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Launch of the Asia-Pacific Human Development Report
Shaping the Future:
How Changing Demographics can Power Human Development

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be here today.

I have visited Bangladesh several times over the past 20 years and I am always struck by the enormous progress that has been made.

Between 1980 and 2014, Bangladesh's life expectancy at birth increased by 18 years. Gross National Income per capita increased by about 178 percent. Children now go to school on average for three years longer.

I am proud that UNDP has been for 44 years part of these significant changes.

Everything we did – we did in partnership with the government.

From building more than 5,000 digital public services centers known as Union Digital Centers, to supporting village courts that bring justice to 7 million people to connecting more than 100 million Bangladeshis to an early warning system, UNDP has been assisting the government with transformation of key sectors.

As a development organization, we are grateful to the people of Bangladesh for showing the role civil society and non-governmental organizations can play in poverty reduction and development.

I commend your government for leadership in shaping and finding consensus for groundbreaking agreements on the Sustainable Development Goals, Climate Change and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

We at United Nations also recognize your country's contribution to the UN's peacekeeping efforts.

Let me turn now to the new human development report.

Asia and the Pacific is at a crossroads.

The population in the region tripled in the past 65 years to 4 billion.

They are forming the largest working population the world has ever seen.

There are now more working-aged people and fewer dependents than at any point in history, providing a springboard for growth.

To be exact, 68 percent of people are of working age and only 32 percent are dependents.

This is an opportunity.

This is our calling.

But we have to act now. Immediately.

If we fail to create jobs for the growing working-age population, we risk unemployment, frustration, instability and exploitative migration.

We will not achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, we will not end poverty by 2030.

The window of opportunity to increase productivity, invest in growth and save for the future is between now and 2050.

For example, , the working-age population in Bangladesh will increase from 106 million to 130 million between now and 2030.

This is a truly unique opportunity that will not present itself again.

Birth rates are beginning to fall. The share of working-age people in the population will also begin to fall after 2050.

If countries in Asia-Pacific do not create optimal employment conditions, the regional economy will begin to slow down by 2050, as the current working-aged population begins to retire.

With the right strategies, countries in Asia and the Pacific can capture the benefits of the current demographic change.

With 58 percent of all the working people on earth, what happens in Asia-Pacific will affect countries far beyond the region.

We have to find the key to unlock the world's sustainable future.

With this report, we are putting forward a set of "9 Actions for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific."

These are concrete policies tailored to the demographic profile of individual countries.

For states with a large working-aged population - such as Bangladesh and many countries from South Asia and Southeast Asia - UNDP is calling for the creation of decent jobs to match the growing workforce, equal employment for women, and ways to turn savings into investments inside the region.

For countries with young populations – such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and many countries in the Pacific - there is a need to invest in education and healthcare, smooth the transition from school to work and encourage youth participation in public life.

In older countries – such as such as China, Sri Lanka and Thailand - governments have to design fair, sustainable pension systems, support active ageing and promote appreciation for the value of older citizens. This includes making sure that older people who want to work can bring their skills and experience to the market.

The report we are introducing here today analyzes population trends in Asia and the Pacific and examines their links to sustainable development.

While we primarily work in our programme countries, we included in the report analysis and case studies from other relevant countries, such as Japan and the Republic of Korea.

The report is a practical guide for development planners and decision makers in governments across Asia and the Pacific.

It recommends switching from short-term election cycle priorities to long-term development strategies.

There is no one solution for every country, but the region's diversity provides room for south-south cooperation.

Governments need to share experiences on long-term fiscal planning, including the sustainable use of tax revenue.

Cooperation can also encourage safe migration from younger to older countries within the region and reduce the desperate flight of migrants to Europe.

With 50 years of expertise and 24 offices working in 36 countries in Asia-Pacific, UNDP is ideally placed to help implement the "9 Actions for Sustainable Development."

We can facilitate partnerships combining domestic, international, public and private funding and we can bring expertise on youth, ageing, migration, social protection, climate change and disaster risk management, governance, urbanization and technology transfer.

Thank you and I look forward to working with you on creating a better future for all.