

## The Great Upheaval

At the turn of the 21st century, Asia pulled one billion people out of poverty in one generation, a meteoric rise suddenly stalled by the COVID-19 pandemic. This volume examines the strengths of the Asian-Pacific response to the pandemic and weaknesses that the region must re-engineer to rebound.

The 18 authors included in this volume reimagine social and economic pathways to inform policymakers, development practitioners and other readers about opportunities to revamp production modes and networks to rekindle sustainable growth. They call for bolstering investments in universal public health, education and social protection to strengthen human capabilities and recommend marshalling a suite of global public goods to fortify societies for new digital and climactic realities.

Home to three-fifths of the world's population, the Asia-Pacific Region already accounts for close to half of all global output. By 2050 – after a detour of two centuries and a few pandemics – Asia-Pacific can again become a centrifugal economic and social force. This volume sets out options for policymakers to consider as we head into a new Asia-Pacific Century, one where economic strength will be necessary but insufficient by itself, as inclusion, resilience and sustainability – once seen as moral choices – become imperatives for the planet's future.

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# The Great Upheaval

Resetting Development Policy and Institutions for  
the Decade of Action in Asia and the Pacific

*Edited by*  
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# Abbreviations

APR	Asia and Pacific Region
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CO2	carbon dioxide
CFR	case fatality rate
C	Celsius
COVID-19	coronavirus disease-2019
COVAX	COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access
EUR	Euro (currency)
GAVI	Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance
GPG	global public good
GVC	global value chain
GDP	gross domestic product
GNI	gross national income
G20	Group of 20
HDI	Human Development Index
IDR	Indonesian rupiah (currency)
ILO	International Labour Organization
km	kilometre
Lao PDR	Lao People’s Democratic Republic
LDCs	least developed countries
LMICs	low- and middle-income countries
MERS	Middle East Respiratory Syndrome
mRNA	messenger ribonucleic acid
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
NPI	non-pharmaceutical intervention
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
p.c.	per capita

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RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RMB	renminbi (currency)
SARS-CoV-2	severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAR	Special Administrative Region
SEA	South East Asia
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Aid and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
US	United States
US\$	United States dollar (currency)
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization
\$	United States dollar

## Foreword

Being ready for the future requires unleashing our creativity, questioning our long-held assumptions, changing our behaviour and exercising adaptive governance to better use scarce resources. Above all, it requires greater investment in human development and institutional capabilities to confront the immense challenges of the 21st century – from climate change and growing inequalities to the digital transformation and rapid urbanization. While there is uncertainty whether and when the COVID-19 pandemic will become endemic, what is certain is that the pandemic has already changed our lives and livelihoods forever. This has profound implications for the way we will go on to organize and govern our societies. Multilateralism, the primary means to successfully tackle old and new development risks, is under strain in a world that is increasingly interdependent on the one hand, but torn by many nations' tendencies to look inward. Yet the ground-breaking 2015 Paris Climate Accords and 2021 United Nations Climate Summit, COP26, point to an ever-increasing public and political appetite to realize a greener, net-zero-emissions future.

Countries in the Asia-Pacific Region perch on the frontlines of the climate crisis, given their densely populated coastal areas and inadequate institutional readiness. The effects of climate change will increasingly affect their high dependency on natural resources and agriculture for income and food. Therefore, moving Asian and other economies towards net-zero emissions to arrest climate disruption is a top priority. However, such a move will not happen automatically. An inclusive green recovery from COVID-19 and a just energy transition calls for political will, new systems and smart policies. In particular, countries must put a price on carbon, phase out fossil fuel subsidies and incentivize green infrastructure investments. Countries will also need to find new ways to raise funding to finance achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – the world's internationally agreed plan to tackle challenges that range from eradicating poverty and inequality to protecting and restoring our natural world. Remarkably, allocating just 1 per cent of the total assets held by commercial banks, institutional investors and asset managers towards the SDGs could fill the annual financing gap. Other innovative finance mechanisms, such as debt-for-nature and debt-for-climate swaps, also hold enormous potential to catalyse much-needed financing for development.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted how digital connectivity is fast becoming *the* global metric of inclusion, even as 2.9 billion people remain unconnected. Renewed efforts are needed to extend access to affordable broadband,



the nervous system of today's digital economy. A worthwhile investment of US\$428 billion could achieve universal broadband connectivity by 2030. It would allow thousands of small and medium-sized enterprises to do business online for the first time, generating new, sustainable jobs and livelihoods. In the pandemic's wake, we must build on the momentum it generated to ensure that digital finance applications bolster vital social protection programmes, especially for the half of the global population that lacks healthcare and social security. More affordable broadband and social-protection coverage will help mitigate poverty and better prepare countries for the next crisis.

Over 200 years ago, nine out of ten people lived in extreme poverty. By 2019, even though the global population had risen by 6.5 billion, only one in ten people lived in extreme poverty. Much of this success took place in Asia and the Pacific Region. While the COVID-19 pandemic has set back progress in poverty reduction, it has highlighted the way forward. Once again, the Asia-Pacific Region can take a leading role in driving human development by forging a bold new pathway towards a net-zero future. Informed by fresh wounds from the pandemic and the stubborn challenges that preceded it, *The Great Upheaval* aims to help inform the ambitious policy choices that countries now need to make at this pivotal moment for people and the planet.

**Achim Steiner**  
UNDP Administrator

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