

Statement of India

**Ministerial Segment
72nd Commission Session of the United Nations ESCAP**

Item 7(a) Policy Issues for the Asia-Pacific region

“Key challenges to inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific”

**Madam/Mr. Chairman,
Madam Executive Secretary,
Excellencies, Ministers,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Madam/Mr Chairman let me first congratulate you for your election as Chair of this session and your effective management of the proceedings.

The Government of India is privileged to continue to host the ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia and the Asian and Pacific Centre for Technology Transfer in New Delhi and India reaffirms its commitment to ESCAP and support for the work of the regional commission as the unique body of universal membership of Asia-Pacific countries for promoting regional cooperation between India and its fellow member States for sustainable development. India continues to look forward to further strengthening of ESCAP's presence in the subregion and the increased delivery of work to promote regional cooperation across the 10 member States of the South and South-West Asia subregion.

As the first Commission Session after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, the theme of this 72nd Commission Session, “*Science, technology and innovation (STI) for sustainable development*”, is timely in as it focuses on a key pillar of the means of implementation for achieving the SDGs and one in which regional cooperation can play a pivotal role in fostering this achievement.

India attaches utmost importance to 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development since the agenda articulates international development priorities and global development cooperation for the next fifteen years. We must collectively work towards building a more equitable world, as only an equitable world can be sustainable.

Madam/Mr. Chairman,

The Government's vision of “Transform India” highlights the inclusive and sustainable economic growth that underpins sustainable economic and social development. With the current GDP growth of 7.6% makes India the fastest growing major economy in the world. This has been made possible, despite unfavourable global conditions and two recent years of monsoon shortfall, through the Government of India's focus on fostering growth through prudent macroeconomic management,

enhancing domestic demand and fiscal reforms to direct greater resources to States and those closest to the ground to make the most difference.

Through “Transform India”, the government is focused on achieving sustainable development gains in key cross-cutting development sectors of the economy, including rural and social sectors and the most vulnerable populations and communities.

With nearly half of Indians dependent on agriculture for livelihood which contributes only 17% of GDP, the Government, through the Union Budget 2016-17, has set a target of doubling farmer’s incomes within five years. This covers strengthened programmes for sustainable agricultural and rural development including increased resources for irrigation and for the sustainable management of ground water; better soil, seed and plant testing and breeding. These programmes will complement support to farmers in financing, new crop insurance programme, increasing sustainable productivity, including through organic farming, and access to wholesale markets through electronic platforms.

India is continuing reforms to accelerate social development and improve the lives of its people. India’s core priority on poverty eradication is continued through improvements to our basic employment guarantee programme, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), that provides 100 days of essential employment to those living in poverty. Increased delivery of public works under MGNREGA will also on basic rural infrastructure such as farm ponds, dug wells and compost pits to improve sustainable rural water and soil management.

Universal access to the financial system is a key objective of the Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) programme that has already provided 218 million new bank accounts. India is also a pioneer in employing new technology for biometric identification cards, Aadhaar, that have been issued to over 1 billion Indian citizens. The Aadhaar card, is being used for direct and targeted delivery of financial benefits and subsidies to the poor, removing the leakages.

Increased health and education investments and more devolution to state governments for implementation will deliver improvements and create positive spillovers to other SDG achievements. In health, India is moving towards universal health coverage. In education, India has recently announced the creation of new world-class school and university institutions to be established and new programmes to improve the quality of education especially in primary education. Innovation in policy and the use of new technologies has been applied through a digital repository for educational qualifications and academic awards. In addition, 60 million additional people in rural areas are also expected to benefit in the next three years from the Government’s “*Digital Literacy Mission Scheme*”.

Investment in education is a core complement of the “*Skill India*” mission and the “*Make in India*” to increase the vocational skills and productivity employment creation of India’s youthful workforce most recently through India’s establishment of 1500 multi-skill training institutes and a National Board to coordinate skill development certification between industry and academia. India is applying STI in skills development and employment through the creation of entrepreneurship tools and programmes including promotion of entrepreneurship and start-ups

through "*Stand up India*" and funding support under MUDRA programme and through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

India's energy security and energy access will be essential for sustainable growth and development and the achievement of the SDGs. On Earth Day this year, India, Along with other governments, signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. India has established as part of its commitment, significant ambitious targets to lower the emissions intensity of GDP by more than one-third below 2005 levels by 2030 and increase non-fossil fuel power generation capacity by 40%. India is also targeting an increased production of renewable energy fivefold to 175 Gigawatts by 2022, of which the grid connected solar energy target is 100 Gigawatts. India has made important progress already and has exceeded its targets in increasing renewable energy capacity to now. Large-scale energy infrastructure investments are complemented by programmes to realize real improvements in energy access. The Government has set targets to achieve 100 per cent village electrification by mid-2018 and provide gas connections to replace gas bottles for families living in poverty. The Government is also focusing on enhancing energy efficiency through a massive programme of adoption of LED lights through 'UJALA.' We are launching a new programme Ujjawala to provide 50 million gas connections to poor women. In a pioneering example of making fossil fuels less attractive, we have imposed a tax of 6 dollar per ton on coal production or coal import. We are also addressing the challenge of total sanitation through Swachh Bharat mission under which as many as 15 million toilets have been constructed in a year including 500,000 for girl students in schools. We have reformed waste management rules and we have reserved 6 billion dollars for faster afforestation.

Since the adoption SDGs, India has moved ahead to implement them in right earnest. Through the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), a high-level body chaired by the Prime Minister, has mapped the responsibilities of line ministries for implementation of specific SDGs and targets and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) to monitor progress towards the SDGs. The Union Government has also been instrumental in fostering greater awareness of the SDGs to state and local Governments and empower states to align their programmes towards key SDG targets. The United Nations and ESCAP continue to be important partners in supporting these efforts.

India's pursuit of innovation as a core for achieving the SDGs is also applied in our policy formulation and national planning. The Government has launched the 'Grand Innovation Challenge' where through an online portal this Challenge is involving citizens in crowd-sourcing ideas to address challenges facing India's development. We need to exploit the transformative power of technology for sustainable solutions to development challenges. In this context the proposed technology facilitation mechanism under SDG 17 has a critical role to play and will hopefully 'turn technology and innovation into an effective instrument for global public good, not just private returns', as Prime Minister Modi said at the UN Summit on 25 September 2015.

Before concluding, I would like to reiterate India's strong and unwavering commitment to South-South and regional cooperation. India has been actively sharing our developmental experiences with numerous partner countries as also its expertise in certain areas of capacity building and technology, through its ITEC programme since 1964. India will further expand and intensify such cooperation with our developing country partners in the years ahead.

We look forward to working together with ESCAP member States to implement the 2030 Agenda in our national contexts and through regional cooperation, achieve the Sustainable Development Goals for our region and the world by 2030.

Thank you.