2020-2021
**RESULTS
REPORT**

Asia and the Pacific

UNDP

RESPONDING TO THE PANDEMIC, TRANSFORMING TO WIN THE FUTURE

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Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic was ever-present through 2020 and 2021, causing social, political, and economic upheavals across the globe. We witnessed a region grappling with the evolving and devastating consequences of the virus, with huge loss of life and livelihoods. While these losses can and will be measured, the more intangible, such as learning and psychosocial losses will take more time to be seen and measured.

Protecting societal capabilities and building institutional resilience has been fundamental to UNDP's support to country response strategies in Asia and the Pacific, in two years of turmoil, where COVID met climate shocks and political implosions. For a region experiencing most of the world's natural hazards and extreme weather events, environmental perils are increasingly poised to inflict further suffering.

The region has also witnessed democratic reversals in several countries this past year, with the most forceful experienced in Afghanistan and Myanmar. The barometer of public trust in governance institutions and leadership has diminished in most countries. Income inequalities widened in a large number of countries, as millions got left behind, whether in city-center urban slums or remote rural areas. Other deeply regrettable fall-backs were on gender equality markers, access to new technology and both within and among countries the evident vaccine and global financial flow inequities. 2021 should have been a year to reduce these gaps, not exacerbate them.

UNDP swiftly realigned programmes and budgets to address immediate needs in these volatile situations, working in this context of 'development emergencies', where needed, without losing sight of longer-term sustainable development objectives of reducing poverty, shoring up underlying socioeconomic vulnerabilities, strengthening accountable and inclusive governance, promoting solutions for a sustainable planet, and supporting livelihoods. Fostering resilience, diversity and gender equality drove design and purpose.

For UNDP, tackling these complex issues requires a constant rethink of how we bring in new ideas, learning and innovations to apply integrated approaches to a complex of challenges. The reality of shrinking traditional ODA funding is clear, as LDCs move to graduation and low income to middle income albeit at a decelerated rate. Expanding partnerships and tapping the power of new financing will be critical to our continued ability to respond at scale.

Our experience and presence in the Asia Pacific region, demonstrates a uniquely positioned UNDP that leads with analytics and substance, to work with national institutions as they test and drive their own transitions to COVID recovery and to decarbonizing their economies. As countries look for solutions at varying levels of acceleration, we must increasingly expand and tap our regional and global expertise and knowledge networks to engage with and support transformational change.

This report highlights the results of this journey over the last two pandemic-defined years. It has been unusual times and has required from us an extraordinary response. We hope we have done justice to that team effort, and the work done together with our UN, national and international partners. If we can leave the reader with just one take-away – we hope the capture of results shows more than a series of outputs – we hope it conveys the spirit and commitment of UNDP teams working with clarity of purpose to help countries in the region get back on track with the SDGs.

Kanni Wignaraja
Assistant Secretary General
Assistant Administrator & Regional Director
Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific
UNDP

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause social and economic upheavals across Asia and the Pacific. Even as this report is compiled, the region grapples with the evolving and devastating consequences of the virus, which has taken the lives of thousands of people, destroyed tens of millions of jobs and livelihoods, reversed progress in reducing poverty, and exacerbated existing inequalities.

As COVID-19 affects all human development dimensions, UNDP realigned programmes and budgets to address immediate emergency needs, without losing sight of longer-term aims like pulling people out of poverty, strengthening accountable and inclusive governance, building resilience, promoting solutions for a sustainable planet, and fostering diversity and gender equality.

A results report like this one usually looks back at challenges and progress. However, given the enormity of the crisis that the world now faces, this report also presents responses to the current crisis that set a path for addressing future ones in Asia and the Pacific. After all, we need to look at the long road ahead to post-pandemic recovery to be better prepared for tomorrow's shocks, whatever form they may take.

Address immediate **emergency needs,** without losing sight of <u>longer-term aims</u> like pulling people out of poverty, strengthening accountable and inclusive governance, building resilience, promoting solutions for a sustainable planet, and fostering diversity and gender equality.
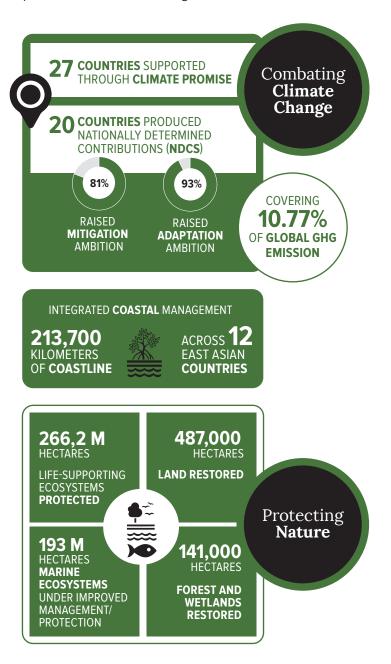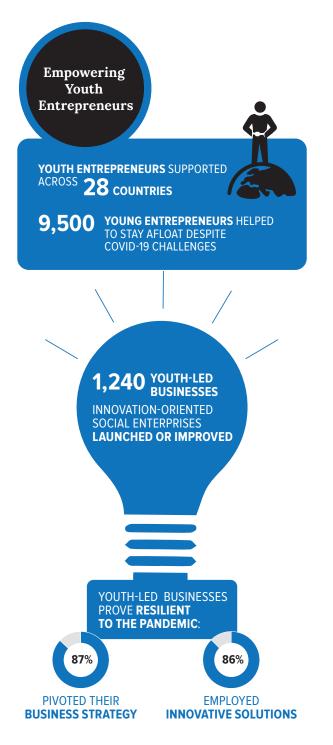
Key Messages

The world was confronted by the ultimate disrupter in the form of a global pandemic that laid bare and intensified the development deficits that already existed. Gains in attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals were stopped in their tracks, and in many cases reversed. COVID-19 highlighted the integrated and interlinked nature of development issues and sectors, where progress in one area cannot be achieved without simultaneous and coordinated work in others.

The pandemic also triggered new ways of thinking and collaborating. It provided avenues to harness the power of existing and emerging digital technologies to fight COVID-19, empower citizens to work remotely and transform the way governments connect with citizens. Innovative use of technologies has spurred a rethink and a reimagining of the way we do development and has offered an opportunity to 'build back better.'

Even as COVID-19 ravaged the globe in 2020 and 2021, ongoing development challenges persisted throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Poverty, joblessness, exclusion and widening income gaps, unsustainable use of the environment, including deforestation and land degradation, loss of biodiversity, inadequate water management, pollution, and climate change remain serious concerns. The deepening of authoritarian impulses and the restriction of democratic space for citizens to express themselves and influence their societies is a disturbing trend.
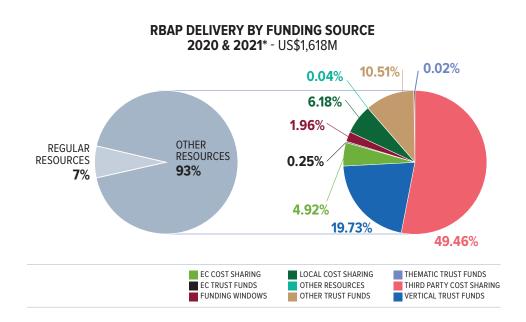
UNDP continued to support the momentum of regional and national campaigns and the mobilization of public and private finance to achieve the SDGs by 2030. However, the pandemic forced UNDP to quickly evolve its programmes and expand its expertise to combat and manage the crisis. It repurposed existing resources to meet the challenge. Priority was given to rapid multi-dimensional assessments of the impact of COVID-19, and the development of national response and mitigation strategies.

RBAP promoted regional dialogue platforms to share experiences and enrich knowledge and learning. We boosted the use of innovation, experimentation, and the leveraging of digital technologies for social service delivery and enhancing the interface between citizens and government. Many of these innovations are here to stay and grow. They position UNDP as a responsive partner attuned to the needs and priorities of its programme countries.

Responding to COVID

1.9B DOSES OF VACCINATIONS ADMINISTERED USING DIGITAL SYSTEMS FOR COVID VACCINE MANAGEMENT IN

5 COUNTRIES (BANGLADESH, BHUTAN, INDIA, INDONESIA, AND NEPAL)

US$30M OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT PROCURED AND DELIVERED TO

22 COUNTRIES, INCLUDING PPE, DIAGNOSTICS, OXYGEN CONCENTRATORS, HOSPITAL EQUIPMENT, AND OTHER COVID-RELATED ITEMS

17 COUNTRIES, SUPPORTED WITH COVID-19 SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Combating Climate Change

27 COUNTRIES SUPPORTED THROUGH CLIMATE PROMISE

20 COUNTRIES PRODUCED NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTIONS (NDCS)

- **81%** RAISED MITIGATION AMBITION
- **93%** RAISED ADAPTATION AMBITION

COVERING **10.77%** OF GLOBAL GHG EMISSION

Protecting Nature

INTEGRATED COASTAL MANAGEMENT

213,700 KILOMETERS OF COASTLINE ACROSS **12** EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

266,2 M HECTARES LIFE-SUPPORTING ECOSYSTEMS PROTECTED

487,000 HECTARES LAND RESTORED

193 M HECTARES MARINE ECOSYSTEMS UNDER IMPROVED MANAGEMENT/ PROTECTION

141,000 HECTARES FOREST AND WETLANDS RESTORED

Empowering Youth Entrepreneurs

YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS SUPPORTED ACROSS **28** COUNTRIES

9,500 YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS HELPED TO STAY AFLOAT DESPITE COVID-19 CHALLENGES

1,240 YOUTH-LED BUSINESSES INNOVATION-ORIENTED SOCIAL ENTERPRISES LAUNCHED OR IMPROVED

YOUTH-LED BUSINESSES PROVE RESILIENT TO THE PANDEMIC:

- **87%** PIVOTED THEIR BUSINESS STRATEGY
- **86%** EMPLOYED INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

Digital Transformation Development Solutions

130 SOLUTIONS ADOPTED IN **17** COUNTRIES

14 E-HEALTH SYSTEM SOLUTIONS

12 E-LEARNING PLATFORMS

18 E-GOVERNANCE SOLUTIONS

23 DATA COLLECTION SOLUTIONS

In 2020-2021, UNDP delivered US $1.618 million in Asia and the Pacific, of which more than 90 per cent came from non-core resources from our strong partnerships at the country, regional and global levels.

RBAP DELIVERY BY FUNDING SOURCE
2020 & 2021* - US$1,618M

REGULAR RESOURCES **7%**

OTHER RESOURCES **93%**
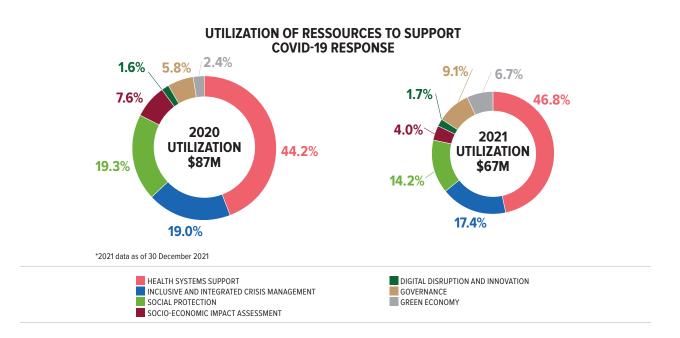
0.04%
10.51%
0.02%
6.18%
1.96%
0.25%
4.92%
19.73%
49.46%

■ EC COST SHARING	■ LOCAL COST SHARING	■ THEMATIC TRUST FUNDS
■ EC TRUST FUNDS	■ OTHER RESOURCES	■ THIRD PARTY COST SHARING
■ FUNDING WINDOWS	■ OTHER TRUST FUNDS	■ VERTICAL TRUST FUNDS

Financial resources to support COVID-19 response came from repurposing US $96 million, and US $131 million were mobilized resources. The largest focus was on health systems support (over 40 per cent), followed by inclusive and integrated crisis management and social protection,

which underscored the immediate needs of the countries. At the same time, longer-term objectives of advancing governance mechanisms, green economy, digitization, and innovation have also been reflected in the 2020-2021 investments.

UTILIZATION OF RESSOURCES TO SUPPORT COVID-19 RESPONSE

1.6%
5.8%
2.4%
7.6%
19.3%
2020 UTILIZATION $87M
44.2%
19.0%

9.1%
6.7%
1.7%
4.0%
2021 UTILIZATION $67M
46.8%
14.2%
17.4%

*2021 data as of 30 December 2021

■ HEALTH SYSTEMS SUPPORT		■ DIGITAL DISRUPTION AND INNOVATION
■ INCLUSIVE AND INTEGRATED CRISIS MANAGEMENT		■ GOVERNANCE
■ SOCIAL PROTECTION		■ GREEN ECONOMY
■ SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT		

This report on UNDP results in the Asia-Pacific region in 2020-2021 is organized around six themes. These are highlights of each theme:

Theme 1:
Thought leadership

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

- Frontier issues that reimagine development

- Spotlight on Myanmar and Afghanistan

- Responding to the shocks, preserving social sustainability

- COVID-19 impact assessments inform response & recovery

- National Human Development Reports fuel public debate

With many countries in Asia and the Pacific now attaining lower- or upper-middle income status, rigorous evidence-based policy advice has become an important part of UNDP work. The goal is to inspire innovation and influence action through cutting-edge analysis and policy advice.

An important component of UNDP policy expertise is the Economist Network, which was expanded by placing economists directly in Country Offices. It has consolidated into a strong community that offers policy advice and foresight to national partners, and works alongside the new Strategy, Policy and Partnerships team in headquarters, closely aligned with the Bangkok Regional Hub.

A policy compendium titled The Great Upheaval: Resetting Development Policy and Institutions

for the Decade of Action in Asia and the Pacific is being published by Cambridge University Press. It documents policy lessons that can underpin development discourse and outreach to governments, thinktanks, social movements and the private sector on development priorities leading to 2030. The chapters address policy shifts in areas accelerated by the pandemic, including climate change; sovereign finance; digitalization; global value chains and productivity growth; measures and aspirations for improved human conditions, such as equality of opportunities, multi-dimensional poverty, human security, and vaccine equity; and new modes of state capacity and international governance, including global public goods, and regional cooperation.

In addition, Socio-Economic Impact Assessments in 17 countries provided much-needed evidence and information to policy makers for their COVID-19 responses. Policy options included adoption of economic stimulus packages and cross-sectoral response programmes.

Strategic communication is an integral part of policy analysis and forecast. RBAP led a collective effort to study the anticipated impact of the crises in Myanmar and Afghanistan on the development trajectories in those countries. It produced reports that were released in the immediate aftermath of the countries' shift of power and received wide global coverage in the media.

In 2020-2021, the Bangkok Regional Hub produced 17 publications, several with partners such as WHO, ADB and ESCAP, that triggered policy debates often contributing to policy changes. It analysed and disseminated a range of relevant policy briefs, launched virtual theme-based knowledge networks, and convened symposia and conferences on pertinent topics in the region. At the national level, UNDP Country Offices in the region catalyzed national dialogues and conversations on critical development and policy issues conveyed through the flagship National Human Development Reports.

Theme 2:
COVID-19 response and socio-economic recovery

COVID RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

- Immediate health response
- Digital vaccine management
- Social Protection to respond to economic shocks
- Restoring livelihoods and building economic resilience
- Effective Communication matters

The pandemic has revealed and intensified development deficits such as poverty, inequality, exclusion, and environmental decline. It has exposed institutional weaknesses including limited health and disease surveillance, education systems, insufficient social safety nets and inadequate fiscal resources to respond to crises.

In 2020-2021, UNDP promoted holistic approaches to tackling COVID-19 through multi-dimensional responses to the pandemic, particularly in health and economic sectors. RBAP has fostered the sharing of best practices and lessons learned on effective surveillance and disease control, use of innovative IT technologies to track and map the spread of the virus, and the quick ramp up of income support schemes. We have also provided direct assistance through procurement and supply of essential health products and vaccine distribution. We have helped to strengthen crisis management and response and provided support to address critical social and economic impacts. Financial resources for the COVID-19 response have come from repurposing US $96 million and mobilizing US $131 million. Our strong partnerships in support of national programmes have enabled the administering of 1.9 billion doses of vaccines

using digital systems for COVID-19 vaccine management, and the procurement of US $30 million worth of medical supplies and equipment delivered to 22 countries. Supplies have included PPE, test kits, oxygen concentrators, hospital equipment, and other COVID-related items.

Many of the approaches introduced during the pandemic will remain as the new normal and will comprise some of the 'build back better' plans that can yield benefits in the future.

Theme 3:
Digital transformation and innovation

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND INNOVATION

- Digital transformation in government
- Closing the digital divide for small businesses
- Bringing care online
- Making data work for people
- Innovation as an integral part of development solutions

Access to digital technologies is an enabler of development and an equalizer of opportunity, amplifying the voices and providing knowledge and information to the powerless and marginalized so that no one is left behind. Access to the internet transforms the way in which citizens interface with government and eases access to public service. Unequal access can deepen vulnerabilities.

RBAP is working with partner governments to foster digital transformation by helping

them to bridge the digital divide, develop digital strategies, access finance, build digital infrastructure and mainstream digital solutions throughout national institutions. Improved accountability, transparency and reduction of corruption are crucial by-products of this effort. Finally, RBAP has worked to stimulate economic activity through skills development in e-commerce, e-payments, and funds transfers.

UNDP has invested heavily in strengthening innovation and digital capabilities across the region through 18 Accelerator Labs, and a Regional Innovation and Digital Team, which is supported by global teams. They have focused on systems thinking, and systems design and transformation, rather than on isolated single point solutions. The disruptions from COVID-19 have provided the opportunity to reimagine the way our societies can work in the future and offered fertile ground for innovation and experimentation.

Theme 4: Responsive and inclusive governance

RESPONSIVE AND INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE

- Expanding freedoms in a shrinking space
- Parliaments meet virtually
- Justice Served Online
- Innovative local solutions for development challenges
- Business and Human Rights
- Stepping up to address Gender Based Violence
- Eliminating stigma and discrimination towards gender identity
- Engaging youth

The COVID-19 pandemic was at first a health emergency, but with serious impacts across the socio-economic spectrum. Governance institutions in many cases struggled to organize capacities and resources for their response. Simultaneously, some countries in the Asia-Pacific region saw the gradual, but noticeable, expansion of centralized measures and the contraction of space in civil society for peaceful and free discourse. Laws were passed to bypass or undermine legislatures, judiciary, or civil society. Press freedoms were curtailed.

UNDP helped to strengthen institutional responses to COVID-19, including support to social service delivery, revitalization of economic activity and bolstering social safety nets. UNDP also pioneered innovations in online governance such as digitalization of the judiciary and parliaments. It created new digital opportunities for citizen engagement, such as Social Innovation Platforms (SIPs), for collaboration at local level among citizens, governments, and the private sector. UNDP also developed guidance and toolkits to create awareness and promote human rights in the private sector. It supported advocacy, capacity building and policy changes to address gender-based violence. Partnerships and direct support to women's groups, police, judiciary, and parliaments were all part of its multi-pronged approach. Some of its most effective efforts to address gender-based violence were carried out as part of the EU and UN Spotlight Initiative. In addition, UNDP and the Citi Foundation helped to catalyze Asia's largest youth leadership and social entrepreneurship movement through its Youth Co:Lab programme, which has benefited more than 9,500 young entrepreneurs and 1,240 startups in 28 countries. Similarly, UNICEF and UNDP worked together in an Asia-Pacific partnership for young people's empowerment which helped more than two million youth.

Theme 5:
Climate change and environmental sustainability

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

- The Climate Promise
- Building resilience to climate change
- The governance of disaster preparedness and response
- Gender and climate responsive measures
- Sustainable management of forests, natural ecosystems and biodiversity
- Supporting the blue economy
- Energy efficiency and renewables
- Waste management

The Asia-Pacific region faces serious environmental challenges, including deforestation and land degradation, loss of biodiversity, inadequate water management, pollution, and climate change. It is also one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world.

RBAP provides critical support to integrate environmental considerations into planning and budgeting frameworks, including National Adaptation Plans. We also help to prepare countries for Conference of Parties (COP) meetings and advocate for them to raise their ambitions for climate action. Through a portfolio of 131 projects in 33 countries in the region, we are a key interlocuter and conduit for programme countries to access environment and climate

change funding from the Global Environment Facility, the Adaptation Fund, Green Climate Fund (GCF), Least Developed Country Fund (LDCF), Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD+) and bilateral donors.

We advise countries on ways to finance the management of forests, natural ecosystems, and biodiversity, including through the Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) which supported 11 countries in the region in 2020-2021. The REDD+ programme helps to conserve tropical forests and reduce greenhouse gases. With financing from the GEF, UNDP in the Pacific has been promoting a sustainable blue economy for decades through integrated coastal management and improved management of marine resources.

Our support to energy efficiency and expanded use of renewable sources extends beyond technical solutions to also examine the linkages of energy access to poverty, gender, and human rights. In addition, UNDP works to de-risk investments for renewable energy markets and attract and leverage private and public sector resources.

UNDP, in our most disaster-prone region in the world, works closely with governments to strengthen governance capacities to plan and respond to disasters and conduct impact assessments after disasters have occurred. It supports the development of national disaster reduction and management plans and strengthens resilience through disaster and climate change adaptation programmes. With UNDP assistance, a risk-informed lens is applied to national planning and budgetary processes, large-scale infrastructure investments, as well as local recovery and development actions.

Theme 6:
SDG Acceleration, Integration and Financing

SDG ACCELERATION, INTEGRATION AND FINANCING

- Integrated national financing frameworks
- Thematic bonds to finance COVID recovery and the SDGs
- Innovative financing instruments
- Youth rally around the SDGs
- SDG integration

COVID-19 stalled progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. The health emergency is not yet over, with new variants emerging and cases rising again in early 2022 even as this report is written. COVID-19 demonstrated the interlinked nature of the SDGs. A renewed focus on SDG acceleration is crucial to getting back on track to reach the global goals by 2030.

