

CLEAN ENERGY POST COVID-19

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

A ventilator bed. File | Photo Credit: [The Hindu](#)

The year 2020 was one that only a few of us will forget. While the effects of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) have played out unevenly across Asia and the Pacific, the region has been spared many of the worse effects seen in other parts of the world. The pandemic has reminded us that a reliable and uninterrupted energy supply is critical to manage this crisis.

Beyond ensuring that hospitals and healthcare facilities continue to function, energy supports the systems and coping mechanisms we rely on to work remotely, undertake distance learning and communicate essential health information. Importantly, energy will also support cold chain systems and logistics to ensure that billions of vaccine doses make their way to the people who need them the most.

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The good news is that our region's energy systems have continued to function throughout the pandemic. A new report, titled *Shaping a Sustainable Energy Future in Asia and the Pacific: A greener, more resilient and inclusive energy system*, released on Monday by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) shows that energy demand reductions have mainly impacted fossil fuels and depressed oil and gas prices. Renewable energy development in countries across the region, such as China and India, continued at a healthy pace throughout 2020.

As the Asia-Pacific region moves towards clean, efficient and low-carbon technologies, the emergence of the pandemic raises some fundamental questions. How can a transformed energy system help ensure our resilience to future crises such as COVID-19? Can we launch a 'green recovery' post COVID-19 that simultaneously rebuilds our economies and puts us on track to meet global climate and sustainability goals?

By emphasising the importance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a guiding framework for recovering better together, we must focus on two critical aspects. First, by making meaningful progress on SDGs, we can address many of the systemic issues that made societies more vulnerable to COVID-19 in the first place — health, decent work, poverty and socioeconomic inequalities, to name a few.

Second, by directing stimulus funding to investments that support the achievement of SDGs, we can build back better. If countries focus their stimulus efforts on industries of the past, such as fossil fuels, we risk not creating the jobs we need, or deflecting from the right direction for achieving the global goals that are critical for future generations. The energy sector offers multiple opportunities to align stimuli with clean industries of the future.

Evidence shows that renewable energy and energy efficiency projects create more jobs for the same investment in fossil fuel projects. By increasing expenditure on clean cooking and electricity access, we can enhance economic activity in rural areas and support modern infrastructure that can make these communities more resilient and inclusive, particularly for the well-being of women and children.

Additionally, investing in low-carbon infrastructure and technologies can create a basis for the

ambitious climate pledges we need to fulfil to reach the Paris Agreement target of a 2-degree global warming limit. On this note, several countries have announced carbon neutrality. Phasing out the use of coal from power generation portfolios and substituting it with renewables, ending fossil fuel subsidies, and implementing carbon pricing are some steps we can take.

The COVID-19 crisis has forced us to change many aspects of our lives. It has shown that we are more adaptive and resilient than we may have believed. But we should not waste the opportunities this crisis presents. It should not deflect us from the urgent task of making modern energy available to all and decarbonising the region's energy system through a transition to sustainable energy. Instead, it should provide us with a renewed sense of urgency.

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