

# experience SINGAPORE

ISSUE 80

Voluntary National Review 2023:

## Singapore's Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals

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MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
SINGAPORE

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share more on the Singapore Cooperation  
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outreach programme administered by  
MFA, and other key issues in Singapore's  
foreign policy.

# Editor's Note



Dear readers,

We entered the new year in a fraught world. 2023 saw no shortage of geopolitical crises, including armed conflicts and humanitarian crises in Gaza and Ukraine. The climate crisis has taken on a new urgency, with 2023 being the warmest year on record. We cannot afford to sit idly by without taking strong, concerted and collective global action to address and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Singapore may be small, but we are far from powerless to act in the face of such cosmic challenges. Climate change and rising sea levels are existential threats to a small island state like Singapore. It is imperative for Singapore to play an active role on the world stage for climate action, and promote cooperation by working constructively with like-minded countries.

At the recent COP28, Singapore joined nearly 200 other countries in reaffirming the global commitment to tackling the climate crisis. In July 2023, we also did a stocktake of our progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, conducting our second Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the High-level Political Forum. This VNR is the focus of this issue's cover story (pages 3 to 5).

Beyond international fora such as COP28 and the UN, we also play an active role in fostering both local and international collaborations for climate action. This includes setting up frameworks for emerging instruments such as carbon markets. The National Climate Change Secretariat's Mr Rueban Manokara offers some insights into Singapore's efforts on this front in pages 8 and 9. In the same article, Mr Lim Tian Kuay from the National Environment Agency also sheds light on Singapore's contribution towards capacity building and knowledge sharing through initiatives such as the Climate Action Package (CAP).

Building on the completion of CAP in March 2023, we announced the launch of the Sustainability Action Package (SAP) at Singapore Cooperation Programme's 30th Anniversary. Find out more about SAP on pages 10 and 11, and hear first-hand from Ms Ishuna Niita Amakutsi, a participant of an SAP course.

As we work to make 2024 another fruitful year, we invite you to check out the comprehensive line-up of SAP and SCP courses – and join us in advancing sustainability and shaping a better and more cohesive world.

*Sheryl Sham*

**Director  
Strategic Communications Directorate  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore**



Voluntary National Review 2023:

# Singapore's Progress Towards the SDGs

In the face of climate change and geopolitical conflicts, it has become more urgent than ever before for the international community to come together to implement the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. How do member states maintain accountability and track progress across industries? *Experience Singapore* explores how Singapore is meeting its commitments.

Adopted by UN Member States in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer countries an ambitious blueprint for achieving the shared goals of peace, prosperity and sustainable development.

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) – voluntary and country-led reviews of progress at the national level – help countries track their progress towards the SDGs. Singapore presented its second VNR in July 2023, focusing on SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (clean energy), SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), SDG 11 (sustainable cities), and SDG 17 (partnerships). Singapore's first VNR was conducted in 2018.

The VNR is an important platform for Singapore to share our experiences and best practices in sustainable development with the international community and learn from other countries.





## Keeping the SDGs Front and Centre

With SDGs spanning across different domains and industries, data collection and coordination among stakeholders is a mammoth task. The Singapore Government formed the Inter-Ministry Committee on SDGs (IMC-SDG) to oversee the entire process. The IMC-SDG is co-chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE), and comprises members from 33 government ministries and agencies.

A Whole-of-Nation approach ensures that the SDGs are at the heart of our policy objectives. Deputy Director (International Agreements) Ms Angeline Chui, Supervising Deputy Director of the MSE 2023 VNR Taskforce, explained, “Environmental sustainability comes under MSE, and Singapore’s engagements at the United Nations are overseen by MFA. But the SDGs cover a much broader range of issues which are beyond the purview of both ministries. That is why

it was necessary to rope in the 30 or so agencies for a comprehensive coverage.”

Many of the IMC-SDG ministries and agencies were familiar with the VNR process, having been part of Singapore’s first VNR in 2018. However, as some time had passed since then, it took some time to get everyone up to speed for the 2023 VNR. Nonetheless, every member was supportive and readily contributed their domain expertise to keep the process on course.

