

Re-thinking development through anticipatory, agile and adaptive governance.



Image by vectorjuice on Freepik

The recent crises have erased at least one decade of development progress. Why?

The 2023 ESCAP-ADB-UNDP SDG Partnership [report](#) explores the impacts of the polycrisis of COVID-19, conflict and climate change on food, energy and finance systems within the Asia-Pacific region. The disruption of energy and food markets has led to the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation, pushing millions of people and vulnerable populations back into poverty, and exposing massive structural weaknesses. At this impasse, several things are clear: the first is that the convergence of these crises has severely derailed SDG progress in the region. Secondly, the exposed vulnerabilities of the region's food, energy and finance systems show how much they intersect; and third, any efforts towards getting the SDGs back on track should factor in these intersections, moving away from siloed approaches.

The question, however, remains: *how* does the Asia-Pacific region make progress on the SDGs while responding to these compounding crises? The answer begins with rethinking public governance and doing development differently.

‘Triple A’ Governance: what is it and why is it needed?

The impacts of the polycrisis have demonstrated that traditional governance systems and policymaking may be too rigid to address complex, ever-evolving circumstances. Siloed approaches applied to social, economic, and environmental challenges have failed to address the interconnectedness of contemporary issues. Not only do traditional governance systems struggle

to respond to emerging crises (such as pandemics, conflict and climate change), they also face difficulty to keep pace with the innovations deployed to address those challenges. In particular, within current policymaking processes, approving, implementing and regulating innovations can take months, or even years.

“The Anticipatory, Agile and Adaptive (“Triple A”) Governance approach refers to the ability of institutions to adapt to changing circumstances through responsive and iterative policymaking.”

- 2023 ESCAP-ADB-UNDP SDG Partnership Report

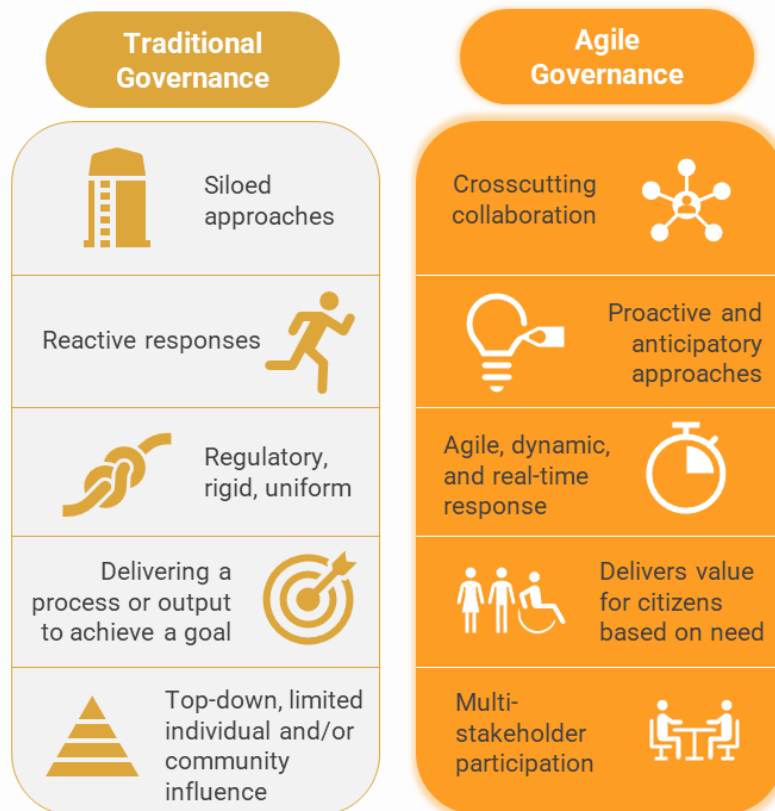
Multi-layered, complex and rapidly evolving challenges of today’s world can be best confronted through governance systems which can *anticipate* the landscape of uncertainty, are *agile* enough to develop strategy and experimentation in real time, and are *adaptive* to the needs of society.

“Anticipatory, Agile and Adaptive (“Triple A”) Governance” is a model of future governance, which is more people- and outcome-focused, inclusive, flexible and innovative. The key value of Triple A governance is that it allows for governments to respond to challenges with precision and speed and creates an enabling environment for innovative solutions.

Anticipation refers to creating systems which involve foresight and understand the dynamics of uncertainty and change, especially in relation to future risks, opportunities and innovations.

Agility denotes a cultural and institutional shift which supports innovation, experimentation and iterative policymaking to deal with change in a timely manner.

Adaptation involves the ability to translate anticipation and organizational learning from experimentation into concrete actions and strategies which are aligned with people’s needs.



Asia-Pacific pacesetters: who is doing development differently?

There are countries in the region that are innovating their governance systems and could set important examples and experiences for others to follow:

Japan: In 2021, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry released a report—based on public consultations—titled [Governance Innovation Ver.2: A Guide to Designing and Implementing Agile Governance](#), outlining the need for a new, agile governance model to support Japan’s aim to achieve “Society 5.0” - a progressive human-centered society which involves a high integration of cyberspace and physical space, with the view to promote socio-economic development.

Singapore: The Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF), now part of a new Strategic Group in the Prime Minister’s Office, supports the Government of Singapore in its foresight work in identifying emerging risks. By developing insights into future trends and focusing on whole-of-government strategic planning, CSF supports the Government of Singapore in navigating emerging challenges and developing new capabilities in Singapore’s public sector.

Republic of Korea: The National Assembly Futures Institute supports the formation of mid- to long-term national development strategies by predicting and analysing changes and trends and in consideration of citizen preferences.

Viet Nam: The country has received widespread public support for the government’s swift and effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through collaboration with the private sector,

innovative initiatives such as the establishment of [rice ATMs and zero-dollar grocery stores](#) were able to efficiently respond to immediate needs.

What next?

These regional pacesetters demonstrate varying methods of integrating agility into their governance systems which can be adopted in or adapted to other national contexts. In the spirit of south-south cooperation, pacesetters such as these are encouraged to share their experiences and knowledge of anticipatory, agile and adaptive governance initiatives, especially with least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing States considering their economic, geographic and social vulnerabilities. This practice of experience-sharing and knowledge exchange of Triple A governance innovations has the potential to reduce national vulnerabilities to emerging crises, enhance trust and lead to a widespread behavioral shift towards doing development differently, in a way that is more suitable to today's complex and interconnected challenges.



Asia-Pacific
SDG Partnership

Click [here](#) to read the 2023 Asia-Pacific SDG Partnership Report

Click [here](#) to visit the SDG Partnership webpage