UNDP has conducted rapid assessments of the impact of COVID-19 at regional, national, and sub-national levels, and has helped to recalibrate SDG targets and plans when needed. In 2020 – 2021, UNDP scaled up its support for SDG financing initiatives to tap both public and private capital flows. Innovative finance instruments have included the Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs), thematic SDG bonds, and SDG-themed Multi-Partner Trust Funds.

UNDP promotes SDG integration through processes and platforms that bring together diverse groups, including civil society, the private sector, and investors, to examine SDG priorities and plans. RBAP pioneered Social

Innovation Platforms (SIPs) to dialogue on wide-ranging development challenges such as ways to strengthen overall labor market resilience and tackle environmental pollution. The Youth Co:Lab programme brings youth together to empower them to create solutions to pressing issues and afford them opportunities in leadership and entrepreneurship. To date, more than 200,000 young people in 28 countries in the region have participated in Youth Co:Labs, and 1,240 youth-led enterprises have been launched or assisted by the programme. The Climate, Land-use, Energy and Water Systems (CLEWS) modelling approach assesses the interlinkages between natural resource systems and helps develop sectoral models for water, energy, and land use, taking into consideration different climate futures. In addition, the UNDP-wide flagship SDG Integration Spark Blue Platform, an online space for practitioners, has expanded collaboration in the region for collective intelligence, sharing and co-creation.

Photo: UNDP Solomon Islands

Thought leadership

In recent decades, there has been heightened demand for sound technical advice to initiate policy reforms that pave the way for development outcomes that are just and lasting. With many developing countries in Asia and the Pacific now attaining lower- or upper-middle income status, rigorous evidence-based policy advice is a domain that merits greater UNDP engagement. As part of this effort, UNDP, including in Asia and the Pacific, aims to be an evidence and experience-based thought leader in the six signature solutions championed by the UNDP Strategic Plan and tailored to local contexts and needs.

What is thought leadership? The goal is to offer policy guidance, inspire innovation and influence action through cutting edge analysis and policy advice. UNDP plays the role of a connector by linking country partners with resources, expertise, and knowledge.

In Asia and the Pacific, UNDP has responded to this imperative by moving swiftly on two fronts: policy advice to influence longer-term, sustainable policy change to achieve results at scale; and, leveraging our value as a knowledge-based development partner, cataloguing the vast experience and practical advice gleaned through our global network and putting it at the service of our programme countries. This is achieved through wide use of data and expertise, drawing on local policy context and developments, and undertaking rapid human development assessments, such as reports on the effects of acute crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar, or socio-economic assessments of COVID-19 impacts across the region.

At the regional level in Asia and the Pacific, this includes creation of collaborative policy space to examine options and generate development solutions with national partners, through the help of policy briefs and analyses, establishment and nurturing of virtual theme-based knowledge networks, convening of symposia and conferences on key issues, and direct support to Country Offices. At the national level, in addition to the policy advice and advocacy provided through our projects, UNDP Country Offices in the region are catalysing national dialogue and conversations on critical development and policy issues. In 2020-2021 the launches of our flagship National Human Development Reports have brought together diverse national partners to generate consensus on the way forward, supported by perspectives of regional and global thought leaders. The effective use of media as part of a systematic communications strategy is key to this effort, be it turning a spotlight on rapidly evolving development emergencies through global news outlets or sharing real-time development events in social media.

Frontier issues that reimagine development for a sustainable future

The Asia and Pacific region is remarkably diverse, and UNDP's policy support is essentially demand driven. However, issues such as inequality, climate change, basic social services, governance and judicial reform, LDC graduation, and building resilient economies are of global and lasting interest, and therefore are the focus of much of the thought leadership provided by UNDP. In 2020-2021, the high demand for policy advice to deal with the impacts of COVID-19 meant that RBAP ramped up advice on responding to the economic, health, inequality, and social effects of the pandemic.

UNDP plans to deepen its support to policy and foresight analysis on frontier issues that reimagine development for a sustainable future. With the advanced capabilities for policy modeling and anticipatory analysis, UNDP and our national partners will be better positioned to navigate complexity and uncertainty. UNDP's core mandate to integrate and coordinate varied facets of sustainable development requires continued forging of partnerships with diverse development allies.

In 2020-2021, UNDP laid the solid foundation to support a thought leadership agenda in the region. We consolidated the Economists Network by placing 27 economists in 20 country offices, formed a regional Foresight Network, strengthened a regional team of advisors on inclusive growth at the Bangkok Regional Hub, and established the Strategy, Policy and

Partnerships (SPP) Unit at Headquarters in New York. These steps augmented in-house capacity that resulted in rigorous, evidence-based knowledge products on policy and strategic foresight. To solicit periodic ideas from some of the world's finest thinkers in development, an Eminent Advisory Council was formed.[1] High-level dialogues and events regularly brought together leading thinkers from academia and governments, including sessions with Asia-Pacific Ambassadors to the United Nations, former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd at The Asia Society, and 'The Equity Imperative' discussion series with the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth in the sidelines of the 76th UN General Assembly. These helped to ensure a laser focus on the development challenges and explore the solutions that are critically important for the region.

An edited policy compendium, *The Great Upheaval: Resetting Development Policy and Institutions for the Decade of Action in Asia and the Pacific,* will be published by Cambridge University Press. It documents policy lessons that can underpin current dialogues and outreach to governments, thinktanks, social movements and the private sector on development priorities leading to 2030. The chapters address policy shifts accelerated by the pandemic, including climate change, sovereign finance, digitalization, global value chains, and productivity growth; measures and aspirations for improved human conditions, such as equality of opportunities, multi-dimensional poverty, human security, and vaccine equity; and new modes of state capacity and international governance, including global public goods, regional cooperation, and lessons from pandemic governance.

UNDP is institutionalizing 'horizon scanning,' along with creation of a foresight network to explore strategic futures for designing selected

Country Office programmes. An innovative foresight research project on *Reimagining Development in Asia and the Pacific* identified tipping points that are shifting development trajectories. This research positioned foresight as a global public good, a collective process of action and reimagination to evolve pathways and capacity needed for countries to navigate uncertainty. Topics covered under this research project included development as long-termism for future generations; new forms of rights for the 21st century; and reimagining digital public goods for equitable futures and indigenous futures.

In 2020-2021, the Bangkok Regional Hub responded to the urgent need to gain and share knowledge about the rapidly evolving COVID-19 pandemic and the ways to respond and recover. Our policy teams produced 17 publications, several with partners such as WHO, ADB and ESCAP, that triggered policy debates often contributing to policy changes. Themes included **COVID-19 response**, such as the report, Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Leaving No Country Behind, which underlines the risk of leaving behind vulnerable countries. It highlights how digitalization and regional cooperation can help close development gaps and manage and mitigate growing divergence between countries. For **COVID recovery,** Recovering from COVID-19: Lessons from Past Disasters in Asia and the Pacific highlights ten lessons and good practices from Asia-Pacific to 'build back better.' Investing in care: a pathway to gender-responsive COVID-19 recovery calls for transformative actions to develop policies and initiatives to turn unpaid care into decent work, support behavioural changes to dismantle gender stereotypes, reduce and redistribute the burden of unpaid care work, and ultimately build a new social contract that puts gender equality at the center of the COVID-19 recovery.

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1   Includes Professors Kaushik Basu, Mariana Mazzucato, Branko Milanovich, Rohini Pande, and Danny Quah

Photo: Kanni Wignaraja, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director, RBAP. Interview with BBC November 2021

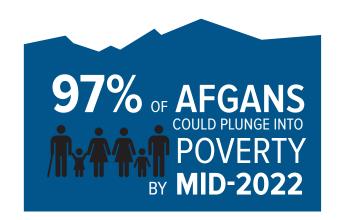Photo: Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator, Interview with CNN April 2021

Photo: Abdallah Al Dardari, UNDP Resident Representative in Afghanistan. Interview with CNBC in November 2021

Spotlight on Myanmar and Afghanistan

Myanmar and Afghanistan have fallen into deep crisis, at risk of losing decades of development gains. The situation in **Myanmar** topped global media attention in early 2021, with a focus on the political and security crises and their effects on the ongoing humanitarian situation in the country. UNDP, through cooperation between its field presence, expert network, and headquarters teams, quickly contributed analysis on the consequences of the ongoing crisis on development and the setbacks

caused by the disruption which helped provide a broader understanding of the impact. The policy brief [COVID-19, Coup d'état and Poverty: Compounding Negative Shocks and their Impact on Human Development in Myanmar,](#) was released at the end of April 2021. It forecasted that half of Myanmar's population would live in poverty in 12 months due to the compound political, security, and economic crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Extensive print and broadcast coverage included stories on CNN, CNBC and articles in the *Financial Times, New York Times, Foreign Affairs, Associated Press, Reuters,* and others. A follow-up study was launched on the Impact of the Twin Crises on Human Welfare in Myanmar.

As well, the global media narrative on **Afghanistan** in August 2021 was dominated by a 'humanitarian crisis' frame, and the commentary called for a 'humanitarian response.' The need to sustain livelihoods at the same time rarely featured. Here, too, UNDP set out to provide a broader understanding of the impact by highlighting the consequences on the formal and informal economy. The Afghanistan Country Office, with support from several economists and economic modeling experts from UNDP[2],

produced an economic rapid appraisal, [Economic Instability and Uncertainty in Afghanistan after August 15.](#) One of the main projections was that 97 per cent of Afghans could plunge into poverty by mid-2022. *The Washington Post, New York Times, Associated Press,* and other news outlets carried headlines warning of Afghanistan's risk of universal poverty. The rapid appraisal grabbed media attention around the world, from the *Hindustan Times to Euractiv* and *El Pais.* The economic appraisal continued to be quoted in interviews and opinion pieces in the *The Economist, BBC,* and *Al Jazeera.* UNDP's economic modeling was referenced by Member States during the UN pledging conference for Afghanistan in Geneva in September 2021.

Two analytical briefs were also prepared: a [Situation Report on the Afghan Banking and Financial System;](#) and a [2021-2022 Outlook on Economic and Basic Human Needs.](#) Both pieces, provide analysis and recommendations to address the economic challenges that could accelerate a slide into extreme poverty. The briefs also generated momentum for the integration of livelihoods and support to local economies in the response.

97% OF AFGANS COULD PLUNGE INTO POVERTY BY MID-2022

Responding to the shocks of climate change and COVID-19 to ensure social sustainability

The impacts of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have emerged as key hurdles to SDG attainment. The policy response to each of these shocks is multifaceted and call for globally coordinated actions that ensure social sustainability.

The RBAP Economist Network produced a series of policy papers on these interrelated topics to examine development challenges faced by the countries in the region and proposed policy options to address them. *The Economic Aspects of Climate Change* provided a succinct overview of key policy elements needed for a shift from fossil fuels.[3] It recommended pricing carbon in a way that is compatible with the ambitious targets in the Paris Agreement. It noted that taking this approach would contribute to creating the necessary fiscal space to help manage the transition. A critical mass of countries following this path could lead to a sustained transition.

The Economist Network also produced a *Position Note of the Social and Economic Impact of Covid-19 in the Asia-Pacific,*[4] policy guidance for UNDP Resident Representatives in the Asia-Pacific Region, and 17 country-specific notes, summarized in the *Synthesis of Socio-Economic Impact Assessments of COVID-19 in Asia Pacific*[5]. Key insights included the need to overhaul policies and invest in public health, economic stimulus, and social safety nets to set countries on a path toward recovery. Short-term fixes to previous unsustainable policy frameworks should be avoided. Instead, policies should be developed that build sustainability, and governments must coordinate their policies.

In addition, the Economist Network produced the paper, *Addressing the COVID-19 economic crisis in Asia through social protection.*[6] It pointed to gaps in social protection systems throughout the region, linked in part to the informality in these economies. It noted that the pandemic presents an opportunity to build more effective, comprehensive, and universal social security schemes that can reduce poverty and inequality and be scaled to the magnitude of shocks. A separate World Economic Forum op-ed emphasized the timeliness and feasibility of a Universal Basic Income element in social protection systems.[7]

A policy report was produced by the China Country Office in partnership with the China Center for International Economic Exchanges (CCIEE) entitled, *Paving the way for low-carbon development globally and along the Belt and Road.*[8] To support global SDG attainment and facilitate low carbon development worldwide, the report described three key pathways: development and transfer of clean energy technologies; channeling investment and financing flows towards low-carbon projects; and advancing low-carbon capacity-building. The report highlighted China's role in a global low-carbon transition, the need for internationally coordinated policies, including appropriate carbon pricing, and the role of the private sector.

These policy-focused thought pieces contributed to the policy advisory roles of Country Offices. Many of the policy insights and recommendations in these papers helped to sharpen UNDP inputs to policy formulation, particularly in today's rapidly changing environment.

Photo: UNDP Mongolia. Rapid socio-economic impact assessment for vulnerable groups

Socio-Economic Impact Assessments influence COVID-19 response and recovery

UNDP in Asia and the Pacific joined the UN-wide response to the pandemic, including as a technical lead in the socio-economic response - a role entrusted to UNDP by the UN Secretary General. Building on the *Position Note of the Social and Economic Impact of COVID-19 in the Asia-Pacific,*[9] the policy guidance for UNDP Resident Representatives in the Asia-Pacific region, and the 17 Socio-Economic Impact Assessments commissioned by Country Offices in 2020 in the region, UNDP helped national partners to understand the dynamics of the socio-economic impact and derive policy options for the response in country-specific context.

The **Mongolia** Country Office released Poverty and Inequality during COVID-19, using Big Data from Value-Added Tax data to track changes in consumption, poverty, and inequality. This is the first time that Big Data generated from such

records was used for research and analysis to present alternative estimates of poverty and inequality in the country. The data can provide evidence for policy makers to define targeted social protection policies. The **Philippines** Country Office issued a brief on *Leveraging Non-traditional Datasets for Assessing Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 across Philippine Households,* using data from private sector market research and mobility data from internet companies to assess the impact of COVID-19 and recovery. In **Fiji,** monitoring of social and economic effects from the onset of the pandemic in 2020, led to the Country Office producing a COVID-19 recovery policy brief to help decision-makers to navigate the uncertainties of the crisis. The brief was developed through a 'sense-making methodology' to understand the evolving COVID-19 socio-economic impact, including through the collection of personal stories from those most affected by the pandemic. Future scenarios were then developed through a 'foresight approach' which led to a set of proposed policies in governance, and social and economic sectors.

Several Country Offices have advocated for long-term investments in strengthening social protection systems as a policy lever for poverty reduction and inclusive growth. The **Cambodia** Country Office, with the Ministry of Economy and Finance, conducted a COVID-19 Economic and Social Impact Assessment in Cambodia based on modelling and simulation that also examined the impact of social protection on growth and poverty reduction. The brief informed high-level dialogues with national and UN partners. It also led to the Government launching in 2020 a new COVID-related social assistance programme and MSMEs stimulus packages, equivalent to 3.4 per cent of GDP. Accordingly, 674,146 poor households received US $300 million in cash transfers. A national allocation of around US $200 million benefitted 682,328 households in 2021. The **Malaysia** Country Office issued a policy brief on *Unified Social Registry: Towards an Efficient Social Protection System in Response to the COVID-19 Crisis.* The aim was to present

MIGRANT WORKERS IN INDIA

58% DID NOT MIGRATE

84% REQUIRED FINANCIAL AID

60% LOST THEIR JOB

opportunities to improve efficiency, coordination, and coherence in the mechanisms that can expand the coverage of social safety nets. In **Nepal,** the Rapid Socioeconomic Impact Assessment informed recovery programmes in the 2020 and 2021 national budget. The assessment also led to the Government of Nepal introducing schemes to generate employment for poor and disadvantaged people. This included a new US $450 million fund to revive MSMEs. Nearly US $100 million was allocated for the Prime Minister's Employment Programme, which aims to generate 200,000 short-term employment opportunities.

Employment, especially among women, young people, and migrants, was heavily affected by the pandemic in the region. The **India** Country Office released the *Impact of COVID-19 and Industry 4.O on Future of Work for Women: Insights from the Formal Sector in India,* highlighting the effects of COVID-19 on employment by gender and sector, the importance of reskilling, and the pandemic as a catalyst to adopt new technologies that curb job polarization. The **India** Country Office also partnered with civil society organizations on the *Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrant Workers in India,* following *An Analysis of the*

6   https://www.undp.org/publications/addressing-covid-19-economic-crisis-asia-through-social-protection
7   https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/covid-19-universal-basic-income-social-inequality
8   https://www.cn.undp.org/content/china/en/home/library/south-south-cooperation/paving-the-way-for-low-carbon-development-globally-and-along-the.html
9   https://www.undp.org/publications/social-and-economic-impact-covid-19-asia-pacific-region

ASSISTANCE TO **SRI LANKA** IN TOURISM

685 WOMEN BUSINESSES DEVELOPMENT

670 WOMEN SKILLS FOR LIVELIHOOD DEVELOPMENT

75 NEW BUSINESSES REGISTERED

322 REOPENED BUSINESSES

Socioeconomic Situation of Working Migrant Women in 12 States of India. The research indicated that 60 per cent of the respondents lost their jobs, 58 per cent did not migrate when the restrictions lifted, and 84 per cent required additional financial aid. The **Philippines** Country Office commissioned a policy brief on *Exploring Opportunities for Economic Diversification and Productive Employment in the Philippines,* analyzing how industrial policy can play a role in the COVID-19 recovery.

UNDP assessments of the impact of the pandemic on tourism in **Sri Lanka** informed a recovery road map that is the basis for transforming the sector. A rapid assessment jointly undertaken by UNDP and the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority found that 67 per cent of those who lost their jobs due to the pandemic were female workers. As a result of these findings, UNDP, and the Tourism Authority, with financial assistance

from Citi, have developed a project that is both a social protection and a recovery initiative. It has provided direct financial support to more than 685 women, business development services to more than 670 women to enhance their skills for livelihood development and assisted with registering 75 new businesses and provided PPE items that enabled 322 business ventures to reopen. As part of its wider support to the recovery of the tourism sector, UNDP is providing technical expertise for the national tourism policy, including rolling out the national sustainable certification scheme for tourism with funding support from the EU and BIOFIN.

As an advocate for sustained investment in human development and inclusive recovery, UNDP examined issues of fiscal sustainability during COVID-19. The **Pakistan** Country Office conducted an *Analysis of the Federal Budget 2020-2021* focusing on development and socioeconomic aspects. **Maldives** published two *Economic Bulletins* with analytics of the 2021 national budget, insights on the country's pension system and reform options based on expenditure analysis. The **Malaysia** Country Office commissioned *Financing Development in Times of Change,* presenting quantitative analysis of the challenges in financing development. They include insufficient domestic public finance, untapped domestic private finance, unstable international private finance flows, and the changing nature of international public finance.

LDC graduation emerged as a challenge in the context of COVID-19. The **Bhutan** Country Office issued a policy brief on *Trade Diversification in Bhutan,* analyzing the difficulties in addressing economic vulnerability through economic diversification. Specific recommendations on trade diversification included: improving the alignment of investment and export promotion policies; strengthening export and investment in sectors with markets in India and the world; establishing linkages between domestic firms and foreign companies; incorporating the service sector into the diversification portfolio; and pursuing import substitutions.

Photo: Youth Co:Lab Summit

A green and low-carbon agenda remained at the heart of UNDP's advocacy on COVID-19 recovery in the region. The **China** Country Office issued several policy briefs and co-organized a series of UN policy dialogues. Through these initiatives the Country Office informed and offered recommendations in areas such as energy reform and the use of green technology, green finance, and nature-based solutions to accelerate a just and inclusive low-carbon transition going forward.

National Human Development Reports foster public debate on inclusive development pathways

The third National Human Development Report for **Pakistan,** the *Three Ps of inequality: Power, People and Policy,* examined how inequality has affected the country's economic and social progress. Despite the Constitution of Pakistan upholding equality and regardless of global commitments to the SDGs, there are still two different Pakistan's – one for the rich, with access to the best avenues and opportunities, and one for the poor, who have a narrow pool of choices. Accompanying a Regional Human Development Report, the **Malaysia** Country Office commissioned the *Satellite Paper on Inequality in Access to Essential Health and Medicine (COVID-19 Vaccines) in the Asia-Pacific* region to analyze vaccination distribution by income groups, the COVAX allocation scheme, and the underlying reasons for vaccination inequality. The **Nepal** *Human Development Report 2020: Beyond Graduation: Productive Transformation and Prosperity* recommends that LDC graduation strategies must go beyond economic yardsticks and consider social and environmental dimensions of development.

COVID-19 response and socio-economic recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis of our time. It amplified what it is to live in poverty, as it did to live with opportunity. For UNDP, the pandemic has meant adapting to new demands and realigning programmes to meet the changing needs of countries in Asia and the Pacific.

The pandemic has revealed and enlarged weaknesses and exposed development fault lines already present in the region, including widening inequality, inadequate health and social service delivery systems, threadbare to non-existent social safety nets, and the fragility of work in the informal sector. The economic and social disruption of COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific has been devastating. In addition to loss of life, millions have lost their livelihoods, many industries have gone into debt, small and larger businesses have gone bankrupt, and the education of millions has been interrupted for extended periods. The worst hit are the most vulnerable – the poor, women, workers in the informal sector, the elderly. There has been a marked regression of development gains of the past decades, and the growth momentum of the region has been stalled.