Mr Vivek Ganesh, a foreign service officer and member of the MFA 2023 VNR Taskforce, added, “Working with so many agencies – especially when it came to writing the report – took quite a bit of coordination. But MFA’s good relations with other agencies and experience with interagency work and relations went a long way in mitigating the challenges.”

## Improving the Status Quo

The IMC-SDG was able to build on the experience and



The Inter-Ministry Committee on SDGs comprises members from **33** government ministries and agencies.

learnings from Singapore’s first VNR to enhance the second VNR.

The inaugural VNR outlined Singapore’s sustainability journey since independence. It also included a report of Singapore’s progress on the SDGs, supported by data from across different domain areas, which were collated by the Singapore Department of Statistics (SingStat). The second VNR saw an improvement in Singapore’s SDG data collection.

But data collection is an ongoing challenge. This is because the global SDG indicators often did not apply to Singapore’s unique context as an island city-state without natural resources. “We were unable to report on many indicators as they were not relevant to Singapore. As such, we could not paint an accurate picture of Singapore’s progress in achieving the SDGs through our data reporting,” said Ms Chui. “We managed to address the issue for some indicators by developing qualitative responses. But there were others where more work is necessary. For these, we will continue examining to see how we can report them better for the third VNR.”

## Walking the Talk

One year after the IMC-SDG started the VNR process, Ms Grace Fu, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment delivered Singapore’s second VNR at the 2023 UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development held in New York on 19 July 2023.



In tandem with the HLPF's theme of "Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels", Ms Fu's presentation highlighted the Singapore Green Plan 2030, as well as Singapore's progress for SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17. This included the Four National Taps system to ensure a sustainable water supply, possible pathways to achieve Singapore's net-zero goal and continued innovation on low-carbon solutions.

Ms Fu said, "We have pursued sustainable development since independence, balancing economic development with environmental sustainability. [...] Since then, we have maintained our commitment to build a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive society."<sup>1</sup>

This ongoing commitment is crucial as 2023 marks the halfway point to the 2030 Agenda's deadline. Concluding her presentation at the HLPF, Ms Fu emphasised, "[G]lobal challenges such as climate change require us, as one global community, to work together for global solutions. We must continue to foster international partnerships, to build a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive future that leaves no one behind."



### Did you know?

The HLPF presentation focused on five of the 17 SDGs (6, 7, 9, 11 and 17) selected by the UN. Singapore's VNR Report covered all 17 SDGs.

## VNR 2023: Key SDGs Under Review



### SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation



Ensure diversified water supply through Four National Taps



Large-scale water reclamation with Deep Tunnel Sewerage System



Reduce approximately **90%** of carbon emissions by adopting renewable energy and reducing electricity consumption

### SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy



Accelerate solar deployment



Leverage low-carbon alternatives (e.g. hydrogen)



Investments in natural gas



### SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure



Invest **1%** of GDP in research, innovation and enterprise



Expand rail network by **50%** over the next decade



### SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities



Integrated land-use planning



Increase ratio of electric public buses to **50%** by 2023



Plant **1 million** trees between 2020 and 2030



Share expertise through the Singapore Cooperation Programme



Whole-of-nation implementation of SDGs



### SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals



Keen to find out more about Singapore's progress for the other SDGs? Scan to read the full VNR Report.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mse.gov.sg/resource-room/category/2023-07-19-speech-by-ms-grace-fu-at-the-high-level-political-forum-on-sustainable-development>

Behind the Scenes:

# Voluntary National Review 2023

What was it like putting together a report involving over 30 agencies – for the first time? *Experience Singapore* finds out from the team – the Inter-Ministry Committee on Sustainable Development Goals (IMC-SDG) – behind the VNR.

**Q: What was it like to work on the VNR for the first time?**

**A:** The VNR is a big project. Preparations lasted more than a year and involved many different agencies through multiple phases of work. Fortunately, while it was my first time, it was not Singapore's first VNR, so I was able to learn a lot from the previous team's experience.

