



**Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation**

2024/SOM3/003b
Session 4.3

A Review of the Bangkok Goals Evergreen Compendium

Purpose: Information
Submitted by: APEC Secretariat



Third Senior Officials' Meeting
Lima, Peru
24-25 August 2024

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Introduction:

The 2022 Bangkok Goals on Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy (The Bangkok Goals) represent a pivotal commitment by APEC economies to integrate sustainability into economic growth across APEC work streams. As articulated in the Bangkok Goals, members have committed to annually track efforts to advance these goals through the Bangkok Goals Evergreen Compendium (The Compendium). The Compendium was introduced as a companion document to the Bangkok Goals in 2022 and this year (2024) serves as the third update coordinated by the APEC Secretariat. In addition to the assessment, the APEC Secretariat has undertaken an informal analysis of data focused on ongoing initiatives, actions and projects captured in the Compendium. This more detailed review delves deeper into data contained in the Compendium to identify trendlines in coverage. Members are invited to review this document with the understanding that it is an informal and non-exhaustive assessment that relies heavily on the submissions of fora and sub-fora. It serves as a snapshot in time of the work of APEC to advance the Bangkok Goals.

Overview:

The APEC Secretariat used the four Bangkok Goals, as summarised below to organise the analysis:

1. **Addressing Environmental Challenges and Resilience:** Supporting global efforts to address environmental challenges, including climate change, through ambitious initiatives, enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience, promoting clean energy transitions, rationalising fossil fuel subsidies, advancing sustainable agriculture, and supporting finance and investments in sustainability.
2. **Sustainable, Inclusive Trade and Investment:** Promoting sustainable trade and investment by enhancing supply chain resilience, facilitating trade in environmental goods and services, advancing responsible business conduct and ESG practices, promoting gender equality, and supporting MSMEs in adopting green and sustainable practices.
3. **Environmental Conservation:** Enhancing the sustainable use and management of natural resources by conserving marine and coastal ecosystems, reducing marine debris and plastic pollution, combating illegal logging, and ensuring diversity and inclusion in conservation efforts.
4. **Resource Efficiency and Waste Management:** Promoting circular economy approaches, sustainable production, and consumption patterns, and enhancing cooperation for advancing resource efficiency and sustainable waste management towards zero waste.

Findings:

Addressing Environmental Challenges and Resilience: Approximately 84 or 46% of all ongoing projects and initiatives included in the Compendium in 2024 advanced work on climate action and resilience. These activities are aimed at addressing climate change, including adaptation and mitigation measures, disaster risk reduction and management, enhancing energy efficiency, promoting renewable energy, supporting carbon neutrality, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This is a slight decrease compared to 47% in 2023 and a slight increase from 45% in 2022, indicating a steady focus on climate and energy-related goals.

The projects span across various fora, including the Policy Partnership on Science, Technology and Innovation (PPSTI), Energy Working Group (EWG), Emergency Preparedness Working Group (EPWG), and the Oceans and Fisheries Working Group (OFWG). Notably, the EWG has emerged as a standout contributor, with 26 projects or 14% of all initiatives under the first Bangkok Goal being implemented in 2024. This underscores the significant role of energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives in the broader climate action agenda.

Sustainable, Inclusive Trade and Investment: In 2024, 70 projects or 38% of the initiatives included in the Compendium furthered efforts to promote sustainable trade. These projects encouraged ESG practices, facilitated investment in green initiatives, fostered inclusive economic growth, and supported policies for sustainable finance and investment. Specific initiatives aimed at enhancing trade facilitation, promoting

inclusive economic growth, supporting micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), and addressing trade-related challenges such as standards and market access. Key topics included low-carbon trade, green customs practices, and the development of environmental goods lists to facilitate trade in sustainable products. This represents an increase from 33% in 2023 and 22% in 2022, reflecting a growing emphasis on sustainable trade practices.

The projects were implemented across various fora, including the Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy (PPWE), the Small and Medium Enterprises Working Group (SMEWG), the Transportation Working Group (TPTWG), and the Human Resources Development Working Group (HRDWG). The PPWE contributed the most, with 18 projects or 26% of all initiatives under the second Bangkok Goal being implemented in 2024.

