

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific  
South and South-West Asia Office

# Regional Cooperation for Inclusive and Sustainable Development

South and South-West Asia  
Development Report 2012–13



United Nations





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## Foreword



South and South-West Asia has made large development gains over the past decade, yet remains home to the world's largest concentration of poor and hungry people, and lags behind in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Slowing growth in the subregion, and uncertain prospects in developed countries, are exposing the subregion's structural challenges. Amongst these are the need for more inclusive development, closing wide infrastructure gaps, strengthening food and energy security, diversifying and moving up the value chain in industrial and export structures, and reducing the risks and costs of disasters. In addition, the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries of the subregion face special challenges closing their development gaps and promoting inclusive growth.

Regional cooperation in South and South-West Asia can be an important strategy to address many of these challenges, and to ensure the sustainable future of the subregion as a whole. Cooperation can help spur more inclusive growth and drive the elimination of poverty in the subregion. Greater regional integration not only increases intraregional trade, but also promotes investment in the subregion's supply chain and production networks. This creates more and better jobs and builds productive capacity, particularly in the subregion's least developed countries. Greater intraregional cooperation can also improve food and energy security, as well as help reduce disaster risk.

Through a focus on inclusive growth and regional cooperation, South and South-West Asia can harness its many advantages, including its youth bulge, to grow, within a generation, into the world's largest centre of consumption — driving global growth and filling the global skills deficit, if the path from education to employment is facilitated, and if better quality, decent work opportunities can be generated by the subregion's growth. Finally, better connectivity, across the subregion and beyond, can help leverage the subregion's strategic location at the crossroads of Asia and the Pacific to re-emerge as the hub of East-West trade that it once was.

*South and South-West Asia Development Report* presents an analysis of the development challenges facing the subregion and the ways to turn them into opportunities. It presents a policy agenda for the subregion to emerge as an economic powerhouse and as a model of inclusive and sustainable development. Helping South and South-West Asia sustain this dynamism to meet the development challenges facing the subregion is a crucial endeavour, and is a priority for ESCAP. As a development partner of the subregion, now with a new office dedicated to it, ESCAP stands ready to assist its member States implement this agenda.

I am happy to commend this *Report*, the first major publication of ESCAP's South and South-West Asia Office to the policymakers and development community at large in the region.

**Dr. Noeleen Heyzer**  
United Nations Under-Secretary-General and  
Executive Secretary of the Economic  
and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

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