

# Inclusive Subregional Cooperation in East and North-East Asia for Sustainable Development





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## Preface

This report highlights the current state of subregional cooperation and key agenda that will help accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in East and North-East Asia. Despite the subregion's economic dynamism, and many countries in the subregion leading the world in frontier technologies, the subregion has been lagging in making progress on many of the Sustainable Development Goals. Common challenges in the subregion exist in all dimensions of sustainable development including air and marine pollution, increased exposure to natural disasters in connection to climate change, rapid population ageing, and growing inequality, just to name some of the most pressing issues.

In addressing these common challenges, the subregion has an urgent need to develop joint strategies and actions. Unlike other subregions in Asia and the Pacific, the East and North-East Asia subregion has not been able to capitalize on institutionalized regional cooperation mechanisms for multiple reasons. As such, functional and mainly bilateral cooperation in specific areas have been established in place of a multilateral entity covering multi-sectoral issues. While sectoral cooperation mechanisms have been effective in solving technical issues in a particular field, the complex and intertwined nature of today's challenges require the subregion to rethink traditional cooperation mechanisms.

At this time, when countries in the subregion are experiencing unprecedented socio-economic challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, there is concern that countries will retreat to inward-looking strategies and protectionism in line with border closures and disruptions in regional supply chains.

This report explores opportunities to tackle some of the hurdles impeding subregional cooperation by targeting low-hanging fruits and utilizing existing structures to promote broader, deeper and stronger subregional cooperation.

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The report draws from detailed inputs, comments and discussions provided at the *Expert Group Meeting on New and Inclusive Multilateralism in North-East Asia* which was held on 4-5 December 2019 in Incheon, Republic of Korea, attended by Andray Abrahamian, Visiting Scholar, George Mason University; Hirofumi Arai, Director and Senior Research Fellow, Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia; Tugudur Baajikhuu, Director, Greater Tumen Initiative Secretariat; Javzandolgor Battogtokh, Chairperson of Department of International Relations, School of International Relations and Public Administration, National University of Mongolia; Enkhbaigali Byambasuren, Director, Institute for Strategic Studies, Mongolia; Eunmi Choi, Senior Fellow, Asan Institute for Policy Studies; Zolboo Dashnyam, Director of the Institute of International Affairs, Mongolian Academy of Sciences; Farhad Taghizadeh Hesary, Associate Professor, Tokai University; Wandu Huang, Programme Officer, Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat; Jangwon Jin, Professor, Korea National University of Transportation; Miyun Kim, Officer of International Cooperation Department, Association of North East Asia Regional Governments (NEAR); Yeonsoo Kim, Programme Officer, Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat; Athita Komindr, Head, UNCITRAL Regional Centre

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<sup>1</sup> Including Russian Federation

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