Environmental Conservation: In 2024, 19 projects or 10% of the initiatives in the Compendium focused on environmental conservation. These initiatives targeted the conservation of natural resources, reduction of pollution, and enhancement of biodiversity. Specific projects included marine conservation, combating marine pollution, promoting sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, combating illegal logging and associated trade, developing green technologies and digital tools for agriculture. Several initiatives focused on combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, addressing plastic waste in oceans, fostering environmentally responsible food systems and enhancing the legal timber trade. These projects often involved capacity building, workshops, and policy development to promote sustainable practices. This focus on environmental conservation was slightly lower than the 14% in 2023 and 28% in 2022, indicating a need for renewed emphasis in this area.

The projects were implemented across various fora, including the Expert Group on Illegal Logging and Associated Trade (EGLAT), the OFWG, the Tourism Working Group (TWG), and the PPSTI. OFWG was the top contributor, with 9 projects or 47% of all initiatives under the third Bangkok Goal being implemented in 2024.

Resource Efficiency and Waste Management: In 2024, 11 projects or 6% of the initiatives in the Compendium aimed to advance resource efficiency and waste management priorities. These projects focused on promoting the circular economy, sustainable production, and advancing practices across various sectors that support environmentally sustainable economic growth. This is consistent with the 6% in 2023 and an increase from 5% in 2022, indicating a steady albeit limited level of focus on resource efficiency and waste management.

The projects spanned various fora, including the Sub-Committee on Standards and Conformance (SCSC), the Policy Partnership on Food Security (PPFS), the PPSTI, and the Anti-Corruption and Transparency Working Group (ACTWG). PPSTI and SCSC were the highest contributors, each with 3 projects or 27% of all initiatives under the fourth Bangkok Goal being implemented in 2024.

Cross-cutting Issues:

Sustainability serves as the overarching cross-cutting issue addressed by the Bangkok Goals. A number of complex, multi-dimensional topics such as digitalisation and innovation, capacity building and knowledge sharing, gender equality and women's empowerment, require coordinated efforts to leverage collective expertise and innovation.

Digitalisation and Innovation: There is a significant emphasis on leveraging technology and innovation to address various challenges across all four Bangkok Goals. Focus areas include utilising smart technologies for environmental management and sustainability, promoting green and low-carbon transition through digital technologies, enabling SMEs' competitive, specialized and innovative development and accelerate their digital transformation, capacity building in digital skills, and employing digital platforms for sustainable economic growth. There is a notable emphasis on fostering digital economy ecosystems, across different sectors such as education, healthcare, agriculture, and trade.

Among the 184 projects or initiatives listed as ongoing, 38 explicitly include elements of digitalization and innovation. This represents approximately 21% of the total projects. These projects focus on leveraging digital technologies and innovative approaches to address a range of issues. For example, the DESG 06 2022A project aims to promote digital transformation in agriculture by enhancing technology uptake and productivity. Similarly, SME 05 2023A addresses the development of digital solutions for low-carbon business models in SMEs. Projects like PPSTI 108 2024A explores the application of generative AI to advance Industry 4.0 transformation.

Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing: Many initiatives focus on capacity building, education, and skills development, particularly in the areas of digital literacy, green technology adoption, climate resilience, and entrepreneurship. These efforts aim to empower individuals and communities to adapt to changing environmental and economic landscapes across different sectors such as technology, agriculture, and energy. Workshops, training sessions, and collaborative efforts aimed at enhancing skills, disseminating best practices, and fostering innovation across member economies are common mechanisms for facilitating information exchange and building expertise in relevant areas.

Although much of APEC's work can be understood to be focused on capacity building and knowledge sharing, 65 out of the 184 projects, or approximately 35%, clearly emphasize capacity building and/or knowledge sharing. By focusing on these areas, APEC aims to equip stakeholders with the necessary tools and knowledge to drive sustainable and inclusive growth within their respective fields.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: There is a notable emphasis on promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment across various projects and initiatives. Activities range from promoting women's leadership in climate action to enhancing women's participation in the digital economy and entrepreneurship.

