

IGES' forthcoming Fifth White Paper "Greening Integration in Asia: How Regional Integration Can Benefit People and the Environment", discusses how regional integration in Asia and the Pacific could be a driver for sustainable development. The current regional integration processes in the region are focusing on economic integration through trade and investment liberalisation. The White Paper provides input to the discussion on what kind of regional integration amongst Asian nations would be beneficial, not only in the short term and from the narrow viewpoint of national interests, but from a wider sustainability perspective. This session aimed to present key messages of the White Paper with a general audience and to receive feedback from the discussant – Ms. Ella Antonio of the Earth Council.

The session had four presentations from IGES researchers who are contributing authors of the White Paper. The first presentation introduced the overall idea and structure of the publication, described some unsustainable regional trends and emphasised the role of regional policy processes, as an important complement to national and global policy making. The second presentation highlighted some key challenges related to the forest sector and described how regional collaboration, especially on timber certification, could help improve the situation. The third presentation underlined the significance of climate friendly technologies and the need for trans-border technology transfer. A three-stage model for technology transfer was introduced together with a set of recommendations on how regional integration could help address key obstacles. The fourth and final presentation explained the structure of ASEAN and discussed how this regional integration framework could become more effective to facilitate sustainable development in member countries.

In the discussion part, the overall ideas and messages of the White Paper were enthusiastically supported by Ms. Antonio. However, she pointed out the need for some recommendations to be further elaborated, especially with regards to how they can be put into practice. She also underscored the significant progress made by ASEAN and the need for the White Paper to take notice of these achievements. Finally, she emphasised that the key to reforming Asia's regional integration is to go through governments in the member countries.

Key messages of the session

Asia is developing rapidly but unsustainably. Currently, regional cooperation and integration processes contribute only marginally to addressing these undesirable trends. However, as argued in the White Paper, joint action at the regional level holds considerable potential to complement and strengthen country level efforts. The White Paper provides recommendations under three headings: (i) Make trade and investment work for sustainable development, (ii) Strengthen and refocus regional institutions, and (iii) Build capacity at national and sub-national levels.