However, the RBAP assessments of the impact of COVID-19 in Asia reveal another trend. Many Asian nations have mounted multi-dimensional responses to the pandemic which have mitigated its most damaging impacts, particularly

in the health and economic arenas. UNDP has been involved with some of the successful responses, including effective surveillance and disease control, use of innovative IT technologies to track and map the spread of the virus, and income support schemes. Another heartening development has been the robust regional cooperation to address the pandemic.

Not surprisingly, the wide variance in the impact and effectiveness of the national response to COVID-19 reflects the diversity within the region with respect to institutional capacities, fiscal strength, and demographic size. UNDP has recognized that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work in Asia and the Pacific, and a customized and tailored COVID-19 response is required in each country.

How has RBAP responded in 2020-2021 to meet the challenge of COVID-19? The pandemic brought shifts to UNDP which needed to swiftly adapt to new demands and reprogramme initiatives to meet the changing needs of the countries which it serves. While quickly tapping and bringing on board health expertise directly related to the spread and control of the disease, RBAP proactively repurposed existing substantive and budgetary resources at regional and country levels. To meet the unprecedented challenges, UNDP conducted multi-dimensional assessments of the impact of COVID-19, put in place institutional and fiscal capacities, and fostered national response and mitigation strategies.

Specific areas of support to combat COVID-19 included health procurement; introduction and scale-up of digital vaccine management systems; improving access to PPE, vaccination, and health care services; ramping up tele-medicine; strengthening and scaling up social protection schemes and livelihoods support; and broad information campaigns to create awareness and influence safer behaviour. The intersection of these efforts and the need for a rapid response has led to the development of integrated COVID-19 response programmes that favour multi-sectoral national campaigns. RBAP has facilitated cross fertilization of experience throughout the region so that successes and lessons learned from 'first movers' could be shared with others.

Leveraging longstanding partnerships, RBAP mobilized US $155 million for the immediate pandemic response, and quickly moved resources to where they were needed most in three priority areas: the procurement and supply of essential health products and vaccine distribution, strengthening crisis management and response, and addressing critical social and economic impacts.

Asia's experience with COVID-19 has also revealed another silver lining. Many of the approaches introduced during the pandemic will remain as the new normal when this period becomes a distant memory. For example, digital solutions in managing health products, remote work and education arrangements, rapid-response mechanisms for strengthening social safety nets and livelihoods, management of vaccine delivery systems, and safe behavior communications will all be components of 'build back better' plans that can yield future benefits.

Immediate Health Sector Support

More than 12,000 new health facilities were established, and 250,000 health care workers were hired or trained with UNDP support for COVID-19 response in the region.

Through its support to global procurement for early COVID-19 response, UNDP contributed to the world's collective efforts to combat the virus. UNDP helped countries to procure critical supplies from China, during the early days of the pandemic when supplies in most other global markets were running low and were subject to export restrictions. In total, procurement support from UNDP **China** covered 47 different types of COVID-19 medical supplies for 72 countries. Specific support included market analysis and mapping, quality assurance of medical goods, and logistical operations. Within China, UNDP supplied vulnerable locations with vital medical equipment including patient monitoring systems, infusion pumps, and protective suits for healthcare workers.

In 2020, at the outset of the pandemic, UNDP in **Cambodia** in partnership with the World Bank and WHO, procured US $6 million worth of priority health equipment and supplies for the Ministry of Health. In recognition of UNDP's quality and speed of delivery, the budget almost trebled to US $17 million in 2021. The urgently needed equipment enhanced the capacity and preparedness of Cambodia's COVID-19 designated hospitals and testing facilities to respond and support the reopening of the country in late 2021.

In **Timor-Leste,** UNDP worked closely with the Government through a cost-shared US$ 11 million programme to support emergency procurement and quality assurance of health products during the critical period of 2020. With UNDP assistance the Government was able to procure over 7.3 million units of medicines, 4.5 million test kits and reagents, 802 units of equipment and accessories, and other health supplies. In addition, as one of the country's first responders in 2020, UNDP's Accelerator Lab in Timor-Leste

RESPONSE IN **IRAN**

2,500 HEALTH CENTERS

30 PCR MACHINES

500,000 AT-RISK-INDIVIDUALS AND PATIENTS
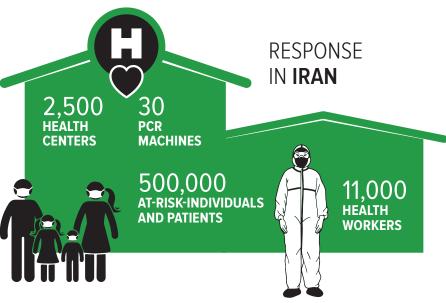
11,000 HEALTH WORKERS

Photo: UNDP Nepal. Vaccination in Dhangadi

produced 1,200 face shields using 3D printers. More than 6,280 frontline workers and journalists received face shields, face masks and other PPE.

Building on health infrastructure created through the Global Fund, UNDP could immediately contribute to the COVID-19 response in **Iran.** UNDP joined forces with the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, the Social Welfare Organization, and the Prisons Organization to support government-led responses in harm reduction centers, specifically in mobile centers that offered infection prevention and control services to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among high-risk populations. UNDP supported the provision of 30 PCR machines to increase COVID-19 diagnostic and testing capacity. More than 2,500 health centers, 11,000 health workers and nearly 500,000 at-risk-individuals and patients directly benefited from targeted distribution of essential health supplies.

In the **Pacific** region, the UNDP Multi-Country Western Pacific Programme (MCWP) funded through the Global Fund was positioned to provide immediate procurement of urgent medical supplies and equipment that included 85,500 PPE kits to 11 countries for 350 health care workers in public health departments, along with screening of TB, HIV and STI prevention and testing.

In addition, the UNDP MCWP supported public health information campaigns in **Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia,** and **Palau. Niue** and **Samoa** upgraded laboratory testing facilities. The Ministries of Health in **Marshall Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu,** and **FSM** enhanced their infection prevention and control in hospitals and other health facilities.

Also, with financial support from the Global Fund, UNDP in **Afghanistan** assisted the Ministry of Public Health to strengthen laboratory capacity and establish a surveillance system by expanding prevention diagnosis and management services at the Central Public Health Laboratory facilities and reference labs in five regions. UNDP provided technical assistance to train 25 regional and provincial laboratory staff in the use of new equipment. UNDP also supported the establishment of 15 health centers, 11 mobile health teams and two home-based care outreach teams in eight provinces. In partnership with the Ministry of Interior Affairs, UNDP in Afghanistan provided technical and financial support to 300-bed hospital facilities and ICUs across five provinces to ensure they can quarantine, isolate, and treat affected Afghan National Police (ANP) personnel. UNDP assistance helped to reconstruct a police hospital to fight COVID-19 in Mazar-e-Sharif city, which serves nearly 9,000 ANP personnel and their

families in five northern provinces. After the 15th of August, in the face of a breakdown of public service delivery, UNDP in Afghanistan continued to play a crucial role in preventing the disruption of essential health services. With emergency funding mobilized from the Global Fund, UNDP contributed to sustaining health services around the country. Such support ensured that 2,157 health facilities remained operational, providing health services to more than 3.1 million Afghans including 1.1 million children and 782,000 women, with 2.5 million people receiving health services in outpatient departments. As part of this support, UNDP paid the salaries of 26,013 health workers.

In close coordination with WHO and the UN Country Team, UNDP in **Myanmar** worked with government ministries and partners to strengthen national preparedness efforts. UNDP provided health system support to 11 regional and state governments with over 300,000 medical and non-medical items such as walkthrough temperature scanners, suction machines, patient monitors, ventilators, oxygen concentrator, pulse oximeter, oxygen facemasks, and thermometers, in addition to PPE items. PPEs were also distributed to IDP camps and quarantine centres. As part of strengthening capacities of national institutions in tackling the health crisis, UNDP also established an oxygen plant at the Sittwe Hospital in Rakhine.

Partnering with the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and the Lao Women's Union, UNDP **Lao PDR** provided essential health equipment to support more than 1,200 women in temporary quarantine centres. Medical supplies went to the national hospital for women and children, serving more than 2,000 patients. Community outreach initiatives in Bokeo Province, one of the regions hardest hit by COVID-19, informed women about their rights and how to access services if they experienced domestic violence during the pandemic. The community outreach model will be adopted in three more provinces.

In **Maldives,** UNDP procurement of PPE for frontline health workers opened new opportunities in the health sector for UNDP to work with the

Ministry of Health. In 2021, UNDP was able to secure funding for additional national emergency medical supplies. In addition, through the regional project on Digital Solutions for the Deployment of COVID-19 Vaccines, UNDP is conducting a digital readiness assessment. It is also providing technical support to strengthen the legal framework for data governance in the health sector through the Health Information Bill, which will cover data privacy, security, data use and data collection.

Digital Vaccine Management

Closing the digital divide and harnessing the power of digital technologies for COVID-19 vaccination is essential for driving faster and fairer vaccination access. As part of national deployment and vaccination plans, UNDP is working with governments, UN, and other partners to introduce digital solutions to strengthen health systems and ensure equitable, safe, and efficient vaccine distribution.

By leveraging the experience of both **India** and **Indonesia,** UNDP supported digitalization of COVID-19 vaccine tracking in **Bhutan, Bangladesh, Iran, Nepal, Philippines,** and **Afghanistan.** South-South cooperation, facilitated

Photo: UNDP India. CoWIN (Winning Over COVID-19) programme

by UNDP, has been crucial to the success in digital vaccine tracking and deployment among these countries.

In **India,** the mobile cloud-based eVIN system (Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network) was adapted to manage COVID-19 vaccine logistics and ensure uninterrupted tracking of COVID-19 vaccines and other routine vaccines. The eVIN system, developed and implemented with technical support from UNDP, was already in use at all 28,994 vaccine cold chain points across all 733 districts in the country to manage vaccine stocks and storage temperatures for the regular immunization programme of the government.

To bolster the herculean task of providing free vaccinations to a population of 1.4 billion people, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Government of India, developed the CoWIN digital platform. The existing eVIN platform with trained users in place to handle large-scale databases, facilitated the adoption of CoWIN (Winning Over COVID-19).

CoWIN tracks vaccine recipients, appointment bookings, and facilitates vaccination registration and certificates. With 3.2 billion hits per day, no other Management Information System in India handles a scale equivalent to CoWIN, which by mid 2021 had registered more than 530 million vaccinations for an average of 3.5 million vaccinations a day, and more than 1.4 billion by end of 2021. UNDP provided technical support to the Ministry for developing and managing CoWIN and has assisted with training more than 1.2 million health workers and frontline staff on use of the Co-WIN software. It has set up a call centre which receives 1,500 calls a day that works in tandem with a government vaccination helpline.
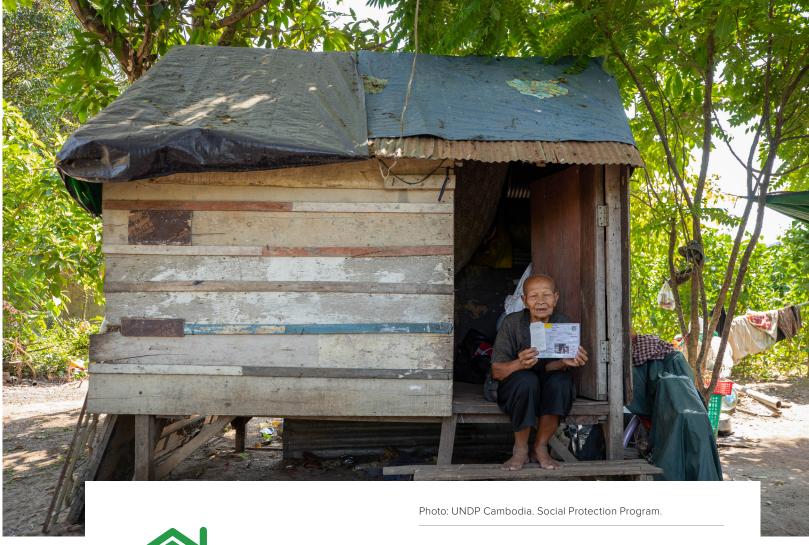
By partnering with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, UNICEF and WHO, UNDP also helped to expand digital solutions to vaccine management for COVID-19 in **Indonesia.** The existing digital vaccine logistics management system, Monitoring Imunisasi Logistik secara Elektronik (SMILE), funded by GAVI, uses a mobile app to provide an online dashboard of the entire vaccine supply chain. SMILE enables real-

time visibility of vaccine cold chain logistics by digitizing stock supplies and storage temperature across vaccine cold chain points. Health officials can check if vaccines are overstocked, falling short or out of stock. It informs decision-making to maximize vaccine distribution and management. More than 10,000 health staff have been using SMILE to update vaccine logistics and more than 100 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been distributed and recorded in SMILE. UNDP Indonesia developed and expanded the use of the system from just two pilot districts and 54 health facilities in 2018 to all 514 districts and 10,000 health facilities by 2020. It aims to reach 600 Public Health Centers by 2021.

In **Bhutan,** UNDP supported the Ministry of Health to develop a digital system for COVID-19 vaccine beneficiary management, known as the Bhutan Vaccine System. The app-based digital system ensures that those eligible for vaccinations are registered, vaccine supplies match demand, adverse effects are monitored and reported, and vaccination coverage information is sent to central health authorities. The IT equipment used for the system has meant that health workers could vaccinate more than 93 percent of eligible adults. More than 2,100 health workers received training on registering and screening patients through the digital system.

Social Protection to respond to economic shocks during the pandemic

The UNDP position paper on *Addressing the COVID-19 economic crisis in Asia through Social Protection,* noted that the strongest social protection systems are those that blend innovative approaches with existing ones that have a proven track record. After 18 months responding to the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, 1 million formal and informal sector workers have been supported by UNDP in the region, and an estimated 4 million people have benefited from social protection schemes

670,000 HOUSEHOLDS

ASSISTANCE TO **CAMBODIA**

98,494 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

+50% WOMEN
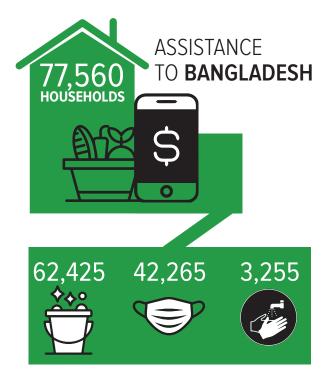
and services, such as UNDP's cash transfer programmes, water and sanitation services, and food and nutrition schemes. With UNDP support, more than **25,5000 jobs** were protected by economic or other labour market measures in Asia and the Pacific.

UNDP in **Cambodia** supported the government in mounting a quick policy response, including a stimulus package, which catalyzed partnerships with development banks. UNDP and the Ministry of Economy and Finance used economic

modelling to predict the size and impact of the pandemic on vulnerable households, which assisted the government in developing stimulus options. Technical support from UNDP, GIZ and UNICEF contributed to the government rapid rollout of social protection cash transfers for every Cambodian below the national poverty line. The assistance reached over 670,000 households, including 98,494 people living with disabilities. Furthermore, nearly 7,800 PLHIV households received ID Poor cards and access to cash transfers in 2021, of which the majority were women-headed households. In addition, as part of the emergency response to COVID-19, UNDP in Cambodia with funding from SIDA, set up a cash-for-work scheme for affected households. It engaged 2,810 people from 1,915 households (27 per cent were headed by women) in tree planting, and injected emergency cash in communities that led to the reforestation of 181.93 hectares in community-managed areas.

UNDP partnered with over 22 municipal governments in **Nepal** to provide short-term

ASSISTANCE TO **BANGLADESH**

77,560 HOUSEHOLDS

62,425 **42,265** **3,255**

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response amongst the 30 million slum dwellers in **Bangladesh.** As part of its National Urban Poverty Reduction Programme, UNDP supported the Government of Bangladesh with a rapid emergency response in low income and slum communities in 19 towns and cities. The response provided food assistance to 77,560 households through digital cash transfers and food baskets. It also included COVID-19 preventative measures like the installation of more than 3,255 handwash points, distribution of 62,425 hygiene kits and 42,265 masks, and other PPE for health workers.

In **India,** UNDP helped link 177,500 people across ten states to government social protection programmes. Its support to livelihoods for marginalized and vulnerable communities, particularly women and youth, included training 104,000 individuals on entrepreneurial skills. A central aim of UNDP support and its partnerships with more than 25 civil society organizations, government institutions, industry associations, foundations and the private sector was to assist farmers, artisans, primary producers, self-employed people, MSMEs, and informal sector workers to cope with the crisis and get back on their feet. More than 17,000 farmers, artisans, small-scale entrepreneurs, and informal sector workers were able to restore their livelihoods through training on financial and digital literacy and support for them to access markets.

In addition, over 87,000 women and youth in **India** were provided career guidance and counselling to enable them to make informed career choices, including through Sach Honge Sapne (*Dreams Will Come True*) an online career counselling and job readiness series launched by UNDP. A UNDP initiative for those who lost livelihoods due to the pandemic placed more than 6,600 people, aged 18 to 35, in jobs in e-commerce, logistics, manufacturing, banking, finance, telecom, and retail. UNDP also partnered with industry associations to set up helplines to inform MSMEs on COVID-19 related government schemes. It supported business continuity for nearly 9,000 MSMEs, which helped to restore livelihoods and build economic resilience.

employment through cash-for-work projects for more than 6,000 vulnerable people who were hardest hit by COVID-19. Those involved in the projects included workers who lost jobs in the tourism sector, or economically marginalized communities and migrants. The projects, co-funded with the respective municipalities, included building agriculture roads, trails, irrigation canals, and community buildings, using local labour and materials.

UNDP fostered inclusive social services amidst the pandemic, with systems that will be useful for the future in **Viet Nam.** Specifically, it provided experts to design and test the software and processes for e-registration and e-payment of social assistance programmes and identify and verify eligible households. The online tools were tested in five provinces, benefiting more than 11,560 ethnic minority individuals. Approximately 100 ethnic minority cooperatives, led by women, gained access to cash transfers, cash for work, PPE, and other essential support to protect, and sustain their livelihoods.

UNDP tapped its existing community outreach networks to implement a holistic COVID-19

Photo: UNDP Iran. Livelihoods and women economic empowerment

UNDP in **Bangladesh** brought current COVID-19 prevention information to marginalized communities while also offering ways to restore their economic support. The UNDP project on *Strengthening Women's Ability for Productive New Opportunities (SWAPNO)* targeted remote communities to raise awareness about COVID-19 prevention measures by reaching nearly 900,000 people through community radio. The distribution of over 190,000 hygiene kits including soap bars, facemasks, and hand sanitizers provided easy protection methods against COVID-19. In collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, 164 women were trained to produce WHO-approved protective masks which have provided steady household incomes for the participating rural women, benefitting 650 families.

In **Iran,** households received training, financial support, and assistance in linking their local supply chain networks with potential buyers. UNDP helped to re-tool women-headed microenterprises in the garment sector so they could produce PPEs to reduce national shortages. The focus on home-based businesses helped to repurpose jobs in other sectors such as food and

extension services. These initiatives contributed to creating more than 5,500 direct and indirect jobs in hard-hit provinces.

Under the SEEDS project to kick-start economic recovery, support to agricultural entrepreneurs is helping to increase food production and improve food security in **Maldives.** The project provides capacity development to the newly established state-owned enterprise Agro National Corporation (AgroNat), that was created to increase crop yield and mitigate food shortages during the crisis. Nearly 215 farmers, 47 percent of them women and nearly 20 per cent were youth, are now under contract farming. AgroNat provides them with training on sustainable farming practices and offers starter packs which include fertilizers, seedlings, and tools.

In addition, an agri-business incubation pilot programme in **Maldives** was introduced with the Housing Development Corporation, to increase urban farming among youth, women, and persons with disabilities. The SEEDS project also provided technical support and capacity development to the Business Center Corporation of Maldives, to provide support services for MSMEs to adapt

Photo: UNDP Sir Lanka. Enhancing skills of women in the tourism sector

Photo: UNDP China. "Spread the Word, Not the Virus" campaign.

to the post-COVID business environment. This includes the establishment of co-working space for entrepreneurs and development of the 'Authentic Maldives' website, reaching over 2,000 MSMEs and 50 home-based workers.

The **Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme** (PFIP) is jointly administered by UNCDF and UNDP and supports low-income Pacific Islanders to improve their access to useful and affordable financial products and services across Pacific countries including **Fiji, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga,** and **Vanuatu**. By the end of 2020, the programme funded over 44 Pacific projects which assisted financial service providers to innovate their technology, products, and services for mass market customers. New business models and innovations contributed to the enrolment of approximately 1.9 million customers in financial services such as mobile wallets, micro insurance, remittances, and savings groups. Just over half of the enrollments were women. The PFIP technical and financial support contributed to the development of National Financial Inclusion Strategies in **Fiji, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Papua New Guinea,** and **Vanuatu** and supported the development of financial education curriculum in **Fiji, PNG,** and the **Solomon Islands.** The experiences from PFIP serve as an

important foundation for new programmes such as the Pacific Insurance and Climate Adaption Programme (PICAP), the Pacific Digital Economy Programme (PDEP) and the Coral Reef and Blue Economy Programme.

Effective communications matters

UNDP assisted national awareness campaigns on best health practices to avoid COVID-19 infection, and ways to combat misinformation and stigmatization.

Following the initial outbreak of the virus in **China,** UNDP, in partnership with WHO, launched a 'Spread the Word, Not the Virus' campaign on Chinese social media. With over 36 million views on Weibo, the month-long campaign mobilized netizens to share crucial information on safe health practices in over 50 languages and dialects including Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, Korean, Spanish, Romanian, and Icelandic. As people returned to work, a separate joint UNDP–WHO campaign raised awareness about workplace safety. Companies demonstrated their enhanced infection prevention protocols through the campaign, helping over 480,000 people gain awareness on how to return to work safely. Op-

eds, interviews, blogs, and social media posts on these subjects resulted in more than 1.8 billion media impressions.

