scale catastrophic disasters, experienced 155 disasters in 2015 alone, with an estimated 6,721 fatalities and around $32,578 million in economic damages.\textsuperscript{15} Indirect losses were even higher, as well as an ongoing erosion of development assets, such as local infrastructure, dwellings, schools, health facilities and roads, that were repeatedly hit by severe weather and climate events.\textsuperscript{16} These numbers are likely to be underestimates because there has been no systematic assessment of the cost of all disasters that have struck the region, especially slow-onset disasters, such as droughts, heat waves, forest fires and haze.\textsuperscript{17}

Integration of climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning

- Although many countries have climate adaptation plans, many of them are not fully funded.

- Although efforts to integrate climate change measures, including disaster risk reduction, into national policies and planning processes are growing, sector-based implementation (such as building and infrastructure codes, land-use planning and zoning) has been much slower.\textsuperscript{18}

Climate finance

- Despite progress in spending climate finance, there is a need to ensure that this funding is predictable and able to address the risks that impede greater investment in climate change solutions and that it is used effectively in countries that need it most.

- Accounting for finance to address climate change remains a challenge, although progress in reporting continues to be made. Many governments in the region are leading the way in monitoring climate expenditures in their budgets and more broadly within their countries.

- Climate finance flows predominantly support mitigation. Continued efforts to scale up adaptation support, particularly for least developed and small island developing countries in the region, are needed.

EMERGING ISSUES

- Although the Paris Agreement creates a framework in which all countries commit to climate-related action, collective pledges are far short of achieving the greenhouse gas emission reductions required to keep climate change below 2°C (targeting 1.5°C). This means that further iterations of the Nationally Determined Contributions need to be much more ambitious and the search for rapid mitigation strategies will assume greater importance in the coming years.

- Adaptation has limits—there will be losses and damages that people cannot completely prevent. New mechanisms to cope with loss and damage are being explored, including risk and insurance transfer measures.
• The issue of climate-induced displacements may become a human crisis. Loss of territories in the Pacific due to sea-level rise\(^1\) can pose new international policy dilemmas that touch upon sovereign, legal, social and cultural issues.

• People and their assets are increasingly exposed to climate change-induced hazards. A primary driver of increased exposure in the region has been rapid and unplanned development in hazard-prone areas, driven in part by heavy urbanization.

• The work on achieving SDG 13 in the context of all SDGs has the opportunity to lay the groundwork that would enable countries in the region to advance their adaptation and mitigation efforts.

**TARGETS**

13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries

13.2 Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning

13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

13.a Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly $100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible

13.b Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities