

Sri Lanka Model United Nations



**United Nations Economic and Social Council
for Asia and Pacific**

Study Guide

www.slmun.org

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR THE ASIA AND PACIFIC

The Economic and social commission for the Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) is one of the five regional bodies of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It being the largest of the five bodies, it works to provide results oriented projects, technical assistance and capacity building to member States in the following areas:

- Macroeconomic Policy, Poverty Reduction and Financing for Development
- Trade, Investment and Innovation
- Transport
- Environment and Development
- Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction
- Social Development
- Statistics
- Sub regional activities for development
- Energy

In doing so, ESCAP also works to gather data and then translates such data into policy dialogues. This is significant in the region as it is by far the most economically, socially and culturally diverse region. Therefore, it plays a large role to assist many of the developing nations in the region to find its unique path to being a developed region, while maintaining its national identity.

Delegates must understand that their task in committee is therefore to promote policies that they believe will be the best choice for a progressive agenda leading to the respective goals. This intern outlines the mandate of the committee, and it is needless to say that the final resolutions must be an innovative compilation of such policy suggestions.

THE AGENDA

Conference topic: Fostering sustainable economic transformation in Asia and the Pacific.

Practice Debate topic: Addressing the digital divide in the Asia and the Pacific.

CONFERENCE TOPIC: FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

BACKGROUND

As mentioned earlier, the region being the most economically, socially and culturally diverse region of the five regions, is home to some of the least economically developed regions in the world, hence it is vital that we cautiously proceed with any development strategy in this day and age.

First of all, it is important to note that this region that is the center of trade worth more than a trillion dollars of global trade is also home to the largest concentration of people under poverty, as it estimates that no less than 309 million people in South Asia live with less than two dollars per day. Several studies link this with the lack of access to markets for most of the population in the region. Hence, tackling the region's economic inequality is a vital goal to be addressed.

However, this issue is made much more complex as any development in the region must be sustainable. Given the diversity of the region, it is significant that steps taken are well planned and contextual, meanwhile being coordinative to mutually benefit all parties and stake holders in the region.

It is also needless to remind anyone that this discussion comes in the middle of a global discourse on climate change and its significant and catastrophic effect on the planet, therefore any planned development on such a large region would without question must be in consideration of the issue.

The narrower considerations in this question are numerous, but the more significant ones have to do with the uniqueness of the region.

CASE STUDIES

BANGLADESH – DOES FREE TRADE IN THE REGION WORK?

The south Asian nation of Bangladesh has over the years faced many difficulties in building its economy, while struggling from natural disasters, lack of education and many other issues. With hope of joining the regional market and recovering its trade deficit, Bangladesh had joined many if the regional trade agreements such as APTA, BIMSTEC FTA, and SAFTA. Despite all these efforts, reports in early 2018 came out saying that the trade deficit of Bangladesh had rose to \$7.6 in just 5 months, which is an increase of 96.1% increase within a year!

A troubling factors seems to be that even though the willingness to cooperate in regional trade has been prevalent since the 1098s, less significant improvements have happened to intra-regional trade. What has happened over the years is that Bangladesh has failed to utilize the goodwill present in the region to penetrate into markets in neighboring nations such as India and China. Instead, the Indian and Chinese markets have successfully made their way into Bangladesh, thus contributing to the increasing trade deficit of the Nation.

Over the years, imports from these two neighbors have only grown in Bangladesh, meanwhile exports have grown little or have remained relatively stagnant. This shows that the preferential tariff margins given to Bangladesh have little to no effect. This may somewhat be attributed to other factors such as administrative delays, large quality control and regulations, and even bans on several imports based on false allegations.

While a consideration of regional trade is important, we must not stray from the original goal of sustainability. Several attempts around the globe have been made to improve provisions of free trade so that it is pushed in a sustainable direction. These measures can be aimed at maximizing the leverage of trade and investment in on issues such as environmental protection, mitigating climate change and attaining global sustainable development goals so as to achieve significant progress in sustainable policy.

These issues are much easily implemented in wealthier nations such as Japan and elsewhere, however a bigger question hangs over nations such as Bangladesh who are in a more desperate to achieve any sort of development, much less a sustainable one.

BHUTAN – BALANCING DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY

Bhutan is significant in that this small land locked nation is the only one in the world that is known to be carbon negative. It is also unique in the sense that its key development goal is based on “Gross National Happiness (GNH)” rather than the more usual Gross National Product (GDP). First introduced in early 1970s, the system forms the core of the nation’s governing and policy making. It also requires the government to regularly monitor the multitude of factors that in encompassed in the GNH principle. As a results, Bhutan has been able to show outstanding statistical achievements in the recent years. It is the 9th in the world in terms of annual GDP growth rate at 8% and its poverty rates seems to drop annually.

In 2014, the prime minister described the GNH principle as “development with values”, and this includes regular progress checks and a mid-term strategy for development. The democratic constitutional monarchy is also very transparent and less riddled with corruption being 26th in the world index and has strong governance.

While all these have been achieved, the country has constitutionally ensured that at least 60% of the nation remains covered in forests, although that figure is high as 70 % at the moment. Tourism in the nation has been growing but is highly regulated to prevent the nation’s culture from being spoiled and all construction in the nation has also been regulated by royal command to ensure its traditional architectural value and style is preserved.

However, this is not to say that the nation has not has its fair share of difficulties and obstacles. For example, in developing the nation’s key export, hydro power, the nation has increased current account deficits equal to about 25% of the GDP, and the sector has also yet to generate significant employment and integrate into the rest of the economy.

In moving forward, the nation has to address several factors such as maintaining macroeconomic stability and improving its currently small financial sector and attract FDIs and other forms of financing to enable its agenda. That being said, it is important that the rest of the region learn from this small nations achievements and use its wisdom to tackle the much larger issue at hand in developing a sustainable development strategy for Asia and the Pacific.

LAOS – PRESERVING BIO-DIVERSITY VS. HUNGER FOR ENERGY

As the regions urgent need for rapid development increases by the day, many tend to forget the high stakes at which these development comes in. the regions hunger for energy is one particular case. In Laos, an easy cleaner alternative to fossil fuel in the region, with its abundant rivers, is hydro power. However, obtaining hydro power requires dam construction flooding massive region. This not only required large scale evacuation but will also effect the local biodiversity in rather detrimental ways.

Recently, plans have been unveiled to construct several large reservoirs across the stretch of the Mekong River, which raised alarm over the region that shares the Mekong's water. The issue is that the construction of one single dam across the river would mean that aquatic life in the river would not be able to migrate through the river. The Irrawaddy dolphin, an already endangered species, would be extinct within the river, if such a dam is constructed as it halts its migration required for its mating and reproductive cycle.

Therefore, the question remains is that is such reckless forms of development worth such a loss or what other viable options are available?

PHILIPPINES – GROWING CITY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY

The capital of Philippines was ranked by a Dutch research group to be one the world's least sustainable cities. Traffic congestion, flooding, sewage miss-management, air and noise pollution are few of the city's problems. To tackles these issues, the government has increased its infrastructure spending over the last few years and continue to do so.

But what must be noted here is that just solving several of these issues like flooding and traffic congestion won't be enough to title the development as sustainable. Yes it will reduce car emissions if the plan is successful and traffic congestion reduces. Sustainable development of infrastructure is a more considerate development aimed at reducing as much carbon emissions as possible. Every building, every road and every construction leads to some form of carbon emission. The question is how we reduce it.

Of course, the question of scientific innovation and engineering is best left to the experts of the fields to handle, but where international bodies like the UN can do is to promote and make these technologies available to where it can be implemented. Therefore at ESCAP what we will look forward to is how these technologies can be brought out to cases like the Philippines and then be implemented.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

When researching, delegates are expected to understand the workings of the issues discussed at minimum to a median level. For example, when researching about regional economic cooperation, they are expected to look into the functioning, consequences, and alternative methods; relevant treaties and existing legal agreements are a vital part. Criticism, context and achievements are also important in debate.

Delegates are expected to cover the following areas (but is not limited to them) in their research, discussion and draft resolutions:

1. Economic inequality
2. Infrastructure
3. Trade policy and regional economic/financial cooperation
4. Promoting and the growth of renewable energy dependency
5. Over depletion of natural resources
6. Regional transportation
7. Improvement of the quality of life

When delegates research on, formulate and compile a set of policies, they are advised to enshrine the following causes, as well any other they deem necessary in it.

1. Cultural sensitivity and protection
2. Preserving bio diversity, and wildlife protection
3. Climate sensitivity
4. Economic sustainability and practicality

At SLMUN 2018, we look forward for a resolution from ESCAP that formulates a comprehensive set of macroeconomic policies that respects the regions diversity and creates a dialogue for coordination for development in the region and as well as any relevant sub regions (ex: SAARC, ASEAN). All proposed polices are expected to be well formulated, detailed, contextual and practical. Necessary funding mechanisms and legal consequences are some of the factors that are expected to be covered.

FURTHER RESEARCH

1. <http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Asia-Pacific%20RECI%20Report.pdf>
2. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257579996_Impact_of_RTAA_and_PTA_on_Bangladesh's_Export_Application_of_a_Gravity_Model
3. Investing in Sustainable Infrastructure, Improving lives in Asia and the Pacific by Asian Development Bank (2009)
4. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David_Ness3/publication/266203850_Sustainable_infrastructure_-_doing_more_with_less_by_applying_eco-efficiency_principles/links/542a3ab20cf277d58e871035/Sustainable-infrastructure-doing-more-with-less-by-applying-eco-efficiency-principles.pdf
5. <https://www.sustainablegoals.org.uk/sustainable-infrastructure-asia-pacific-new-normal/>

PRACTICE DEBATE TOPIC: ADDRESSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

BACKGROUND

The Asia-Pacific region needless to be said has large economic divide. For this reason and many more, the region is home to the largest technical and digital divide, where countries like China and Japan lead the world in the technical sphere while nations like Papua New Guinea where less than 10% of the population has access to the internet.