An extensive information campaign in **Timor-Leste** included an app-based COVID-19 game, information pamphlets, and public service announcements. News and feature shows were broadcast in nine local languages on six community radio stations. Nearly 500 journalists received training on how to accurately report on COVID-19.

In **Sri Lanka,** in partnership with the Health Promotion Bureau of the Ministry of Health, a #StayAtHome cartoon campaign was carried through social media and on national TV to counter misinformation about COVID-19.

UNDP supported a national awareness raising campaign in **Bangladesh** to highlight the importance of maintaining basic health and safety measures during Eid-ul-Azha celebrations in 2021. Using its community-based networks, UNDP mobilized 1,200 people to conduct vaccine awareness sessions and assisted nearly 22,970 citizens to register online for COVID-19 vaccines on a government digital platform.

COVID-19 awareness campaigns were organized in **Myanmar,** reaching thousands of people in high-risk areas, informing communities, in local languages, about safety measures to prevent infection. Vocational training for hand-sanitizer

production to 3,500 of the most vulnerable households in targeted townships was organized. Joint UNDP and UNHCR awareness campaigns distributed COVID-19 information, education, and communication materials to 40 villages. In Buthidaung and Maungdaw Townships in Rakhine, nearly 6,000 households in 48 villages received mask-making kits.

Photo: UNDP Bangladesh

Digital transformation and innovation

Access to digital technologies is an enabler of development and an equalizer of opportunity, while unequal access can deepen vulnerabilities. COVID-19 and the lockdowns triggered new shifts towards digital technologies and highlighted the importance of access to the internet for children's education, working from home, telemedicine, coverage by social assistance programmes and accessing financial services for everyone. Policies and solutions that tackle the digital divide are therefore essential for inclusive recovery and continued digital transformation that ensure no one is left behind in socioeconomic inclusion.

The power of digital technologies has opened new possibilities for accelerating human development, expanding engagement in social and economic life, and transforming the way government interacts with citizens. The emergence of digital technologies has prompted a rethink and a reimagining of the way we do development. UNDP has been a leader in this transformation.

The Asia-Pacific region has been a source of innovation and digital and technological development long before the pandemic. New technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, robotics, and the 'Internet of Things' have been influencing how societies and states connect. UNDP has been working with countries to build the foundations to harness the power of this Fourth Industrial Revolution.

DIGITAL SUPPORT

Our work on digitalization and innovation in the region covers two broad areas: building government capacities to harness digital technologies for development; and empowering individuals to use data, information, and knowledge to enhance their capacity and maximize personal potential.

UNDP is working with partner governments as an enabler of digital transformation by helping to develop digital strategies and encourage digital solutions in national institutions. We have been working with national partners to access new technologies and identify financing mechanisms for building physical digital infrastructure. We have provided support and advice to develop digital systems and interfaces in a range of sectors. Specifically, UNDP has fostered digital transformation in areas such as finance, business, government, health care, and the provision of easier public access to essential services. Improved accountability, transparency and reduction of corruption are crucial by-products of this effort.

At the individual level, digitalization is empowering citizens through provision of information and knowledge and enabling them to be more active participants in civil society. UNDP in Asia and the Pacific is focusing on two important digitalization areas: ease of access to basic social services, in particular health and education; and bridging the digital divide for small and medium businesses through skills development and establishment of e-commerce and e-payment systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has stimulated and quickened the pace of digitalization and revealed the benefits and urgency of moving to digital solutions. UNDP has invested in strengthening innovation and digital capabilities across the region through 18 Accelerator Labs and a Regional Innovation and Digital Team which is supported by global teams.

With the help of these change agents, UNDP and its partners have facilitated the adoption of nearly 140 digital and innovative solutions across 18 countries in Asia to respond to the pandemic and set the path for accelerated recovery. RBAP's focus on innovation to confront the region's most intractable and complex development challenges includes systems thinking and systems design and transformation, rather than isolated single point solutions. The intent is that such approaches will lead to better and more durable results.

PARTNER GOVERNMENTS

Increased access to **digital technologies and solutions, mobilizing resources for digital infrastructure, sectoral support** and **cross-sector connectivity.**

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Broader access to **essential services** (health, education, judicial etc.), and **support to SMEs.**

Digital transformation in government

A significant area of work in the region has helped governments and institutions to continue functioning during the pandemic, while also planning broader and longer-term digital transformation strategies. With UNDP support, governments, and institutions in 18 countries benefited from new technological equipment and capacity building to maintain their operations while working towards closing digital gaps.

In **Lao PDR,** UNDP is a strategic partner in the Digital Government Transformation project which pilots new government service delivery approaches. At the outset of the pandemic, UNDP provided capacity building to more than 3,000 government officials on digital literacy and the use of mobile applications. UNDP worked with the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) at the Ministry of Planning and Investment to assess their systems and re-engineer workflows. Installation of video conferencing equipment in all provinces and e-office suites in 14 priority provinces enabled the DIC to hold remote meetings. Equipment and capacity development at the E-Government Center at the Ministry of Technology and Communications similarly bolstered government functions. As smart phone

Photo: UNDP Sri Lanka. Support to digital solutions in government practice

Photo: UNDP Lao PDR. Digital Legal Aid Platform.

use increases in the country, UNDP is helping to develop and test new mobile applications for the country's One Door Service Centers for people who apply online for government services. To advance the rule of law and widen access to justice in Lao PDR, UNDP launched the Digital Legal Aid Platform with the Ministry of Justice. The platform provides basic legal information and an interactive chat function for people to receive legal consultancy online. It provides targeted support to vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities and women at risk of gender-based violence in rural communities who experience barriers to accessing legal advice.

In **Sri Lanka,** UNDP supported the finalization of the Digital Economy Strategy which included incorporating scalable initiatives from UNDP and other partners, as well as sharing regional and global best practices on social innovation within this sector. The Country Office also facilitated a Digital Maturity Assessment that gauges public sector readiness for digital transformation, providing useful insights for the development of a Digital Government Strategy. UNDP partnered with the e-Governance Academy in Estonia, a pioneer in this area, and

IDENTIFY DIGITAL ACCESS
1,000 ISLANDS

130 OFFICIALS IN DIGITAL LITERACY PROGRAMME

4 MICROWAVE ANTENNAS

120 ZOOM LICENSES

SB $2.5 million (USD $310,000) SAVED WITH DIGITALIZATION

SUPPORT IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

carried out the assessment, and made relevant recommendations for departments and ministries. In parallel, UNDP and the Information and Communication Technology Agency assessed the needs and skills of the Chief Innovation Officer network for its readiness to carry out a digital government strategy. UNDP also helped to develop digital solutions for the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority. In addition, it offered technical assistance to the Department of Motor Traffic to re-engineer business processes for issuing driving licenses and transitioning to a smart office.

A UNDP-supported assessment of the digital capacities in **Solomon Islands** was carried out to identify excluded and digitally marginalized areas in the country's nearly 1,000 islands. UNDP collaboration with the government led to the establishment of the Digital Transformation Authority in 2021 and a commitment to the first National Digital Strategy. UNDP partnered with the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, the Ministry of Communication and Aviation, and the Government Information Communication Technologies Services to begin the digitalization of state authorities. New technology improved facilities in all nine provincial government headquarters, as did the procurement and installation of four microwave antennas to establish and upgrade internet connections in targeted remote areas. Laptops, LED monitors and related equipment, including video conferencing

capabilities, and generators were complemented with more than 120 Zoom licenses. Nearly 130 government officials took part in a video-based digital literacy programme or in-person classes. The digitalization saved nearly SB $2.5 million (US $310,000) from the national budget that was redeployed for the COVID-19 response.

In I**ndonesia,** UNDP has provided support for a platform called SP4N-LAPOR, which is a national public service complaints handling system. Indonesian citizens can directly send their feedback on the quality of public services they receive. With its dedicated mobile application, this online citizen complaints system helps increase public participation in the supervision of programmes and government performance in public services. Complaints are logged and directed to the relevant government institution. With support from UNDP, this national complaint system is now transforming into a direct communication channel between the government and citizens on COVID-19 information. In addition, UNDP and the Government of Japan are supporting the Ministry of Health in Indonesia to launch the Blueprint of Health Digital Transformation Strategy 2024. It rests on key pillars such as a digital integration

Photo: UNDP Indonesia. SP4N-LAPOR platform.

of health information on patients and health providers, as well as an integrated development of digital health infrastructure. The blueprint will also help the Government of Indonesia accelerate its national goal to provide universal, affordable, equitable and quality care to all Indonesians, leveraging digital technology. In a country of 270 million where paper records are still the norm, implementing this blueprint will help the Indonesian Government develop an integrated Health Information System.

In **Myanmar,** an e-learning platform for training the civil service was developed and rolled out for the new cadre of civil servants in 2020. Approximately 40 professors from the Central Institute for Civil Service received training-of-trainers distance learning for Senior and Executive Leadership Development, who in turn trained 268 civil servants. UNDP supported the Hluttaw Learning Centre to establish its Online Learning Centre, which was used to deliver professional development support to Members of Parliament and courses for other staff. UNDP also provided training and ICT equipment for the Human Rights Commission and the Anti-Corruption Commission to facilitate remote working during the pandemic.

IT equipment, projectors and laptops strengthened the communication and planning capabilities of the Ministries of Health in **Palau** and **Samoa. Fiji**'s National Disaster Management Office was also supplied with laptops that bolstered its coordination of remote emergency operations. Siren systems and HF/VHF radios meant that all of **Palau**'s remote island communities could be reached. In **Samoa,** e-governance platforms were enhanced and open-source e-learning management systems were established at seven educational institutions in response to the disruptions from the pandemic. Teachers and students benefited from capacity building for their digital skills. These initiatives are developing the necessary capabilities for several countries in the Pacific to make a successful digital transition.

Photo: UNDP Philippines. EMPOWER PH platform.

UNDP in the **Philippines** provided 43 Zoom teleconferencing licenses to the government in Bangsamoro to continue operations and reach its partners amidst COVID-19. Among the recipients are the Office of the Chief Minister, all 15 ministries and select Local Government Units. With community quarantine in the provinces, the government in Bangsamoro capitalized on virtual meetings and teleconferencing technology to reach its constituencies and partners. UNDP also created the EMPOWER PH platform to improve digital access to the PPE supply chain, consolidate PPE-related resources approved by the Department of Health through a centralized information hub, and facilitate the vetting of non-medical use PPE for consumer protection. The EMPOWER PH platform has been handed over to the Department of Trade and Industry, with UNDP continuing to provide technical support services for its expansion to include RT-PCR test services. Given the flexibility of the platform, it may be used as a public procurement site for a range of products and services for disaster response.

In **Sri Lanka,** UNDP provided communications equipment and Zoom licenses that allowed

business continuity of 134 Local Government Authorities. Similarly, in **Nepal,** UNDP provided Zoom licenses to all seven provinces and 753 local governments, improving communication between provincial and local governments. The upgraded virtual communication and operational capabilities meant better coordination and more efficient service delivery during the pandemic.

Closing the digital divide for small businesses

UNDP's support has resulted in the development of a range of online services for small businesses and improved technical and vocational skills through training in six countries. Establishing digital payment platforms and e-commerce systems are central to the functioning of online businesses. UNDP assistance has focused on women-run small and medium enterprises to help close the digital divide for women and marginalized populations.

For example, in **Samoa** UNDP and UNCDF are working in partnership with SkyEye, an ICT and Geographic Information System Mapping company, to support the Maua App, an
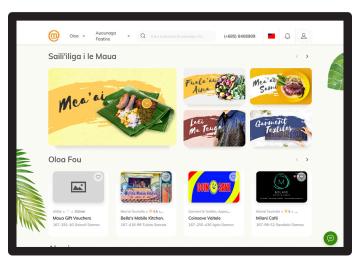

Photo: UNDP Samoa. Maua App.

e-commerce platform that was built to respond to the economic effects of COVID-19. It allows registered vendors to upload their goods and services for potential buyers to purchase through real-time digital payments. The project will expand the reach of the Maua App to make it more accessible for women, people with disabilities, and remote and rural communities.

MSMEs in **China** employ roughly 80 per cent of the workforce. The pandemic has demonstrated that digitalization provides some stability for the continuity of these businesses, easier transition to e-commerce and access to wider markets. Through its Bangkok Regional Hub, UNDP's Digital Transformation Catalytic Facility engages with the private sector to assist in the digitalization of MSMEs. Support also includes financial and technical assistance to ageing entrepreneurs to help them cross the digital divide and build resilience to future shocks.

To boost the sales and livelihoods of farmers who cultivate dragon fruit in **Viet Nam,** UNDP has been working with the Binh Thuan Agriculture Extension Center and the Vietnam E-commerce Association. The local farmers have needed new approaches to selling their hometown specialty. Live streaming, especially across the border in **China,** has now become the norm for farmers to reach customers who increasingly operate online. This innovative solution has been important for economic recovery from COVID-19. Rural live streaming has benefited 2,000 rural users who now generate a monthly income over RMB 10,000 (US $1,400).

In **Iran,** UNDP is working with local communities to enhance their digital literacy and reduce the digital gap between urban and rural communities. The aim is to provide access for rural producers to the markets through e-commerce platforms and build forward better and greener from the economic shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, more than 600 MSMEs in five provinces are being registered on a national e-commerce platform. Furthermore, UNDP conducted a nationwide innovation ecosystem mapping exercise. Through this initiative, 200 national

SUPPORT FOR **PAKISTAN**

TELEMEDICINE ICU PILOT
PLATFORM DESIGN

1.5 MILLION
PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH E-CLINICS

4,500
MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

Photo: UNDP Pakistan. Tele ICU.

innovation platforms and more than 400 startups were identified that can provide entry points to connect traditional knowledge with innovation and new technology that will promote sustainable human development.

Bringing care online

COVID-19 catalyzed digital innovations in healthcare. New technological approaches have strengthened the provision of medical care and expanded access to health services that will endure beyond the pandemic. UNDP supported the development of digital health systems and remote healthcare in eight countries.

For example, UNDP partnered with the healthcare firm, Sehat Kahani, in **Pakistan**, to design and roll

out a telemedicine ICU pilot platform. At the same time, it supported the Ministry of Health with policy and legislative changes that will institutionalize tele-medicine in the country. While the healthcare firm had 27 existing e-clinics across Pakistan, their platform was modified to meet the expanding needs of public and private hospitals, clinics, and critical care experts. To date, the e-clinics reach more than 1.5 million people. Nearly 4,500 medical professionals and junior doctors in 60 underequipped or understaffed intensive care units are now linked with critical care specialists and can receive on-the-spot guidance on patient care via the platform. UNDP continues to engage with the digital health team in the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Information Technology, and the National Database and Registration Authority to enhance policies on telehealth. UNDP is providing technical assistance to the country's Digital Health Strategy and is coordinating with USAID, UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO to mobilize resources with private telecom partners. Knowledge exchange on the digital health agenda is also expanding through the UNDP Singapore Global Center.

UNDP supported the development of robotics in healthcare in **Viet Nam** with the provision of 19 service robots for 10 health facilities in six provinces. The robots helped to protect frontline doctors and nurses from COVID-19 and other infectious diseases by performing nonclinical tasks like remote communication, diagnoses and treatment, and delivery of medicine to isolated patients. One robot, the BeetleBot, was made

Photo: UNDP Viet Nam. UNDP Resident Representative in Viet Nam Ms. Caitlin Wiesen presents 15 Service Robots.

in Viet Nam by a startup, called AIOZ, that won UNDP's Hackathon on COVID-19 response innovations. As robot makers are currently isolated, UNDP helps facilitate dialogue between them and doctors and policymakers. UNDP is planning to work with the Ministry of Health on policy recommendations to promote robots for healthcare as part of the larger national telehealth strategy.

In **Indonesia,** UNDP partnered with the Indonesian Telemedicine Association, a platform of 28 health-related digital applications, to boost the telemedicine industry. Through this platform Indonesians have been able to use telemedicine services, paving the way for an integrated telemedicine platform. Under this partnership, UNDP and the Telemedicine Association will work together to gain relevant verified data and information as a basis for building a telemedicine regulatory system.

The Ministry of Health in **Bhutan,** in partnership with UNDP, JICA and the Government of Japan, launched a programme to scale up eHealth solutions in one of the country's most important priorities – meeting Sustainable Development Goal 3 on health, especially for maternal and

childcare. Forty-six new mobile cardiotocography devices, or iCTG, are being used to remotely monitor fetal heart rates and uterine contractions of pregnant women to detect high-risk pregnancies and ensure timely care. With only 14 gynecologists in the country, access to their care and obstetric services remains a challenge, especially for pregnant women in remote areas. The technology helps reduce exposure to infections including COVID-19 and allows continuity of maternal health services. The new iCTGs will benefit more than half of the 10,000 pregnancies reported each year in Bhutan.

In **Bangladesh,** UNDP partnered with an online team of counselors at Moner Bondhu to facilitate psycho-social counselling during the pandemic. This initiative focuses on women and adolescents to destigmatize mental health and sensitize people to psychosocial counselling. This partnership fostered primary mental health care for 14,130 people through a helpline and conducted 1,171 remote psychosocial counseling sessions. UNDP piloted a 40-hour training course on mental health in which 100,000 participants enrolled. The nearly 15,540 people who completed the course reported that they found

it useful for gaining knowledge on mental health issues and maintaining a positive and healthy lifestyle. A rural development organization, Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation, made the course mandatory for its staff. In addition, a UNDP-supported mobile app provides information and self-assessment tools on common mental health problems like stress, sleep problems, depression, and domestic violence. Caritas Bangladesh and OKUP, a community-based migrants' rights organization, has used the app with 1,000 return migrant workers and their families. Action in Disability and Development, and the Innovation for Wellbeing Foundation and Disability Children's Foundation have also used the app to raise mental health awareness among 9,000 people with psychosocial needs.

Similarly in **Fiji**, Empower Pacific, which is a community-based provider of counselling, social services, and training, opened counselling helplines to respond to stress and anxieties caused by the pandemic. Their expert counsellors responded to calls across Fiji, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Callers received counselling support and were linked to social service providers. In 2021, the helpline responded to 4,550 calls, 69 per cent of them female.

Photo: UNDP Cambodia. Data for Cambodia platform.

Making data work for people

Using new and traditional forms of data to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals is one of UNDP's core capabilities. Real-time data and evidence to inform decisions are essential during crises. As countries faced widening data gaps and information scarcity for an effective response to the pandemic, UNDP supported 23 different data collection systems in nine countries to enhance the integration and analysis of data and facilitate decision-making.

For a more comprehensive picture of the economic impact of the pandemic, the Accelerator Lab in **Cambodia** developed a nowcasting dashboard, called www.dataforcambodia.org, that shows the short-term past and future forecasting of socio-economic data. The dashboard combines traditional phone-based surveys and mobility data to provide up-to-date insights on the impact of COVID-19 on MSMEs and informal workers to show socio-economic trends since the onset of the pandemic. In addition to the data dashboard, the Country Office is leveraging Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to combine big data with traditional data to create models that generate poverty and vulnerability data across the country. Using AI for poverty mapping ensures the provision of timely and transparent data for decision-making during crises.

A command center for the Department of Health and the Inter-Agency Task Force in the **Philippines** was set up to visualize data on case trends and healthcare capacity. Data revealed specific socio-economic impacts of the pandemic on MSMEs and more than 18,000 low-income families in urban areas. This information continues to be used for policy decisions on quarantine measures, procurement, and recovery, with visualization also forming a key part of the Department of Health daily public briefings on Viber (~ 2.7 million people) and Facebook (~8.5 million people). UNDP also launched the Pintig Lab, a network of data field experts that synthesize epidemiological data for policy recommendations for the government's response and recovery strategy.

Photo: UNDP Nepal. Smart Palika platform.

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES HELP ADDRESS COMPLEX DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

SENSEMAKING, SYSTEMS THINKING, COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE, DATA ANALYTICS, NEW EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES (AI, BLOCKCHAIN ETC.), ETHNOGRAPHIC LENS AND PREDICTIVE ANALYSIS

In **Nepal,** the UNDP Accelerator Lab partnered with a youth led enterprise, Cellapp Innovations, for an application called 'SmartPalika' to assist the local governments in Sudurpaschim Province with COVID-19 preparedness and response. Given the large number of migrants returning from India to the province, the application has an 'Immigrant Assistant' feature that reports migrants who return, which helps local authorities with quarantine management. Data received is monitored daily from the SmartPalika Call Center, which assists local government to manage their COVID-19 response amidst the influx of migrants.

With funding from Japan, UNDP in **Mongolia** offered technical assistance for the creation of a digital case management system for social workers to better assist marginalized people and those with disabilities whose lives were disrupted by COVID-19. The system helped to digitally connect the country's 728 social workers with the most vulnerable communities through a digital platform developed with the Ministry of

Labour and Social Protection. UNDP managed the procurement and worked with the Ministry to distribute 1,000 portable tablets and fingerprint scanners. This virtual assistance system also enhances the collection and updating of social services data which will inform the government as it develops policies on social welfare and protection services.

Making innovation integral to development solutions

Innovation at UNDP supports transformation of systems and structures rather than a single solution to development challenges. The 18 Accelerator Labs in the region serve as a platform for innovation, and for decision-makers and development partners to explore and experiment with new approaches to address their most pressing development concerns.

Systems transformation
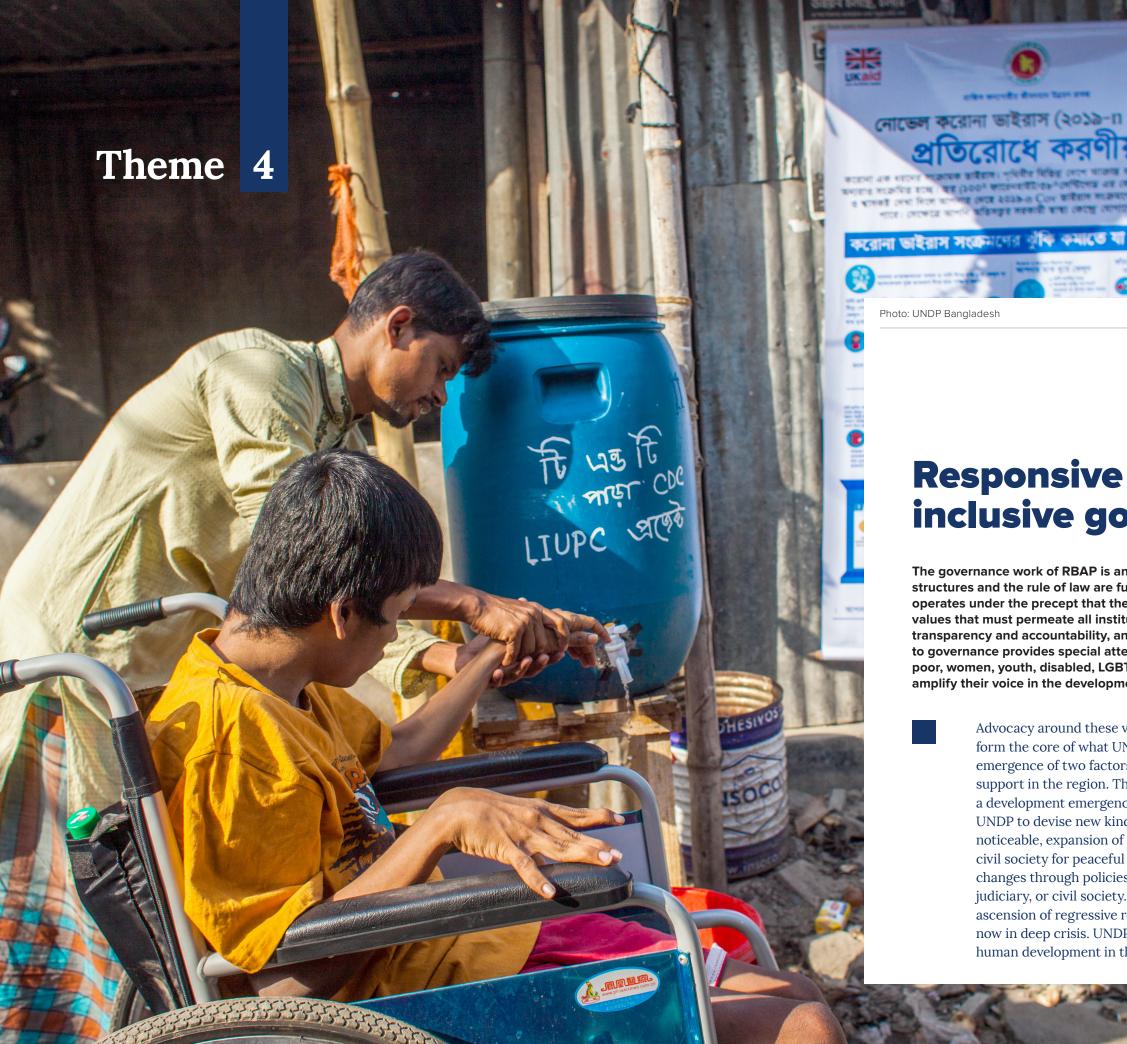
UNDP works with countries to develop new and transformational solutions to the complex challenges they face. In **Bhutan,** UNDP is helping to tackle youth unemployment through technology and infrastructure solutions which are now being prototyped and tested with government and other partners. **Thailand**'s tourism industry was hit hard by COVID-19. UNDP has been working with the Thai Government to reimagine tourism that is more sustainable and environmentally friendly, while also fostering economic growth. This systems transformation approach involves participation across sectors and society to find solutions together.

Exploration, experimentation, mapping, and scaling solutions

UNDP has provided support to test new development approaches that involve experimentation, mapping, and scaling solutions in 18 countries. UNDP's Accelerator Lab activities include mapping small grassroot innovations, as well as large-scale public sector innovations. Processes involve sensemaking, systems thinking, collective intelligence, data analytics, the use of emerging technologies and Artificial Intelligence, and predictive analysis to add value to UNDP programming and deliver next generation development solutions.

For example, in **Malaysia** the Accelerator Lab has run an urban biodiversity challenge, using citizen science, ethnography, and in-depth interviews to develop locally driven insights on green and blue spaces to bring nature to urban centres. They are also building a network of partners for the Youth Environment Living Labs, which is a joint project with UNICEF to equip and mobilize youth for local action on the environment and the SDGs. In **Nepal,** the Accelerator Labs are working in a range of areas including unplanned urbanization, unemployment, and promoting a circular economy through ethnographic research and GIS mapping of urban municipalities to track plastic waste. In **Samoa**, the Accelerator Lab has entered a partnership with the Samoa Bureau of Statistics to test a digital solution that helps increase the timeliness and coverage of birth registration, especially in rural villages where there are significant information gaps on home births. This is a critical gateway activity supporting the Government's move towards introduction of a national digital ID.

Photo: UNDP Bangladesh

Responsive and inclusive governance

The governance work of RBAP is anchored in the conviction that the quality of governance structures and the rule of law are fundamental to peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. It operates under the precept that the quality of governance is determined by adherence to values that must permeate all institutions and policies – universal human rights, inclusion, transparency and accountability, and responsiveness to human needs. Our approach to governance provides special attention to vulnerable and marginalized groups – the poor, women, youth, disabled, LGBTIQ, indigenous groups – and seeks to strengthen and amplify their voice in the development and implementation of policies and programmes.

Advocacy around these values and efforts to strengthen governing institutions form the core of what UNDP does in Asia and the Pacific. However, the emergence of two factors in 2020-2021 had a critical impact on our governance support in the region. The first was a once-in-a-generation pandemic, COVID-19, a development emergency that halted social and economic activity and forced UNDP to devise new kinds of responses. The second was the gradual, but noticeable, expansion of authoritarian impulses and the contraction of space in civil society for peaceful and free discourse. Some countries manifested these changes through policies that bypassed or limited the scope of legislatures, the judiciary, or civil society. Press freedoms were curtailed. The year 2021 saw the ascension of regressive regimes, in Myanmar and Afghanistan, both countries now in deep crisis. UNDP has been assessing the impacts of these changes on human development in these and other countries.

Photo: UNDP Bhutan. Supreme Court Justice Tashi Chozom and UNDP Resident Representative Ms. Azusa Kubota at the launch of eLitigation at the Supreme Court of Justice

The COVID-19 pandemic in Asia and the Pacific was a health and socio-economic crisis, but also a human rights and governance one. Governance is more important than ever when governments are under pressure to navigate crisis and uncertainty. RBAP provided crucial support to buttress inadequate health and social service delivery systems, helped in vaccine and PPE procurement, supported digital vaccine management campaigns, and advised governments on how to quickly scale up weak social safety nets. Our experience with COVID-19 has yielded lessons that will help governments 'build back better' and in some ways change forever the ways national institutions respond to crisis and interface with the public. For example, digital solutions in administering policies and managing health products, remote work and educational arrangements, rapid response mechanisms for strengthening social safety nets and livelihoods under crisis, management of vaccine delivery systems, safe behavior communications will all be components of national policies that could yield benefits in the future. New digital governance mechanisms, pioneered by RBAP in 2020-2021 are here to stay and will be developed further. Such advances include digital governance in parliaments and the judiciary, citizen inclusion and outreach through electronic means, and anticipatory governance.

UNDP in Asia and the Pacific continued to work in 2020-2021 to expand the freedom of citizens and civil society for free expression and participation

in the discourse on the decisions and policies that impact their lives and secure the universal rights due to them. Advocacy on tolerance for diversity, on gender bias, gender-based violence and responsiveness, on the importance of a free and independent press, on 'right to know' laws and mechanisms, on the importance of setting up public grievance mechanisms, and a myriad of other topics continued apace. Our programmes, in partnership with programme country governments, have been active in promoting and setting up multi-stakeholder platforms and events that include civil society and the private sector to generate consensus and build coalitions for change. An important example of this is the launch in almost every country, of the global and national Human Development Reports.

Young people, typically between 15 and 25 years of age, will have an influence on society and the economy in the 21st century. UNDP is consciously seeking to bring youth into the development discourse and help them realise their potential to shape the future. At the regional level, the UNDP-supported Youth Entrepreneurs network has demonstrated agility and resilience in the face of COVID-19 and contributed to the response to the pandemic to build forward better. The Karma Dialogues, launched by RBAP, helped connect youth in the region through video conversations with inspirational leaders and trailblazers of their generation. An important inter-agency partnership on youth has been established with UNICEF that already shows early results.

UNDP has built capacities and provided support to strengthening parliaments in their legislative and oversight functions, as well as in increasing female representation in legislatures. Similarly, UNDP has become a partner of choice for support to the rule of law and the judiciary, and in ensuring legal access to the poor and marginalized. The digitalization of legislatures and judicial institutions to permit remote work showed significant expansion during 2020-2021, in response to COVID-19. Online e-Litigation platforms were set up in several countries in 2021, allowing electronic registration of cases, electronic filing of documents, electronic payments, and remote hearings in courts. This has improved access, greatly reduced time and cost of dispensing justice and allowed uninterrupted service of courts during the pandemic.
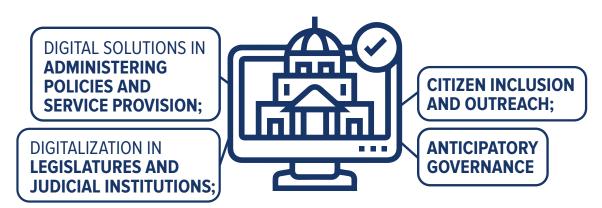
Gender concerns and gender specific objectives have been mainstreamed throughout programmes in Asia and the Pacific. This starts from the collection of gender disaggregated data and the commissioning of gender assessments as the basis for the design of programmes. UNDP work in increasing the voice and participation of women in parliaments, in the judiciary and in local governance is particularly well recognized. Advocacy, civic education and capacity building

of law enforcement, judiciary, parliaments, and women's groups to prevent gender-based violence have been a critical part of our work. As for other marginalised groups, we have used the power of innovation and our convening role to establish platforms where important gender issues can be discussed.

In 2020-2021, work was scaled up on frontier governance issues that have not received much attention or have proven intractable due to their complex and multi-dimensional nature. These challenges have been taken in hand by newly established innovation and digital capabilities across the region, specifically 18 Accelerator Labs and a Regional Innovation and Digital Team which is supported by global teams. These experts have facilitated the adoption of nearly 140 digital and innovative solutions across 18 countries in Asia. In the area of local governance, UNDP experimented with Social Innovation Platforms (SIPs) to dialogue and encourage new forms of collaboration among citizens, governments, and the private sector. RBAP also launched a programme to assess and formulate national policies on the human rights implications of private business.

Overall, in 2020 and 2021, the region carried out 340 governance projects in 23 countries, with an

RESULTS PAVE THE WAY TO FUTURE-READY GOVERNANCE

DIGITAL SOLUTIONS IN **ADMINISTERING POLICIES AND SERVICE PROVISION;**

CITIZEN INCLUSION AND OUTREACH;

DIGITALIZATION IN **LEGISLATURES AND JUDICIAL INSTITUTIONS;**

ANTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

Photo: UNDP Bangladesh. Peace caravan.

Photo: UNDP Solomon Islands

estimated implementation budget of US $230 million.[1] Continuous lockdowns from COVID-19 meant that most of the initiatives took place online.

Expanding freedoms in a gradually shrinking space

The space for freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, and civil society in general is gradually shrinking around the world. Asia and the Pacific is no exception to this trend. To address the decline in civic space, UNDP supports governments in the promotion of tolerance for diversity, an important counterforce to hate-speech, disinformation, and polarization. These trends are among the main threats to democratic space and social cohesion today.

In line with this focus, grants and technical support from the project, Partnerships for a Tolerant, Inclusive **Bangladesh**, assist CSOs in Bangladesh to advocate for tolerance and diversity. One of the partners, Genlab, managed a 'peace caravan' campaign that carried peace messages on public buses. In addition, the project

supports advocacy for digital literacy and digital citizenship to challenge online hate speech and disinformation. The ICT Ministry furthers this work, which is closely aligned with the cyber-crime unit of the police. The aim is to encourage a shift from the policing of digital space to an approach based on prevention through digital literacy and citizenship.

Similarly, to reinforce the significant role young people can play in building a united and peaceful nation, UNDP is helping to make parliaments more open and inclusive to youth. The development of youth councils is one approach for engaging young people in civic life and building their understanding of democratic principles. In **Fiji** and **Solomon Islands,** UNDP is working with youth councils and youth parliaments to empower young people, build trust and strengthen their participation in anti-corruption efforts. In **Timor-Leste,** UNDP is assisting youth to develop data analysis and management abilities to enhance their decision-making skills and inclusion in local policymaking. In **Thailand,** the National Children and Youth Council and local governments are working on

ways to localize the SDGs. With members of the Thai Parliament, a series of dialogues have been organized with LGBTI youth, stateless young people, and those with disabilities.

To further civic engagement, UNDP advocates for parliaments to systematically reach out to youth for their ideas in parliamentary agendas and policy alternatives. At the end of 2020, UNDP began to facilitate simultaneous online youth conversations on open-source platforms in **Bhutan, Pakistan,** and **Timor-Leste.** The digital conversations started with a simple question: What challenges need to be tackled by the government to make Bhutan, Pakistan, or Timor-Leste a better place to live in, both during COVID and in post-COVID times? More than 19,312 people participated by providing ideas and voting on the suggestions. Machine learning was used to analyze the responses and identify common trends and opinion groups. Members of Parliament and parliamentary officials in each country received the results, with the aim of informing parliamentary agendas and debates. As a result, the Bhutanese Parliament has expressed interest in the development of their own digital platform to systematically consult and engage Bhutanese people.
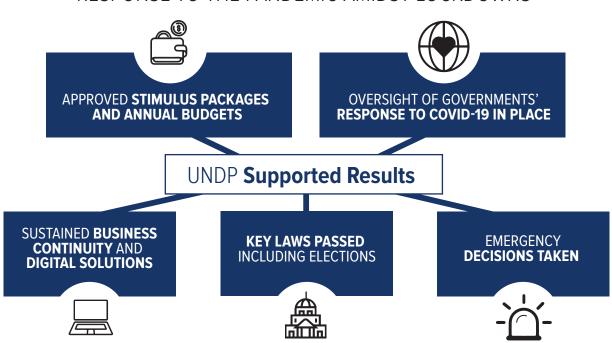
To foster anticipatory, agile, and adaptive governance, UNDP in **Viet Nam** advocated for the inclusion of 'modern and effective national governance innovation' as a goal for the first time in Viet Nam's highest political and strategic levels including: the 13th National Party Congress Resolution approved on 1st February 2021, the Five-Year Orientation of the Socio-Economic Plan 2021-2025, and the 10-Year Socio-economic Development Strategy 2021-2030. The inclusion of "innovating national governance towards modernization and effective competition" reflects a strategic policy shift that recognizes the need for collaboration among multiple levels of governance to address complex societal issues, moving away from siloed and traditional state management approaches.

In **Samoa,** *The Women in Leadership in Samoa* project, a joint programme by UNDP and UN Women funded by Australia, established the Village Leadership Development Initiative that targets both men and women. Through this effort in seven villages, nofotane – women who marry into the village and are traditionally excluded from the same privileges as the women of the village vis-à-vis their dress code and ineligibility for decision-making positions – now enjoy the

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1   Excluding Afghanistan

LEGISLATURES IN THE PACIFIC BOLSTER RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC AMIDST LOCKDOWNS

APPROVED STIMULUS PACKAGES AND ANNUAL BUDGETS

OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENTS' RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN PLACE

UNDP **Supported Results**

SUSTAINED **BUSINESS CONTINUITY** AND **DIGITAL SOLUTIONS**

KEY LAWS PASSED INCLUDING ELECTIONS

EMERGENCY **DECISIONS TAKEN**

same rights and opportunities. Also, through project support, 20 out of 23 women candidates for the Samoa 2021 general election were trained in public speaking and campaign strategy. All four elected female MPs took part in the project, including Samoa's first female Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and Minister of Justice and Courts Administration.

Parliaments meet virtually

The role of Parliament in a time of crisis is vital to pass and review emergency laws, allocate and analyze the use of public resources as well as oversee government actions. UNDP worked with 17 governments in the region to deploy technologies, such as video conferencing services and hardware supplies as they moved their critical operations online.

As **Pacific** countries placed safety measures and closed their borders due to the pandemic, state institutions faced the challenge of

continuing essential services while respecting social distancing. At the same time, the work of parliaments increased, given their legislative and oversight mandates requiring them to approve government budgets, address the emergency and provide scrutiny of the government response to the pandemic. UNDP deployed hardware and software solutions while also helping parliaments to devise and implement business continuity plans. Such support furthered parliamentary work in the **Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Vanuatu, the Cook Islands,** and the Solomons Islands. As a result, the **FSM** Congress became the first Pacific parliament to convene virtual sessions and approve a stimulus package of US $2 million. The **Fiji** Parliament used UNDP's support to organize hybrid sessions, which enabled it to approve the annual budget and pass legislation for upcoming elections in 2022.

In **Myanmar,** UNDP supported the national Parliament to move to a digital learning platform to continue professional development and training of MPs and parliamentary staff across

Photo: UNDP Maldives. Online Hearing. Employment Tribunal Digitalization Project.

all 17 subnational parliaments[2]. UNDP also assisted with the digitalization of the national Parliament in **Timor-Leste** through the provision of 15 Zoom licenses which made it possible for parliamentarians to take part in virtual meetings, discuss and pass new bills and approve plans proposed by the government. Additionally, UNDP supported the production of 20 episodes of civic education television, using MPs and staff as protagonists of these shows, which made them more relatable to the public.

Justice served online

UNDP responded to the needs of national and local justice systems to continue functioning against a backdrop of lockdowns and social distancing. Online platforms meant justice could be met. Virtual courts with remote court hearings were set up in **Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives,** and **Sri Lanka,** greatly reducing travel time and costs while picking up the pace of judicial processes.

For example, UNDP accelerated virtual courts that allowed a continuation of court hearings, even during the COVID-19 crisis in **Bangladesh.** UNDP worked with the government's digital transformation initiative to set up the MyCourt platform, a countrywide virtual court that hears and fast tracks bail applications. UNDP trained

judges, lawyers, and court officials on the online system, which led to a deluge of bail applications and hearings and the release of prisoners. As a result, the prison population decreased by almost 12 per cent in three months in 2020, a record in Bangladesh. As well as reducing the risk of COVID-19 infections in prisons, those releases allowed thousands of absent family members to return home to provide support and reduce economic hardship. Building on the success of MyCourt, the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Law, the National Legal Aid Services Organization, and UNDP began developing a judicial portal, an SMS-based online case tracking system and an E-case filing system for legal aid and the commercial justice system.

UNINTERRUPTED DELIVERY OF **JUDICIARY SERVICES**

BANGLADESH:
countrywide **virtual court; reduced virus** infection in prisons; **online case** tracking, judicial portal.

BHUTAN: eLitigation platform for full-cycle case management.

MALDIVES:
islands access justice through **3000+ online court hearings a month.**

SRI LANKA: 10,000 bail hearings piloted remotely in **23 courts** and go to scale.

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2   See also reference in Theme 3 under 'Digital transformation in government'

Photo: UNDP Pakistan. Gender Desk.

Similarly, UNDP and the Judiciary in **Bhutan** launched an eLitigation platform in 2021 that allows electronic registration of cases, electronic filing of documents, electronic payments, and remote hearings in courts. The eLitigation platform, an innovative and transformational initiative aimed at mitigating disruption in administering justice, is being piloted in seven courts in the country including the Supreme Court. Court officials are receiving training in the use of the digital platform and the case management system to record the virtual hearings. Given Bhutan's sparsely distributed population and harsh geographic terrain, this project has the potential to reduce lengthy travel and related costs for litigants and provide them with judicial services during and after COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Through digitalization of the justice sector that allowed uninterrupted service in **Maldives,** UNDP enabled 11,000 online court hearings in just four months in 2020, a jump from the 14,451 hearings in the entire previous year. The digitalization effort has meant that all courts are now virtually connected with video conferencing and network connections to ensure quick and easy access to justice for everyone, especially those in remote islands. This digital transformation of the justice sector was the result of UNDP collaboration with the Department of Judicial Administration,

the Judicial Services Commission, Attorney General's Office, Prosecutor General's Office, Supreme Court of Maldives, High Court, District and Magistrate Courts of Maldives, and the Australian Government.

With technical assistance from UNDP in **Sri Lanka**, the Judicial Service Commission, the Ministry of Justice, the Legal Aid Commission, and the Prisons Department have piloted digital technology for remote hearings, including more than 10,000 bail hearings in 23 courts. Initiated with UNDP in 2020, the pilot hearings resulted in the Cabinet of Ministers granting approval to expand to other courts and prisons to eliminate delays. Technical support to the Legal Aid Commission and the Prisons Department has already enabled remote legal counselling for more than 85 prisoners.