PPWE is a top initiator of projects focusing on women's empowerment, particularly in the context of climate change, digital economy, and entrepreneurship. These projects aim to enhance women's participation in decision-making, promote gender-responsive policies, and provide training and support for women entrepreneurs. Twenty-one or about 11% of the projects directly address promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

Cross-Fora Collaboration: Several projects involve collaboration between multiple fora, indicating a holistic approach to addressing complex issues. Presently, approximately 40% of the projects and initiatives included in the Compendium involve cross-fora collaboration, which ensures diverse expertise and resources are pooled together for more comprehensive solutions.

Gaps in Coverage:

Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency: While there are projects focused on energy efficiency and renewable energy, such as "Support Offshore Wind Deployment and Grid Connection" and "APEC Workshop on Sustainable Energy Transition," there could be more emphasis on accelerating the adoption of renewable energy sources and enhancing energy efficiency measures across various sectors to align with the BCG goals. This finding supports Peru's host year priority of developing policy guidance to implement low-carbon hydrogen policy frameworks as well as the EWG's work to finalise a Just Energy Transition Initiative, as per the Energy Ministers' 2023 directive.

Circular Economy: Projects related to promoting circular economy principles, such as resource efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable production and consumption patterns, remain limited. There is potential to develop initiatives that encourage the adoption of circular business models, product redesign for recyclability, and waste management strategies to minimize environmental impact and promote resource conservation. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of the *APEC 2024 Report of the APEC Secretariat Executive Director on Fora Work*, which noted that none of the SCE sub-fora work plans identified work as contributing to the APA Collective Action "Advance APEC's circular economy work" in 2024.

Health and Food Security: While there are some projects focusing on climate-smart agriculture and food security, such as "*APEC Workshop on Digital Agriculture Cooperation for Ensuring Food Security*," there could be more initiatives addressing the linkages between health and sustainable agriculture practices and sustainable food supply chains to align with BCG objectives. Peru's host year priority of developing principles for preventing and reducing food loss and waste in the Asia Pacific region is an important initiative that addresses a lacuna in this space.

Structural Reform: An often neglected yet crucial component of achieving sustainable economic growth involves implementing the necessary structural reforms. While numerous projects within the Compendium concentrate on technological advancements or capacity building, few take into consideration the broader regulatory frameworks, policy incentives, and institutional capacities vital for sustaining long-term environmental, economic, and social goals. To effectively fulfil the objectives laid out in the Bangkok Goals, there is a need across APEC economies to explicitly integrate environmental policies with economic and social policies, thereby ensuring comprehensive and sustainable development strategies.

Recommendations:

To address the findings from the 2024 Compendium update and to enhance efforts to achieve the Bangkok Goals, APEC could consider:

- Strengthening cross-fora collaboration, to reduce overlap, identify synergies and further amplify efforts in a variety of areas, including energy transition with climate resilience and disaster risk reduction as well and health and sustainable economic growth, among others.
- Promoting innovative technologies for sustainable development, green and low-carbon transition and climate adaptation and mitigation.
- Advancing circular economy principles and develop initiatives that encourage resource efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable production across industries. This could include encouraging member economies to integrate circular economy principles into domestic policies.
- Supporting more projects and initiatives that seek to strengthen regulatory frameworks and institutional capacities to support long-term sustainability goals, while reducing overlap and identifying synergies.

Conclusion:

The 2024 update of the Bangkok Goals Evergreen Compendium highlights APEC's efforts to advance the Bangkok Goals on Bio-Circular-Green Economy. APEC has shown a strong commitment to addressing climate action, sustainable trade, environmental conservation, and resource efficiency. While progress is evident, challenges remain, particularly in areas such as environmental conservation and circular economy practices, necessitating increased collaboration and focused efforts. Addressing these gaps requires intensified cooperation, targeted initiatives, and robust policy frameworks integrating environmental considerations with economic and social policies.

Looking ahead, APEC could seek to enhance cross-fora collaboration, promote innovative technologies, and advocate for structural reforms. These could accelerate progress towards the Bangkok Goals, fostering sustainable economic growth across the region.