That being said, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has the power to act as a tool for development in the region, and nurturing equality and inclusivity, hence it has been recognized by sustainable development goals (SDGs) as a tool that enables development in the region and as the basic infrastructure for achieving the SDGs. It must be noted that the prevalence of internet connectivity in the region is a boost for smaller businesses

So as to achieve such and such goals, one project ESCAP supports the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS), its regional initiative to enhance connectivity mandated by the member states. It works based on four pillars: enhancing physical connectivity, effective internet traffic management, e-resilience and inclusive broadband access.

When the digital sphere expands, it brings about many applications that can be used about in daily lives of local citizens in many aspects. Success stories in nations like Pakistan and Bangladesh, even though they are still limited to major cities have reached almost all levels of society.

A technical paper by ESCAPs Information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction division outlines that even though mobile broadband coverage has expanded in many developing nations in the region, most of the benefits possible from the available technology is far from being harvested as usage still remains within the confines of communication and entertainment. If so, this may outline several possibilities. One, the users are yet to become aware of the applications of the technology or they are ignorant of the capabilities they have and prefer old methods they have known for generations.

Even though the benefits are immense, the effects of the spread of technological advances are not all positive. It must be noted with caution. The digital sphere by its nature is never fully safe. As seen in many scenarios before, small developing nations are some of the most vulnerable to attacks. Therefore any development proposed is best taken with precaution and necessary abilities to protect against harmful intent.

CASE STUDY

CAMBODIA

Cambodia is a South East Asian nation that is just starting its journey in the digital sphere. The atrocities of its past still bear marks on the nation's identity and economy. Still, less than a third of the nation has access to the internet, but the nation is making progress. The digital sphere is now creating employment in the cities capitals and is also a part in making progress in the nations strive for work place equality for women.

Several NGOs are assisting the government to reform its educational system to meet modern needs. The DAI's Development Innovations, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), is one such body and assists the government by providing material for higher primary education. The NGO also

works on a program called “Technovation Global Challenge” that focuses on young girls (age 10-18) to boost their innovative skills and bring them up as future entrepreneurs in the digital field.

Several other NGOs have focused their attention in the more rural areas to pay attention to farmers. They hope that introducing technology in these remote and rural areas will enhance the farmer’s ability to connect with the rest of the world and improve their lives and work. They use Khmer language classes to promote technology and to show how it can be used to benefit their occupation by contact and gathering information on markets and to learn about newer agricultural techniques and practices. They also hope that the technology will help the locals, especially women, to connect with the world and share their stories in the heart of rural Cambodia.

Although a lot remains to be done, Cambodia seems to be making progress in its chase to catch up with the rest of the world. What these stories tell is that such a goal is not possible to be achieved by a single nation and its government. It’s a communal effort and regional cooperation is a must. The question remains, how is that made possible?

POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. What are the underlying problems effecting the lack of internet connectivity at a domestic level?
2. What can the international community do to assist nations at the lower end of the scale to improve internet connectivity and improve digital literacy?
3. What drawbacks are present in the expansion of the digital sphere? Delegates should take into account the context of the issue.
4. What measures can assist in ensuring that benefits are reaped by all?
5. What geo-political issues effect programs such as the AP-IS?
6. How can the public and private sector collaborate to maximize efficiency and spread benefits of technological advancement?
7. How can ESCAP assist developing nations increase internet availability?
8. How can regional digital literacy be improved?
9. How can new and small businesses assist develop the local internet use and spread the benefits of the technological advances?
10. What points should be added to the AP-IS masterplan to enhance its socio-economic benefits?
11. How can the abilities of the available technology be made aware in developing nations so that locals are enabled to reap the benefits and thus are brought closer to achieving the SDGs.
12. What precautions must be taken in nations that are still emerging into the digital sphere in order to ensure that they have the necessary abilities to ensure their vulnerabilities are reduced as much as possible?

FURTHER READING

1. Bridge the Digital Divide Through Asia-Pacific Partnership, Chinese Taipei ADOC Secretariat (2014)
2. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/closing-asias-digital-divide/>
3. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/06/can-tpp-help-bridge-asias-digital-divide/>

4. <http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20ICT%20in%20Asia%20and%20the%20Pacific%202016.pdf>
5. <http://ias.ubd.edu.bn/assets/Files/WORKING.PAPER.SERIES.2.pdf>