Innovative local solutions for development challenges

In Afghanistan, to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and the breakdown of the country's economy, UNDP launched the initiative ABADEI (Area-Based Approach for Development Emergency Initiatives), which aims to support the most vulnerable populations and small businesses

in the country. Since its launch in October 2021, UNDP has provided 44,335 paid workdays for 4,560 men and women from vulnerable households in Mazar, Kunduz and Herat through cash-for-work. Simultaneously, UNDP led in the establishment of the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA) as an interagency vehicle to foster and fund joint programmes in support of ABADEI, with 13 agencies having joined the Fund to date.

UNDP experiments with new ways to help strengthen local governance and find solutions to local development challenges. In **Thailand, Pakistan and Indonesia,** UNDP has used Social Innovation Platforms (SIPs) to support new forms of collaboration among citizens, governments, and the private sector. Created with the support of ALC, an innovation lab based in Spain, the SIP platforms highlight the power of social innovation and digital tools to enhance inclusive participation, build trust and forge new paths for collaboration and investment between public and private sectors.

For instance, in **Thailand**, a 'deep listening' exercise at the start of the SIP, highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on local populations and the importance of the food sector for recovery from the pandemic. Responding to these needs, UNDP now supports provincial and local governments, farmers, entrepreneurs, fisherman, local artists, and event organizers to co-design a portfolio of solutions that promotes local food products across Thailand. This food system portfolio is helping UNDP strengthen collaboration with other UN agencies, development partners and government agencies. In addition, SIPs fostered a strategic partnership between UNDP **Indonesia** and the Ministry of Villages that allocates public investments at the local level. A portfolio of local economic development was created which focuses on the green and blue economy. Financing options are under discussion with IFIs and private banks. In **Pakistan,** a portfolio of integrated solutions to respond to urban migration is being developed that will strengthen collaboration between relevant public and private

institutions. Recognizing the importance of Social Innovation Platforms to enhance inclusive participation, the Danish 'TechForDemocracy' global initiative is supporting the Country Office to design a 'social listening platform.'

Business and Human Rights

The volume of UNDP work on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights has doubled over the past two years. UNDP experts based in the Bangkok Regional Hub now support dedicated Business and Human Rights initiatives in nine countries. The intensified interest in this arena is reflected in the increase in participation in the flagship Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights for Asia Pacific, which grew from 120 people five years ago to more than 7,000 in 2021. The Regional Forum fostered policy work at country level, including support through UNDP technical assistance resulting in development and official launch of the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights by the Government of **Pakistan.** Similar Action Plans are being finalized with UNDP regional and national support in I**ndia, Mongolia, Indonesia,** and **Malaysia.** The UNDP regional programme on Business and Human Rights designed a simple and accessible toolkit, Human Rights Due Diligence and COVID-19: Rapid Self-Assessment for Business, to help businesses consider and manage the human rights impacts of their operations. Companies across the region downloaded the toolkit more than 10,000 times.

The regional programme on *Promoting a Fair Business Environment in ASEAN* has boosted transparency in infrastructure procurement in **Thailand** through a pilot project that discloses data on public procurement contracts to civil society organisations. Known as CoST, the Infrastructure Transparency Initiative has helped the Thai Government reduce its procurement costs by approximately 20 percent. As a result, the Thai Government amended its procurement law to mandate additional data disclosures for all major infrastructure procurement.

Photo: UNDP Thailand. Pride Month.

UNDP and partners step up to address gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) intensified during the pandemic. UNDP and its partners provided support to 10 countries in the region to integrate violence prevention and response into COVID-19 response plans. Advocacy campaigns have raised awareness about this shadow pandemic of violence. UNDP assisted women in seven countries with a breakthrough approach that allows women to report abuse and seek help without alerting perpetrators. UNDP support to six countries has meant that their shelters for victims of violence to protect women and children could stay open.

UNDP, the National Police and a prominent university in **Indonesia** developed a set of Standard Operating Procedures for use by the Youth, Children and Women investigators and the Women and Children Service Unit in handling cases of violence against women and children during the pandemic. The new procedures now include health protocols, such as initial health screening, that protect both officers and victims who are at risk of COVID-19 transmission during the reporting and investigation of domestic violence incidents. Roughly 886 gender-based violence cases were reported in the first half of 2021. The service providers that managed these cases were guided by the new operating procedures.

Some of the most effective efforts to address gender-based violence during COVID-19 were carried out as part of the Spotlight Initiative, a global, multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. In **Timor-Leste,** legal-awareness campaigns informed women of their legal rights and provided free legal consultations. As a result, 310 survivors of gender-based violence received legal assistance. Also, 188 people, mostly from rural areas, were introduced to relevant aspects of the formal justice system and how to respond to gender-based violence. In addition, 152 police officers on the frontline of this critical human rights issue, working at the Vulnerable Persons' Unit and as Community Police Officers, received training on handling sexual violence and abuse cases. UNDP began providing support in 2021 to community-based organizations that offer shelter, legal and medical assistance to 70 women and children survivors of gender-based violence. Legal outreach campaigns on formal justice system and women's legal empowerment reached 326 community members, including religious leaders, police officers, veterans, and LGBTI persons. As a result, 36 civil cases were registered, and 14 cases were mediated. In a country with limited access to courts, these legal aid and mediation services to remote areas fulfill a critical gap in access to justice. Furthermore, in partnership with UN-EU Spotlight programme and KOICA-funded Together for Equality initiative, have been able to bring about synergies and scale up legal assistance, counselling and safe spaces to hundreds of GBV survivors while public campaign on GBV prevention reached out to over 50 thousands individuals. Working jointly with Australian police development programme and Korean National Police, UNDP helped to build investigative capacities of the police for sexual assault and abuse cases and to share best practices of survivor-centered response to GBV, benefiting health workers, police officers and civil servants.
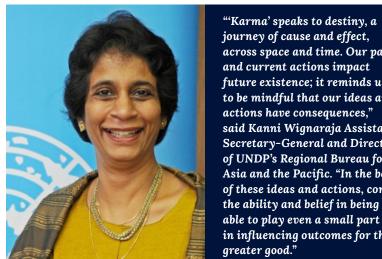
In **Samoa,** UNDP and the joint EU and UN Spotlight initiative assisted in the development of Samoa's new Law and Justice Sector Plan in English and Samoan, which recognizes gender-based and domestic violence and the need to improve access to justice services for all vulnerable people. UNDP was instrumental in organizing the first high-level coalition of parliamentarians against gender-based violence in the country, where 46 percent of women in relationships have experienced abuse. At the local level, a Spotlight-supported leadership training for women from 20 villages resulted in social transformation in two villages where women's committees are now directly part of the village council decision-making process alongside the council chiefs.

Building on previous work to establish a Coalition of Parliamentarians to End Gender-based Violence in **Papua New Guinea,** UNDP further intensified its advocacy to eliminate family, sexual and gender-based violence. Improved law enforcement in GBV, support for family planning and counselling services, and efforts to address the increase in Sorcery Accusation Related Violence are just a few of the targeted initiatives. UNDP established in 2020, the Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence which held its first public hearing in 2021. With UNDP assistance, it delivered a series of recommendations tabled in the national Parliament aimed to eliminate the devastating impacts of violence on Papua New Guinea's economy and its national development. Such efforts have seen increased government funding to address GBV through the 2022 national budget. Other partners have now pledged support, including the Australian Government.

RESULTS IN SAMOA

LEADERSHIP TRAINING IN 2020

FOR **47** WOMEN LEADERS

FROM **20** VILLAGES

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN 2 VILLAGES WHERE WOMEN'S COMMITTEES ARE **PART OF VILLAGE COUNCIL DICISION-MAKING**

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE **(GBV)**

LEADERSHIP TRAINING IN 2021

FOR **300** WOMEN AND TEENAGERS

700 MOBILIZED WOMEN TO FORM LEADERSHIP TEAMS AND ADVOCATE FOR SOLUTIONS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Karma Dialogues
UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific

23-26 November | 7:30 pm (GMT+7)
@UNDP in Asia and the Pacific

UNDP

"You must always have hope and a reason for doing things and this pretty much applies to everything in life. If you have a strong enough reason for something, then you will do it, so find your strong enough reason."

AISHAH SINCLAIR

#THINKGOODDOGOOD

"'Karma' speaks to destiny, a journey of cause and effect, across space and time. Our past and current actions impact future existence; it reminds us to be mindful that our ideas and actions have consequences," said Kanni Wignaraja Assistant Secretary-General and Director of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific. "In the best of these ideas and actions, comes the ability and belief in being able to play even a small part in influencing outcomes for the greater good."

Photo: Karma Dialogues.

Eliminating stigma and discrimination towards gender identity

To mitigate the impact of the pandemic on racism, xenophobia, stigma, and other forms of discrimination, UNDP provided capacity development to 14 women's organizations, 38 youth organizations, and 2,686 urban community associations in four countries in the region. Initiatives ranged from preventing and responding to human rights abuses to addressing stigma and discrimination.

With increased online violence against women exacerbated by COVID-19 in **Pakistan,** UNDP conducted extensive research on hypermasculinity and online abuse of women. It analyzed ways in which gender hierarchies, like men's control of women's bodies, mobility, and life choices, are transferred from the social to the digital sphere. The study used data mining from Twitter and Facebook, and interviews with parliamentarians to examine topics such as hateful content against women. YouTube productions on honour killings, women's safety and toxic masculinity were produced, along with an SMS campaign, and digital stories of young men recounting and regretting their previous abusive behaviour towards women. More than 60 percent of surveyed viewers indicated that they agreed with the women's empowerment messages that the stories reflected.

UNDP helped to preserve the pre-pandemic gains that **Thailand** has made towards gender equality and sexual diversity and continues to promote LGBTI inclusion. UNDP provided grants to the SWING Thailand Foundation, Sisters Foundation, Empower Foundation, and the Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand to procure food and PPE for 3,200 LGBTI sex workers whose livelihoods were affected by the closure of entertainment businesses during the pandemic. UNDP also provided guidance to two private sector companies to adopt a Standard Code of Conduct on diversity and inclusion for LGBTI people in the workplace. Their public commitments have encouraged 15 other companies, largely SMEs, to adopt the Standards of Conduct. In addition, UNDP has been partnering with the Department of Corrections of the Thai Ministry of Justice to improve the standards of managing LGBTI prisoners, particularly transgender prisoners. UNDP proposed recommendations for the correctional system to align their policies with international standards. As a result, standard operating procedures were developed on data collection regarding transgender prisoners, identification of transgender individuals, escorting, housing and body searches, access to health services and HIV treatment, and psycho-social support.

UNDP STANDS WITH YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS AS THEY WITHSTAND COVID-19 AND HELP RESPOND TO IT

87%
PIVOTED BUSINESS STRATEGY

86%
INNOVATED

40
INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS CATALYZED RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

Engaging youth

Engaging youth through the Karma Dialogues

In November 2020 UNDP organized the Karma Dialogues, a six-part series aimed to inspire and motivate youth during the most difficult days of the COVID-19 pandemic that were compounded by lockdowns, quarantines, and curfews. Each one-hour interactive show was designed to engage youth on issues such as leadership, empowerment, and resilience. The dialogues featured conversations with entrepreneurs, actors, scientists, leaders, and innovators who have shown grit and perseverance to beat the odds and achieve success while also changing the world for the better. By bringing together 'believers in the good', the dialogues aimed to help catapult their stories to motivate and inspire others. The Dialogues attracted a large audience from across 36 countries in Asia and the Pacific. They were watched live by over 80,000 people on social media platforms including YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Some of the feedback received from youth in the region included comments on how these stories motivated them to persevere in their endeavors.

Catalyzing the largest youth social entrepreneurship movement in Asia and the Pacific

Through support from UNDP, the Youth Co:Lab initiative has benefited over 9,500 young entrepreneurs and kept them afloat even during COVID-19. As a result, nearly 1,240 startups have been developed or strengthened to address challenges to the SDGs. How have young entrepreneurs in the region responded to COVID-19? While 92 per cent of assessed businesses were negatively impacted by the pandemic, many young entrepreneurs showed agility and resilience. Eighty-seven per cent pivoted their business strategy, while 86 per cent employed innovation – from launching new products and services, to transforming their operating models. Furthermore, more than 40 innovative youth-led solutions were developed to address challenges caused by the pandemic.

UNDP and UNICEF partnership for youth

UNICEF and UNDP are committed to an Asia-Pacific partnership for young people's empowerment which was undertaken in **Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan,** and **Thailand** in 2021. More than two million adolescents and youth were reached with online and offline programmes to develop digital skills, foster participation in their communities, and refine their businesses. Over 12,300 young people were engaged in activities promoting climate action, social innovation skills and digital learning through seed funding and regional advocacy. Approximately 32,000 youth were reached through online campaigns associated with these activities. The Youth Environmental Living Lab (YELL) in **Malaysia** has plans to strengthen youth-led action for the environment and integrate into national schools and universities in 2022. In **Pakistan, Thailand, Nepal,** and **Indonesia,** teams are providing technical and organizational support to local youth networks, National Youth Councils, young parliamentarian networks and policymakers. Regional teams launched the Youth Engagement in Climate Action Platforms, a youth-led effort to bring together UNICEF, UNDP, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to enhance climate advocacy. In its inaugural year, the platform hosted more than 210 consultations to build young people's capacity and bring their voices to regional and global events.

Photo: UNDP Cambodia

Climate change and environmental sustainability

Countries in Asia and the Pacific are confronted with serious environmental challenges, including deforestation and land degradation, loss of biodiversity, inadequate water management, pollution, and climate change. When they are interwoven with the influences of poverty, inequality and COVID-19, the region requires integrated solutions to address these multidimensional crises.

While Covid-19 was the most urgent development challenge in 2020-2021, the impacts of the pandemic were significantly intensified and compounded due to ongoing environmental threats. As global greenhouse emissions continued to grow, the unsustainable use of natural resources, climate change and loss of biodiversity pushed more people into poverty, thereby weakening the ability of natural ecosystems and vulnerable groups to withstand and absorb health and economic shocks.

The effort to preserve and protect the bounties of nature is a race against time, a test of whether modern societies can change existing production and consumption patterns before we are overwhelmed by an ecological disaster. Therefore, even as we fight the pandemic, it is imperative not to lose momentum in ongoing efforts to rebalance the environment, move to a green and more inclusive economy, and enhance resilience.

Fortunately, as with most development challenges, there is another, more positive and hopeful side to the picture. The huge transformations required to decarbonize the economy, invest in renewable energy, promote

ENVIRONMENTAL AND DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS

33
COUNTRIES

2020
BUDGET (USD$)
158.3M

2021
BUDGET (USD$)
161.62M

131
PROJECTS

gef · ADAPTATION FUND · GREEN CLIMATE FUND · LDCF · REDD+ · BILATERAL DONORS

more environmentally friendly resource use, and conserve habitats and species holds the promise of millions of new jobs, better energy access, and potential for progress on gender equality.

UNDP is ideally placed to assist countries in this critical shift. With expertise in multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional fields, UNDP can help to better understand the systemic linkages and risks between the environment, climate change, poverty and exclusion, governance and the ability of individuals and societies to absorb and rebound from shocks. UNDP is providing countries in the region with critical support to integrate environmental considerations into planning and budgeting frameworks, including in the formulation of National Adaptation Plans. We are amongst the largest implementers of environment projects in the region, and a key interlocuter for programme countries to access environment and climate change funding from multilateral climate funds. Environmental and development benefits are delivered through a portfolio of 131 projects in 33 countries, financed by the Adaptation Fund, GEF, Green Climate Fund (GCF), Least Developed Country Fund

(LDCF), Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD+) and bilateral donors. The total portfolio budget for 2020 and 2021 was US $158.3 million and US $161.62 million, respectively.

In 2020-2021, Nature, Climate Change, and Energy (NCE) continued to represent a key focus in our comprehensive support to countries to bring environment and climate concerns into national development plans and strategies. The range of programmes helped address the effects of climate change, promote sound management of chemicals and waste, protect biodiversity, valuable land, forests, coastal and marine ecosystems, and water resources, and build resilience to disasters. Good governance and gender equality are essential elements in this portfolio to ensure that no one is left behind when it comes to a sustainable future. Taking into account the special needs of Small Island Developing states, the regional Governance for Resilient Development (Gov4Res) project works with Pacific Island countries to systematically consider climate and disaster risks in all development decisions. This successful

approach, which is now being replicated in other countries, targets multiple 'entry-points' that can collectively transform an entire system to address vulnerability to climate change.

In preparation and negotiations for COP-26 in Glasgow, UNDP made deliberate efforts to consider human health, the planet's health, and climate change in an integrated manner. Guidance was offered to countries to raise their ambitions for climate action.

Asia and the Pacific is the most disaster-prone region in the world. Nearly 45 per cent of the world's natural disasters occur in the region, and more than 75 per cent of those affected by natural disasters globally live in the region. Accordingly, disaster preparedness and strengthening resilience to withstand climate shocks is a major part of UNDP's work. This includes a range of climate adaptation support, like the mainstreaming of resilience goals into economic, agriculture, housing, water management and other national plans. Examples include research on development of climate resilient seeds, climate proofing of roads and transport infrastructure, and installation of climate early warning and data collection networks.

Support to programme countries has resulted in the development of disaster vulnerability, preparedness, and response plans, and strengthening of governance capacities at national and local levels through Disaster Management Councils. The sub-regional programme on the 'Governance of Resilience' has provided a key mechanism for support.

Considerable work has focused on the management of forests, natural ecosystems, and biodiversity. UNDP's global Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) supported 11 countries in the region in 2020 and 2021. BIOFIN helps countries develop their national biodiversity finance plans through national 'biodiversity finance assessments' that review policies, existing expenditures, and finance gaps to identify potential finance solutions. Through REDD+, incentives are being provided to conserve tropical forests and reduce greenhouse gases that are released when forests are cut down. Social

Photo: UNDP China. nterview with China Global Television Network during COP15, October 2021.

forestry initiatives are underway in several countries.

In the Pacific, UNDP, GEF and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) have contributed to improved marine resources management with 15 Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The fisheries are now recognized as the best-managed tuna fisheries globally. In twelve East Asian countries, UNDP, with financing from the GEF, has been promoting a sustainable blue economy through the implementation of integrated coastal management since the early 1990s.

As part of a green recovery from the pandemic, it is imperative to promote and install greener and cleaner renewable energy options. UNDP recognizes that access to clean energy is a pre-condition for social and economic prosperity, and that any plan to achieve the SDGs must include a strategy to transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. While acknowledging that such a transformation will be difficult, UNDP will deploy its expertise and experience to advocate for a fair process that minimizes the impact on the poor and vulnerable. This includes promoting an approach that goes beyond technical solutions for energy issues, and instead examines the linkages of energy access to poverty eradication, gender equality, and the protection of human rights.

The Asia-Pacific region is responsible for half of the world's energy consumption and half of global greenhouse gas emissions. Aggregate energy

use declined in 2020-2021 due to the economic contractions necessitated by COVID-19. UNDP programmes focus on increasing energy access, promoting renewable energy, and enhancing energy efficiency to meet the different needs of men and women in rural and urban households and businesses. We also work to de-risk investment in renewable energy markets and to attract and leverage private and public sector resources.

The Climate Promise

Climate change presents the single biggest threat to sustainable development and is already causing a disproportionate impact on the poorest, marginalized and most vulnerable. UNDP's **Climate Promise** has become the world's largest offer of support to governments to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. A key principle in the Paris Agreement is that no country should go back on its intentions, which were put forward in climate action plans known as Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs. UNDP's Climate Promise initiative supports 27 countries in Asia and the Pacific to ensure that any country wishing to increase the ambition of their national climate pledges can do so.

In **Cambodia,** for example, UNDP is creating an enabling environment for investments in key climate related sectors with stronger gender targets. By providing coordination and policy support, UNDP contributed to the NDCs to ensure that they now include specific targets on the percentage of women who will participate in each climate action. The more robust and comprehensive NDCs now recognize gender disaggregated data as vital in measuring gender targets for climate actions. In addition, the NDCs now include an ambition of 42 per cent emission reduction by 2030, and a target of halving the deforestation rate by 2030.

In **Papua New Guinea,** UNDP supported the country's Climate Change and Development Authority with finance and technical expertise in the revision of the country's enhanced NDCs, aiming among other things to reduce

CO2 emission by 60 million tonnes over the next decade. These also present a pathway for Papua New Guinea to deliver on its national policy, and a commitment to achieve 100 per cent power generation from renewable energy sources by 2050 and increase electrification rates to 70 per cent by 2030. The government committed to reduce the annual emissions from deforestation and forest degradation to an equivalent of an annual reduction of 8,300 hectares of deforestation and 43,300 hectares of degradation. The Government of Papua New Guinea has also mainstreamed gender equality considerations and youth engagement into the revision of its NDCs.

Building resilience to climate change

The shocks brought on by climate change could drive an additional 100 million people into poverty by 2030. UNDP assists governments to scale up the integration of climate change adaptation into policy, planning, and investments at national and local levels. It supported nine countries in the region to advance their National Adaptation Plans which reduce vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.

Governance for Resilient Development (Gov4Res) is a UNDP project that works with Pacific Island countries to systematically consider climate and disaster risks in all development decisions. This approach, now being replicated in other countries, targets multiple 'entry-points' that can collectively transform an entire system to address vulnerability to climate change. This agile initiative uses a risk-informed lens in a range of areas including local development efforts, national planning and budgetary processes, and large-scale infrastructure investments. The results have meant more programmatic responses to climate risks for community development projects in **Fiji** and **Solomon Islands**, new resilience financing mechanisms in the Ministry of Finance in **Tonga,** integration of climate change and disaster risk criteria in investment processes in **Tuvalu,** risk-

Photo: UNDP Solomon Island. Afforestation in Guadalcanal

informed community-led planning in **Vanuatu,** and the inclusion of climate risks in parliamentary budget scrutiny in **Tonga.** Through this work, the UNDP Pacific Office is advancing its strategic partnerships with Australia, Sweden, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, and the UK.

In **Bhutan,** support from UNDP, the Green Climate Fund and GEF has helped 56,000 farmers and other community members to withstand the effects of climate change by promoting resilient seeds, climate proofing rural connectivity roads to make them usable throughout the year and building climate resilient irrigation channels. As

GOVERNANCE FOR RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT (GOV4RES)

THE AIM	Consider climate change and disaster risks in all development decisions.
ENTRY POINTS	National planning & budgetary processes, local development efforts, large-scale infrastructure investments, new financing mechanisms.
BENEFICIARY COUNTRIES	Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS	Australia, Sweden, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, UK.

Photo: UNDP Cambodia. Weather Stations.

Photo: UNDP Nepal. Bipad Portal.

SUPPORT
TO **VIETNAM**

1,550
LOW-COST
STORM-RESILIENT
HOUSES

BENEFITTING
7,760
PEOPLE

2,522 HECTARES OF MANGROVES

a result, farmers now have enhanced access to market, and no longer face disruptions from landslides and flooding. They are also assured irrigation water through the creation of a sustainable, reliable, and efficient irrigation system. In addition, farmers can now cultivate diversified crops, securing more food while also earning additional income. More than 410,000 hectares of forest have been brought under a sustainable management regime.

With support from GEF and UNDP, the Government of **Cambodia** has strengthened the national climate observation network to improve the production and use of climate information. At the start of the project, the country had only 12 fully functional hydrological stations that manually captured daily data. Now, 24 automated weather stations and 29 automated hydrological stations capture and transmit data every 15 minutes to a central database that enables early warning and climate analysis. The country could produce only three-day forecasts before the project, but can now make seven-day weather forecasts, which are important for farmers to manage climate and weather risks.
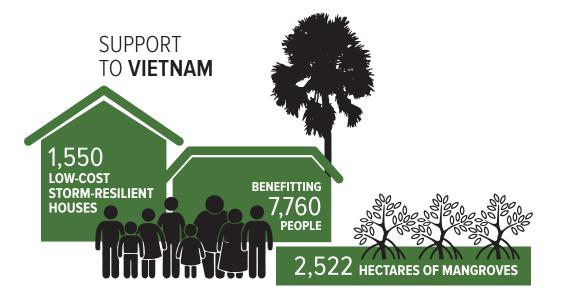
UNDP assisted the Government of **Tuvalu t**o establish a state-of-the-art Light Detection and Ranging technology which collects baseline data for accurate and detailed analysis of climate vulnerability. The analysis helps assess the relationship between land elevation and sea-level rise which is critical for adaptation action

and planning. The technology is fully integrated into mapping systems of the Department of Land and Survey and other agencies. The information has been used for detailed designs of coastal adaptation, including for reclamation in the main island, a project implemented through a Green Climate Fund coastal adaptation project. The technology will be used to develop detailed coastal vulnerability assessments for all islands for planning and development purposes. Enhanced government capacity will improve coastal hazard monitoring and inform long-term adaptation planning.

A technological innovation in **Nepal i**s reducing the risk of future climate-related disasters by examining historical ones. UNDP developed a solution in the country to transform nearly 40,000 records from the last half-century of national disaster incidents into illustrative disaster profiles, accessible in Nepali and English. Based on the inherited rich dataset from the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority, the profiles can illustrate primary hazards, frequency, impact, and disaster trends for any period or administrative jurisdiction, from national, provincial or district levels. These profiles could be a powerful tool for policymakers to quickly grasp the vulnerability of their jurisdictions to make risk-informed decisions. The capability is now being integrated into the National Disaster Information Management Platform for planning and allocating resources.

The governance of disaster preparedness and response

UNDP works closely with governments to provide integrated support to strengthen governance capacities at central and local levels to keep pace with the changing nature of disasters and climate change.

With assistance from UNDP, the national resilience programme in **Bangladesh** has helped improve the capacity of public institutions to make risk-informed, gender-responsive disaster and recovery decisions for recurrent and mega disasters. In 2020, the programme developed tools for conducting disaster impact assessments that promote risk-informed public investment. In 2021, persons with disabilities participated in the local Disaster Management Councils, which resulted in measures to reduce their exposure to risk in natural disasters. In 2021, 1,723 members of the Disaster Management Council, volunteers, and 76 journalists received training on the concepts of integrating gender into disaster risk management and resilience. The programme provided training and grants to 2,700 women who are most vulnerable to disasters.
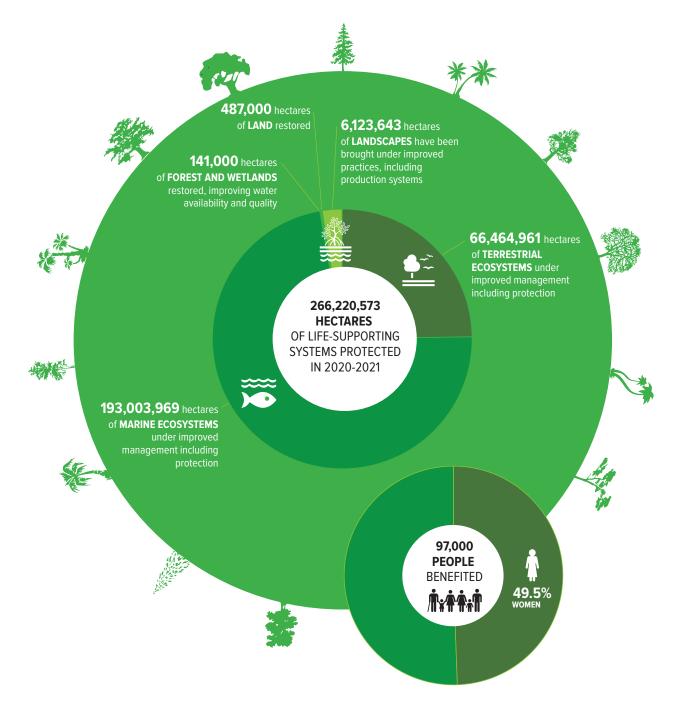
In the **Philippines,** UNDP collaborates with the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council and has supported the development of the updated National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan for 2022-2025. UNDP brought together a wide range of stakeholders to foster open dialogue on the new Plan and

ensure inclusiveness. UNDP advocated for a shift from disaster risk reduction to building resilience through climate change adaptation that reduces the impact of disasters on lives, livelihoods and health. UNDP is working closely with the Council on a data governance study which includes mapping existing digital platforms, data flows and policies on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. This study will serve as the basis for the country's Digital Readiness Strategy as part of its revised Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan. In addition, a mapping and analysis of vulnerable groups was conducted to ensure their needs and priorities are part of the disaster risk plans.

Technical support from UNDP, with Green Climate Fund financing, has helped shape **Viet Nam**'s National Climate Change Strategy, which led to enhanced pledges made at COP-26. Through work with the Ministry of Planning and Investment, a new government circular now guides the mainstreaming of climate and disaster risk reduction into the country's socio-economic development planning process for the next five years. At the community level, resilience to disasters has been strengthened through UNDP technical support to the construction of 1,550 low-cost and storm-resilient houses, benefitting roughly 7,760 people. In addition, 2,522 hectares of mangroves were planted, which will improve coastal resilience to climate change.

SUPPORT TO THE **ECOSYSTEMS AND BIODIVERSITY**

487,000 hectares of **LAND** restored

6,123,643 hectares of **LANDSCAPES** have been brought under improved practices, including production systems

141,000 hectares of **FOREST AND WETLANDS** restored, improving water availability and quality

66,464,961 hectares of **TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS** under improved management including protection

266,220,573 HECTARES OF LIFE-SUPPORTING SYSTEMS PROTECTED IN 2020-2021

193,003,969 hectares of **MARINE ECOSYSTEMS** under improved management including protection

97,000 PEOPLE BENEFITED

49.5% WOMEN

Gender and climate responsive measures

UNDP has helped to bring gender and climate responsive measures into the budget cycle in seven countries through an initiative on the governance of climate change finance. The effort is managed by the SDG Finance team, which is supported by SIDA, Sweden's development cooperation agency. In **Bangladesh,** the national climate change financing framework was updated to be more responsive to gender and social inclusion concerns. In addition, climate change considerations were better reflected in the country's ministerial budgets for agriculture, energy, and local government. Social protection and funding to climate-impacted communities were also expanded. In **Cambodia,** climate change was included in the Ministry of Finance budget circular where support was provided to build capacities for green budgeting.

Sustainable management of forests, natural ecosystems, and biodiversity

UNDP supports countries to develop long-term conservation programmes and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The climate and forest programme focuses on implementation of socially inclusive policies and measures on deforestation and forest degradation, and access to innovative finance.

Working more than a decade to qualify for payments under REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries), **Indonesia** received its first financial rewards in 2020. REDD+ was introduced in 2007 to provide incentives to conserve tropical forests and reduce greenhouse gases that are released when forests are cut down. In August 2020, the Green Climate Fund approved a REDD+ payment of US $103.8 million in recognition of Indonesia's reported reduced emissions of 20.25 million tonnes of CO_2 achieved from reduced deforestation and forest degradation in 2014-2016. The payments will be used to rehabilitate degraded peatland and mangrove, strengthen community empowerment through social forestry and alleviate poverty through eco-friendly economic activities. An estimated 200,000 households are expected to benefit from support to the national social forestry programme.

Between 2020 and 2021 the cumulative results achieved to protect life-supporting systems in the region include 66,464,961 hectares of terrestrial ecosystems under improved management including protection; 193,003,969 hectares of marine ecosystems under improved management including protection; 141,000 hectares of forest and wetlands restored, improving water availability and quality; 48,7000 hectares of land restored; and 6,123,643 hectares of landscapes have been brought under improved practices, including production systems, benefiting approximately 97,000 people.

In the **Philippines,** the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities play a critical role in the conservation of the rich biodiversity of the country. An estimated 85 per cent of the country's key biodiversity areas are within ancestral domains. UNDP has been working with 16 indigenous communities to delineate boundaries, map ecosystems, inventory resources, and document indigenous knowledge and practices. These locations are Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCAs) that may be sacred spaces or ritual grounds. To date, the work with ICCAs has covered 154,868 hectares including land sites and ancestral waters in key biodiversity areas. These efforts include developing inventories of vital flora and fauna and documenting traditional resource management methods.

Rice is a vital agricultural crop in **Lao PDR** and accounts for over 80 per cent of total cultivated areas in the country. The SAFE Ecosystem Project, supported by UNDP and GEF demonstrates sustainable land and forest management in Savannakhet Province, a leading producer of rice. Villages in the project areas previously used a traditional paddy-rice cropping system which resulted in soil depletion and decline in farm productivity. The SAFE Ecosystem project introduced a rice intensification system and the use indigenous nitrogen-fixing trees in rice production fields. This approach contributes to sustainable farming, forest conservation and increased farm incomes.

In **Niue,** through the UNDP-supported Ridge to Reef project, 14 management plans for Special Managed Reef Areas were completed, a

Photo: UNDP Lao PDR. SAFE Ecosystem Project.

INTEGRATED COASTAL MANAGEMENT (ICM)

TYPES OF SUPPORT	Pollution reduction and waste management, food security and livelihood management, water use and supply, habitat protection, and hazard prevention and management.
THE SCOPE	12 East Asian countries.
LENGTH OF COASTLINE	ICM covers 40% of the countries' combined 213,700 km of coastline.

culmination of work over several years. The plans enshrine the commitment by communities to the conservation of 17,213 hectares of terrestrial areas and up to 1,766 hectares of coastal reef areas. The commitments are aligned with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) category for Protected areas with sustainable use of natural resources. Resource Management and Advisory Committees were established in all 14 villages of Niue. The Committees are comprised of key government agencies and all marine and terrestrial biodiversity related representation of stakeholders, including fisherfolk and traditional landowners. Their aim is to ensure the long-term sustainability of the 14 conservation areas. In 2021, the project supported the development of Marine Spatial Planning for the Niue Moana Mahu Large Scale Marine Protected Area (127,000 km2), which had been formalised in 2020.

UNDP's Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) helps countries develop their national biodiversity finance plans through national 'biodiversity finance assessments' that review policies, existing expenditures, and finance gaps to identify potential finance solutions. In **Bhutan,** BIOFIN supported local governments to bring biodiversity considerations into their budgeting process and develop an insurance mechanism to respond to Human Wildlife Conflict cases. In Indonesia, BIOFIN helped secure a US $2.7

million investment for a bird conservation center in the Maluku Islands.

In the **Philippines,** BIOFIN supported the formulation of a US $40 million budget proposal for protected areas that was adopted for the 2020 budget. A new 'GCash Forest' app was launched with a payment platform that combines incentives for sustainable behavior with payments for tree planting, raising over US $500,000 a year. BIOFIN has also assisted in reaching a formal agreement between the Biodiversity Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Public Private Partnership Center. The aim is to collaborate on policy development to increase private sector participation in biodiversity financing, and provide feasible business models for private sector investments in nature-based solutions.

Sri Lanka has developed a Biodiversity Finance Plan that includes payment for ecosystems services through mini-hydropower plants that invest part of their profits in conserving their immediate catchment areas. In addition, a sustainable tourism certification mechanism was created with the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority. BIOFIN also supports the Central Bank of Sri Lanka to promote sustainable financing in the country.

Supporting the blue economy

In the **Pacific,** UNDP, GEF and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) have contributed to improved marine resources management with 15 Small Island Developing States. The fisheries are now recognized as the best-managed tuna fisheries globally. In fact, the four key tuna stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean are now within biologically sustainable levels. This is significant because the tuna industry plays a vital role in economic development and food security for Pacific countries.

In **Samoa, t**he Green Climate Fund has supported the Vaisigano Catchment Project, a cash-for-work programme for catchment rehabilitation that also provides job opportunities for community members. A total of 4,480 native trees were planted on seven hectares, and 3,434 invasive trees were removed from more than 55 hectares. As part of enrichment reforestation, a total of 12,416 trees were planted in an area of 8.7 hectares.

UNDP, with financing from the GEF has been promoting a sustainable blue economy through the implementation of Integrated Coastal Management since the early 1990s. ICM helps local governments to achieve social and economic development targets through pollution reduction and waste management, food security and livelihood management, water use and supply, habitat protection, and hazard prevention and management. Implemented across **12 East Asian** countries, ICM covers 40 per cent of the countries' combined 213,700 kilometres of coastline.

Improving energy efficiency and expanding renewable energy use

The Asia-Pacific region is responsible for half of the world's energy consumption and half of global greenhouse gas emissions. UNDP focuses on increasing energy access, promoting renewable energy, and enhancing energy efficiency to meet the different needs of men and women in rural and urban households and businesses. UNDP also works to de-risk the investment environment for renewable energy markets and to attract and leverage private and public sector resources.

UNDP in Iran has been collaborating with the Global Environment Facility, and the government to improve national energy efficiency and reduce CO2 emissions through institutional shifts towards energy-efficient solutions. The implementation took place in 541 pilot buildings, including 362 residential buildings and 179 non-residential buildings. Measurement and verification of energy indicated energy savings of 10 per cent in natural gas and 15 per cent in electricity, which is annually equal to 24,889 tonnes of CO_2. The government subsequently endorsed an updated energy efficiency building code.

In **Indonesia,** UNDP supported project development for small-scale renewable hydro projects which has enhanced the bankability of projects that have already secured a Power Purchase Agreement with the national utility or were in advanced stages of such an agreement. This assistance was provided

through collaboration with the Indonesia financial institution PT.SMI, a leading infrastructure financier in Indonesia. The pipeline projects have the potential for installation of an additional 50 MW of renewable energy capacity.

UNDP in **China** has been promoting hydrogen-based clean energy for nearly two decades, in collaboration with the Ministry of Science and Technology and GEF. What began as small pilots in eight cities has now been scaled across 45 cities, with UNDP support to the commercialization of fuel cell vehicles. By 2020, policies that provide incentives for hydrogen and FCV development were issued in 22 provinces and municipalities. Technical assistance and advocacy for hydrogen-based solutions in the energy sector has enabled four large renewable energy-based hydrogen production projects in the country and gradual use of hydrogen in steel production plants. UNDP organized two hydrogen industry conferences that created a platform for technical communications amongst more than 20 countries.

In **Cambodia,** UNDP provided technical assistance to establish a new energy unit at the Ministry of Economy and Finance that gathers economic information to inform energy policies. With the Ministry of Mines and Energy, UNDP provided seed funding to pilot solar mini-grids in four remote villages, with plans to expand to 210 remote off-grid communities. A total of 225 households, including 30 female-headed households and 10 households with people with disabilities, living in remote areas and in indigenous communities, gained access to electricity. These projects contributed to the country's rural electrification, which grew from a 6.6 per cent electrification rate in 2000 to 97.3 per cent two decades later. UNDP has worked with the country's Ministry of Mines and Energy, the Electricity Authority of Cambodia, and the private sector to develop business models that influence investors in the country's 100 per cent electrification target of affordable and reliable electricity through renewable energy. UNDP also trained government staff to bring climate components into their budget decision for

infrastructure. With UNDP support, an additional US $4.4 million of infrastructure investments went through climate change screening, increasing cumulative climate-smart investments by 11.7 per cent since 2019.

UNDP recognizes the environmental impact of its own operations and is committed to setting an example. The Regional Bureau for Asia and Pacific invested US $800,000 in 2020 and US $540,000 in 2021 to support **18 Country Offices** overall through a competition to 'green' their premises to reduce their own carbon footprint and minimize use of natural resources. The impact of the sum of all projects implemented in 2020 has resulted in an estimated CO2 reduction of 520 tonnes. Simple solutions included the purchase of electric vehicles and switching to LED lighting and presence-based electrical systems, and installation of solar panels. UNDP India is working towards a Green Building Certification. A move to solar PV systems in China and Sri Lanka Offices led to corporate funding to expand their PV systems in 2020. Cambodia, Indonesia, and Iran have also received funding to expand their PV systems in 2021 and implementation is ongoing.

Waste management

An important element of a circular economy involves recycling and waste management. It includes designing out waste and pollution and keeping materials and products in use for as long as possible. UNDP supports countries in changing the way they produce and consume materials for more sustainable prospects.

UNDP in **Viet Nam** is working with the country as it transitions towards a circular economy for a more resilient, green, and inclusive future. The National Action Plan on Sustainable Production and Consumption promotes eco-labeling and sustainable production, consumption, and exportation. UNDP is collaborating with the Ministry of Natural resource and Environment on the Law on Environmental Protection and is working towards building a National Circular

Photo: UNDP Viet Nam. Responsible business practice and vulnerable groups assessment

Economy Hub, a digital platform to connect and share knowledge to sustainably manage resources. At the city level, UNDP works with a public-private partnership in Danang to mobilize businesses and startups to support the circular economy. Its work with the municipal government is creating the first circular economy road map in Danang.
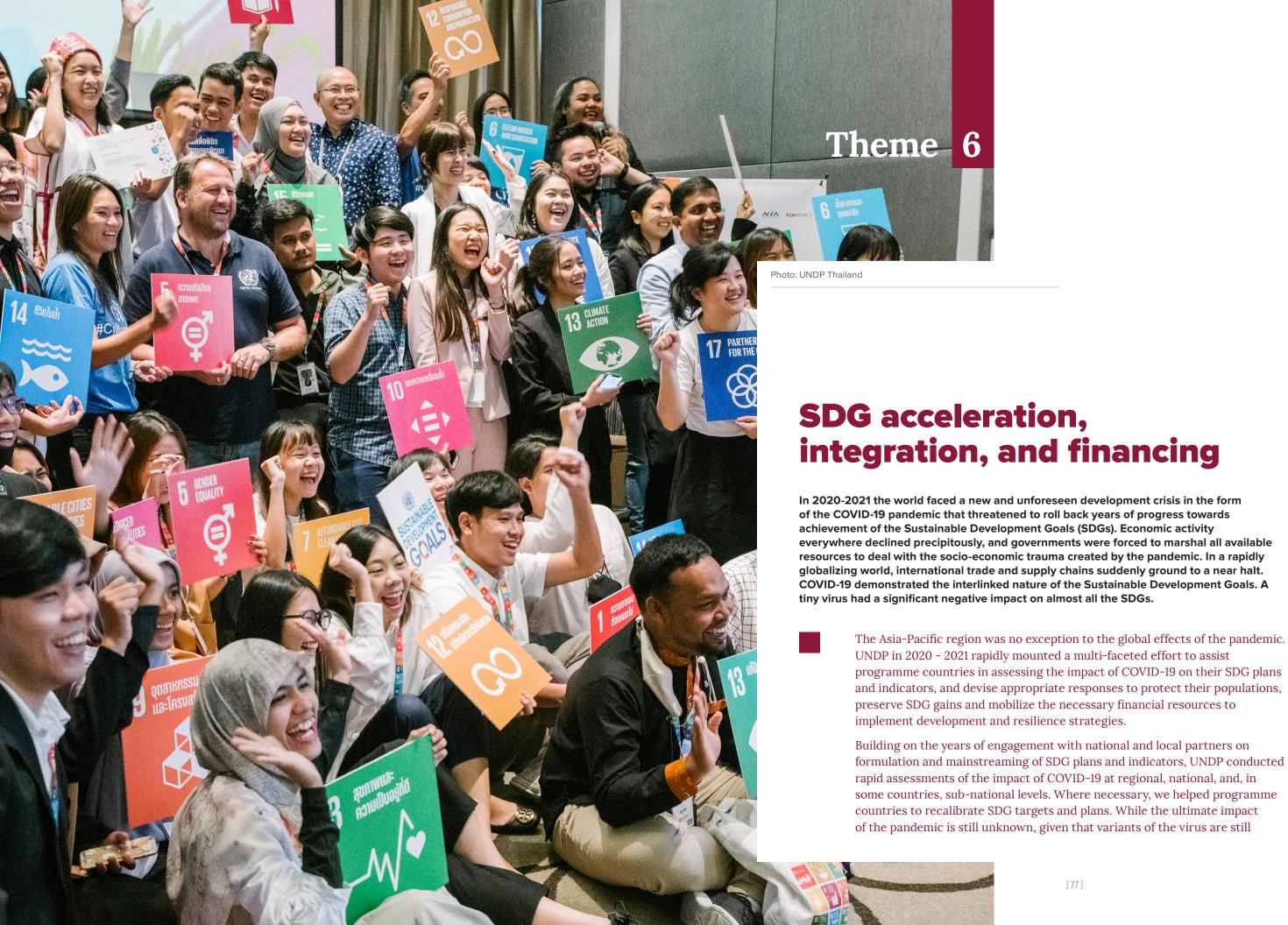
In **China,** UNDP supported the Foreign Economic Cooperation Office with a GEF project that reduces harmful pollutants during the life cycle of electronic equipment. In addition, the project partnered with Lenovo to develop a laptop with eco-design standards that reduce waste. Additionally, 250 management officers were trained in Extended Producer Responsibility concepts, which give producers responsibility for the treatment or disposal of post-consumer products. Three demonstration recycling systems were established, and more than two million e-waste units were collected, removing 284,890 metric tonnes of hazardous chemicals from the recycling chain. The project also resulted in the development of technical guidelines on eco-designs and standards to produce electronic equipment.

A UNDP plastics waste management project contributed to **India'**s flagship programme, Swachh Bharat (Clean India). The UNDP initiative enhances collaboration between municipal corporations, pollution control boards, and relevant government departments to strengthen waste management and improve socio-economic conditions for waste collectors. By 2021, this effort helped process 83,900 metric tonnes of plastic waste, thereby saving CO2 emissions that are equivalent to planting 9,988 trees. This ambitious partnership with 35 urban local bodies in 35 cities plans to process or recycle 85,000 metric tonnes of plastic waste and reach 100 cities by 2024.

In **Indonesia,** UNDP has supported the Ministry of Industry with initiatives to establish a recycling industry that can facilitate the collection and aggregation of plastic waste that contains harmful chemicals. Through the project, in coordination with the Government of Indonesia's assigned companies, businesses in local communities received training in plastics collection, segregation and disposal that has prevented more than 1,000 metric tonnes of plastics containing hazardous chemicals from re-entering the recycling chains. In the Province of Central Sulawesi, which was severely impacted by the earthquake and tsunami in 2018, UNDP is currently reconstructing two landfills as part of its reconstruction efforts in the region.

In **Cambodia,** the Country Office supported the preparation of the National Circular Economy Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2035). Launched in 2021, the Circular Economy Strategy adopts a life-cycle approach and sets as a national goal to close the loop of production, distribution, consumption, waste generation, and waste treatment. UNDP and the Alberta CoLab conducted a system design workshop on waste management in the Maldives. Subsequently, technical support and equipment were provided to the Waste Management Corporation to support circular economy waste management in the greater Male' region. In the Philippines, Viet Nam and Indonesia, similar system design workshops on plastic pollution and circular economy were organized that further some of the circular economy principles on recycling waste.

Photo: UNDP Thailand

SDG acceleration, integration, and financing

In 2020-2021 the world faced a new and unforeseen development crisis in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic that threatened to roll back years of progress towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Economic activity everywhere declined precipitously, and governments were forced to marshal all available resources to deal with the socio-economic trauma created by the pandemic. In a rapidly globalizing world, international trade and supply chains suddenly ground to a near halt. COVID-19 demonstrated the interlinked nature of the Sustainable Development Goals. A tiny virus had a significant negative impact on almost all the SDGs.

The Asia-Pacific region was no exception to the global effects of the pandemic. UNDP in 2020 - 2021 rapidly mounted a multi-faceted effort to assist programme countries in assessing the impact of COVID-19 on their SDG plans and indicators, and devise appropriate responses to protect their populations, preserve SDG gains and mobilize the necessary financial resources to implement development and resilience strategies.

Building on the years of engagement with national and local partners on formulation and mainstreaming of SDG plans and indicators, UNDP conducted rapid assessments of the impact of COVID-19 at regional, national, and, in some countries, sub-national levels. Where necessary, we helped programme countries to recalibrate SDG targets and plans. While the ultimate impact of the pandemic is still unknown, given that variants of the virus are still

emerging and this is the final decade to achieve the SDGs by 2030, there can be no interruption in national efforts to meet the goals. UNDP advocacy and technical support is assisting countries to build forward better from COVID-19 and get back on track to deliver on the global goals.

UNDP scaled up its support for SDG financing initiatives in 2020 - 2021. Nearly every country in the Asia-Pacific region is committed to ambitious SDG programmes but lack the necessary financing. Few countries have coherent strategies to mobilize public and private capital flows in support of their development strategies. UNDP has spearheaded the use of innovative instruments in the region, like the Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs) and issuance of thematic SDG bonds, to tap new sources of development finance. In some countries, SDG related Multi-Partner Trust Funds have been set up where interested national and international donors can coalesce around a particular SDG goal or theme. Our experience has shown that such innovative approaches can raise significant resources and build coalitions of like-minded partners that can support other national initiatives.

An understanding of the linkages between the SDGs lies at the heart of any poverty reduction strategy. After all, reduction of poverty must go hand in hand with progress on health, education, food security, climate change and all the other dimensions of the global goals. UNDP is an advocate of SDG integration, and a champion of processes and platforms that bring together diverse groups across society to dialogue on SDG priorities and plans. RBAP has pioneered Social Innovation Platforms (SIPs) in several countries that bring together national and international groups, including civil society, the private sector, and investors, to discuss development issues. Socio-economic models for sustainable jobs, strengthening overall labor market resilience, and tackling environmental pollution are some of the topics that have been the subject of SIP dialogues.

In addition, Youth Co:Lab is a programme that brings young people together to create opportunities for leadership and entrepreneurship to tackle SDG obstacles. To date, over 200,000 people in 28 countries in the region have participated in Youth Co:Lab, and approximately 1,240 youth-led enterprises have been launched or assisted by the programme.

Two other SDG integration platforms have been active. The Climate, Land-use, Energy and Water Systems (CLEWS) model assesses the linkages between natural resource systems to help develop sectoral models for water, energy, and land use, taking into consideration different climate futures. In addition, the SDG Integration Spark Blue Platform offers an online space for practitioners that enables collective intelligence, sharing and co-creation.

Photo: UNDP Bangladesh

Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs)

UNDP launched programmes in 17 countries in the region to support INFFs, which assist governments to link planning and budgeting, and align and mobilize public and private finance for the SDGs. Examples from **Bangladesh, China, Fiji, India, Malaysia, Mongolia**, and **Maldives** show that UNDP not only assists countries in developing their SDG financing strategies, but it also supports them to mobilize the finance for the SDGs and climate action.

Bangladesh is now expanding its new financing strategy to map ways that private sector financing can be used in three critical areas: energy, water and sanitation, and climate. For instance, a Local Climate Financing Framework was drafted to identify needs of communities exposed to climate vulnerabilities. The Framework also allocates additional resources that factor in gender and social inclusion issues.

In **Malaysia,** a UNDP-designed Ecological Fiscal Transfer scheme was integrated as a recurring annual allocation starting from the 2022 national budget, providing a strong fillip to the achievement of SDG 14 and 15 on oceans, biodiversity, and forest management at the sub-national level. Operating under COVID-19

restrictions, UNDP pivoted its focus to the local level, resulting in an SDG localization roadmap. In addition, the Indigenous Peoples Microgrant Facility, funded by the Ministry of Finance and managed by UNDP, provides grants to grassroots organizations that work directly with indigenous populations. Projects target such areas as food security, rural electrification, clean water, entrepreneurship, biodiversity, and climate change. The platform has convened local NGOs and formed a peer network for collaboration for future initiatives with indigenous communities.

Mongolia's INFF is one of the most comprehensive in scope. As part of the country's larger public financial management reform, Mongolia is piloting SDG-aligned budgeting in five sectoral ministries. To complement this public sector integration of SDGs, UNDP is engaging with the Development Bank of Mongolia to shape the financing policies, which now adopt sustainable financing principles in its strategic plan for 2021-2024. Capacity building for SDG audit practices at the National Audit Office are also part of the INFF support. Other innovative financing approaches include a feasibility study for a debt-for-nature swap, and the development of a green bond that can channel savings from the conversion of the government's debt refinancing to environmental and climate projects.

INTEGRATED NATIONAL FINANCING FRAMEWORKS

help to plan, mobilize and align financial resources with SDGs

IN 17 COUNTRIES

BANGLADESH – engaging private sector to help address climate vulnerabilities, gender social inclusion.

MALAYSIA: SDG localization in partnership in sub-national and grassroot levels.

MONGOLIA: SDG-aligned sectoral budgeting.

CICETE | UNDP

TECHNICAL REPORT
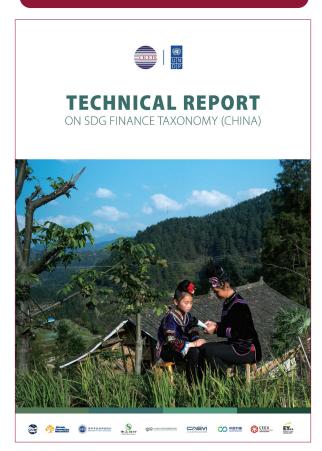### ON SDG FINANCE TAXONOMY (CHINA)

Photo: UNDP China. Technical Report on SDG Finance Taxonomy

In collaboration with resident UN agencies, UNDP in the **Maldives** has been supporting the government to draft a climate-informed development finance assessment, which will lay the foundation for designing the INFF in the Maldives. The resulting INFF roadmap is expected to help the government streamline national development planning and financing decisions, track and monitor SDG financing, and raise additional funds.

Thematic Bonds to finance COVID recovery and the achievement of the SDGs

There has been growing interest in the region in thematic bonds, such as green and blue bonds, social bonds, sustainability bonds, Environmental Social and Governance bonds, and recently, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-bonds to mobilize resources for sustainable development. UNDP's SDG Impact Standards for Bond Issuers and Enterprises have been gamechangers to accelerate the issuance of sustainability and SDG bonds and engage the private sector.

In 2021, the New Development Bank (NDB) in **China** issued a three-year fixed rate SDG Bond in the China Interbank Bond Market worth 5 billion RMB (US $767 million), adopting the UNDP Sustainable Development Goals Impact Standards for Bonds Issuers and UNDP SDG Finance Taxonomy (China). This was the first time that the standards, which help bond issuers optimize their contribution to the SDGs, were put into practice by a multilateral development bank. The proceeds of the SDG Bonds are going towards an Emergency Program Loan to China to finance SDG-aligned projects. As a technical advisory partner, UNDP will support the NDB to authenticate and benchmark how the capital raised by this bond will have an impact on the way public and private entities raise capital to support the achievement of the SDGs.

UNDP worked with HSBC and the World Bank to assist **Indonesia** with the issuance of the world's first sovereign Green Sukuk (Sharia-compliant Islamic Bond) in 2018. To date, Indonesia has raised US $3.9 billion via Green Sukuk for projects in renewable energy, energy efficiency, waste management, sustainable transport and resilience to climate change, which is expected to reduce up to 10.3 tonnes of CO_2-eq. Proceeds have also been used for the construction of more than 690 kilometres of railway tracks to foster cleaner transportation. Building on this success, UNDP is working with Indonesia to accelerate progress towards the SDGs by supporting the issuance of its first SDG Bond. The first sovereign SDG Bond in Southeast Asia raised EUR 500 million (US $584 million) with a 12-year tenor and coupon rate of 1.3 per cent. The SDG Bond provides an alternative source of financing for Indonesia to fast-track the achievement of the SDGs. The proceeds will be allocated to the social sector as part of the response to COVID-19, including for social protection, health, and education. UNDP partnered with the Ministry of Finance to conduct a feasibility study, develop a government securities framework, and support the verification process. In addition to social and green sectors, the framework includes the blue sector as eligible for financing – which will allow Indonesia to issue Blue Bond/Sukuk in the future that will advance the country's blue economy. Similarly, **Fiji** is looking to issue a blue bond in 2022 to raise money for ocean conservation under a Sustainable Development Bond Framework that will enable the country to issue other specialised bonds related to its sustainable development ambitions.

Innovative financing instruments

Fiji and **Indonesia** received funding through the UN Joint SDG Fund, which is a multi-partner trust fund to incentivize policy shifts and stimulate investments to get countries back on track to meet the SDGs. The funding in **Fiji** will directly impact marine conservation and the health of coral reefs and other marine ecosystems (SDG 14), create coastal sustainable economies (SDG 8), and leverage innovative public and private partnerships (SDG 17). In Indonesia, the funding will accelerate development in underfunded sectors, including climate mitigation and adaptation (SDG 13); water and sanitation (SDG 6); and marine resource management (SDG 14).

UNDP **Indonesia** is also catalysing the issuance of thematic bonds, facilitating SDG-adapted credit lines for youth and women entrepreneurs, and assisting an Impact Investing Fund that will invest in Indonesian startups that focus on the SDGs. In **India,** the Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) in Maharashtra signed an MoU with UNDP to create India's first Social Impact Bond. As part of this new finance approach, the Municipal Corporation's administration will bear the cost of the public welfare project associated with the bond if the pre-defined project targets are fulfilled. This limits the conventional risks of inefficient and ineffective spending. The Innovative Financing Lab in Indonesia and the SDG Financing Facility in India are finance programmes through which these and other pioneering services are delivered.

Youth rally around the SDGs

Over half of the world's young people live in Asia and the Pacific. An empowered new generation can drive the 2030 Agenda and help solve the region's most urgent challenges. Youth Co:Lab is a regional initiative that was created in 2017 by UNDP and the Citi Foundation. It catalyses youth startups and opens opportunities for entrepreneurial young people to pioneer new SDG solutions. It is the largest youth movement for empowerment, equality, social inclusion, and social justice in the region.

To date, Youth Co:Lab has built the capacities of over 200,000 people in leadership, social innovation, and entrepreneurship across 28 countries and territories in Asia-Pacific. Youth Co:Lab has also launched or improved over 1,240 youth-led social enterprises offering innovative solutions to meet the SDGs. These include social

enterprises led by women, Indigenous young people, and young people with disabilities.

For example, DeafTawk, a youth-led startup founded in **Pakistan,** is an online platform that facilitates real-time language interpretation, enabling the deaf community to access health, education, and employment opportunities. DeafTawk has provided more than 90,000 hours of sign language interpretation to 17,000 people with hearing disabilities, while creating 400 jobs. Another youth-led startup accelerated by Youth Co:Lab is iFarmer, based in **Bangladesh.** iFarmer allows individuals and institutions to fund the capital requirements of farmers. To date, iFarmer has generated over US $1.13 million in funding support for over 53,000 farmers.

SDG Integration

Many SDGs are interconnected, which necessitates an integrated approach in their implementation. An important step in SDG integration is to understand the linkages among the various goals and targets. Several tools have been designed to tackle integration and policy coherence. UNDP has provided countries with evidence-based insights so they can make decisions and investments that advance towards the SDGs in an integrated and mutually reinforcing way.

UNDP uses Social Innovation Platforms (SIPs) as one method to facilitate individuals and organizations to collaboratively develop social solutions to development challenges. The approach also helps to align disconnected initiatives and enhance their impact through better coherence. The methodology is particularly useful in attracting new partners and financial support for integrated policies and programmes.

An enhanced SIP approach, which includes engagement with potential international partners and investors, is underway to transform socio-economic models for sustainable jobs and building overall labour market resilience in the **Maldives** and **Bangladesh.** In **Thailand** and
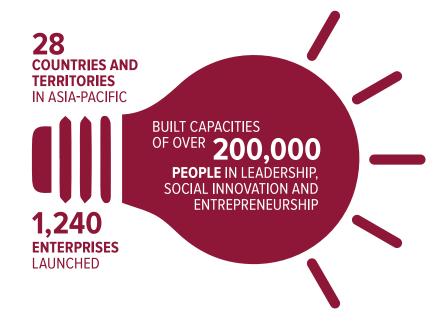
28
COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES IN ASIA-PACIFIC

1,240 ENTERPRISES LAUNCHED

BUILT CAPACITIES OF OVER **200,000 PEOPLE** IN LEADERSHIP, SOCIAL INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

YOUTH CO:LAB

Project Co-Leads

Citi Foundation

Photo: UNDP Bhutan. Druk Thuksey Award given to UN Bhutan by His Majesty the King

Lao PDR, the SIP methodology is being used to shape new socio-economic models of the factors that drive air pollution. With resources from the Republic of Korea and UNDP, a regional air quality monitoring platform will reinforce air pollution monitoring and forecasting capabilities in these **Lower Mekong countries.** These endeavours will offer a digital space for a range of capacities, technologies, and partners to come together to devise inclusive and sustainable socio-economic models that can be replicated across the region.

UNDP has a leadership role in UN inter-agency efforts on SDG Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS). The approach has been applied in several countries, including the **Maldives,** and in **Mongolia,** where the focus has been on policy support.

The prominent role of the UN and UNDP, as the oldest and largest agency in addressing development goals of **Bhutan** over decades of partnership, was recognized in December 2021 when His Majesty the King gave the UN Bhutan the Druk Thuksey (the Heart of the Son of the Dragon Kingdom) award. This award highlights UNDP support to the country's priorities and contributions to Bhutan's management of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate leadership. UNDP and the Government of Bhutan have also

been advancing the SDGs through new forms of engagement, such as the High-Level Advisory Support Track (HEAT), which addresses complex, interrelated development issues.
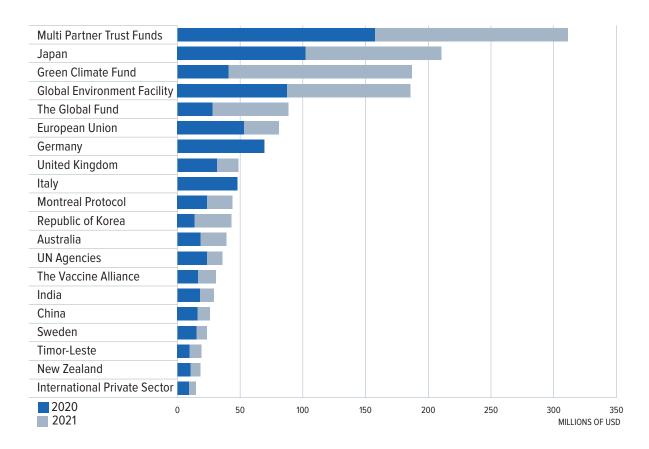
Several countries in the Asia-Pacific region have joined an initiative on Climate, Land-use, Energy and Water Systems (CLEWS) modelling. It assesses the interlinkages between natural resource systems and develops sectoral models for water, energy, and land use, taking into consideration different climate futures. **Bhutan, Iran, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal,** the **Philippines,** and **Sri Lanka** benefited from the methodology. **Bhutan, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Iran,** the **Philippines**, and **Pakistan** received support to tailor the CLEWS methodology to assess their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for climate action.

Collaboration has been expanding through the SDG Integration Spark Blue Platform, an online space created by UNDP globally for practitioners to engage through collective intelligence, sharing and co-creation.   In this UNDP-wide collaborative platform, the Asia and the Pacific region accounted for 31 per cent of engagement and 512 events to co-create development solutions by UNDP staff and practitioners across countries.

Funding partners

DONOR	2020	2021	TOTAL
Multi Partner Trust Funds	157,257,704	153,950,907	311,208,611
Japan	102,187,788	108,363,304	210,551,092
Green Climate Fund	40,470,151	146,508,875	186,979,026
Global Environment Facility	87,401,602	98,367,176	185,768,778
The Global Fund	27,746,684	60,806,260	88,552,944
European Union	53,075,179	27,561,980	80,637,159
Germany	68,908,581	847,083	69,755,664
United Kingdom	31,472,248	17,314,535	48,786,783
Italy	47,789,725		47,789,725
Montreal Protocol	23,656,637	20,024,197	43,680,834
Republic of Korea	13,572,746	29,491,798	43,064,544
Australia	18,281,456	20,770,181	39,051,637
UN Agencies	23,356,257	12,589,131	35,945,389
The Vaccine Alliance	16,146,888	14,687,441	30,834,329
India	17,832,424	11,348,288	29,180,713
China	15,962,178	9,787,090	25,749,269
Sweden	15,055,647	8,638,979	23,694,626
Timor-Leste	9,682,260	9,271,225	18,953,485
New Zealand	10,304,998	8,232,091	18,537,090
International Private Sector	9,016,243	5,705,562	14,721,806
TOTAL	**789,177,399**	**764,266,105**	**1,553,443,503**

Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BIOFIN	Biodiversity Finance Initiative
CLEWS	Climate, Land-use, Energy and Water Systems
COP26	2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
ESCAP	The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
EU	European Union
FCV	Fuel Cell Vehicle
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
GAVI	Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographic Information System
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
RBAP	Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific
RT-PCR	Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction
HF/VHF	High Frequency/Very High Frequency
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICM	Integrated Coastal Management
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ICU	Intensive Care Unit

Acronym	Definition
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
INFFs	Integrated National Financing Frameworks
IT	Information Technology
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
LDCF	Least Developed Countries Fund
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex
MAPS	Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support
MCWP	Multi-Country Western Pacific Programme
MSME	Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
PFIP	Pacific Financial Inclusion Program
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PV	Photovoltaic
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEEDS	Sustainable Economic Empowerment and Development for SMEs
SIPs	Social Innovation Platforms
SMS	Short Message Service
UN	United Nations
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	The United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

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