For example, I learned from the 2018 VNR Team that they had been overwhelmed as the scale of VNR preparations exceeded their expectations. As such, I proposed forming a VNR Taskforce in MSE, pulling officers from different teams to support the 2023 VNR effort. I am grateful that MSE senior management gave me full support to do this.

I also proposed that Taskforce members have specialised responsibilities based on their expertise. As such, we had policy experts who crafted the VNR report, a communications specialist who worked on publicity, and a speech writer who worked with Minister Grace Fu on her VNR presentation speech. This was important as it helped to raise the overall quality of the 2023 VNR.



**Angeline Chui**  
Supervising Deputy Director,  
Ministry of Sustainability and Environment  
2023 VNR Taskforce

Though the process was long and involved a lot of hard work, it was personally meaningful to be part of the team and see our efforts come to fruition.

**Q: How was it like for the Ministry of Sustainability and Environment (MSE) to co-chair IMC-SDG with Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)?**

**A:** As the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are global goals that span across environmental, economic and social issues,

it was important for MSE and MFA to work together. We co-chaired the IMC-SDG as equal partners, recognising that neither MSE nor MFA could lead the process alone.

It was a very positive collaboration, especially since the MSE and MFA teams that co-chair the IMC-SDG are no strangers to each other. We collaborate on many issues on a weekly, sometimes daily basis, so we already have a strong working dynamic. As co-chairs, we were also able to agree on a common vision



and working arrangements early on. This ensured a smooth-sailing process and we did not have major disagreements throughout the VNR preparations.

The only time I recall a disagreement was when MSE and MFA had different preferences for the design of the VNR publication. This goes to show how well we worked together – our only disagreement was about the look rather than substance of the report!

**Q: Was there anything the team did differently from the first VNR?**

**A:** In recent years, public awareness and interest in sustainability and environmental issues have grown significantly. For the 2023 VNR, we made a conscious effort to communicate our VNR efforts to the general public, to demonstrate our accountability and seriousness in making progress on the SDGs. Communications officers were roped into VNR Taskforce from the very beginning, whereas previously we only tapped on them in an ad-hoc manner.

This year was also the first time we invited a youth representative, Ms Farah Sanwari, to co-deliver the VNR presentation with Minister Grace Fu. By doing so, we wanted to bring across two key messages – first, sustainable development is a whole-of-nation effort, and second, stakeholder engagement is integral to facilitating

partnerships across sectors to co-deliver on our SDGs, in line with SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals.

In the lead up to the VNR, we arranged interviews for Minister Fu and Farah with key media outlets such as CNA, to raise awareness and promote the importance of Singapore's role in the VNR.

We also curated banners on our national sustainability targets and initiatives under the Singapore Green Plan 2030 for display at the UN. This serves to profile our national sustainability roadmap, highlighting Singapore's commitments under the UN 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement to the international community.

**Q: Now that the second VNR has wrapped up, what is next?**

**A:** Even though the next VNR will not happen for another few years, we have already started to look ahead. The IMC-SDG met recently to review learning points from the 2023 VNR and agreed on a few areas of improvement, which we will progressively work on in the next few years. For example, we are working with the IMC-SDG agencies to improve data collection for the SDGs. This will require time, so we are engaging the agencies ahead of time.

I do not know if I will be on the next VNR team – but I am confident that the work that we have done in this VNR as well as the momentum we have generated has provided a good foundation for Singapore's next VNR.

**What other VNR 2023 taskforce members had to say:**

**“Months after the VNR presentation, comments and commendations from other countries are still pouring in. It is gratifying to know that our efforts have not only raised awareness, but also uncovered common grounds which could lead to potential future bilateral cooperation.”**

**Vivek Ganesh**

Foreign Service Officer,  
Member of MFA's 2023 VNR Taskforce

**“One of the key highlights for me was seeing our youth representative, Ms Farah Sanwari, present our VNR together with Minister Fu at the UN. This demonstrates Singapore's commitment to engaging our youth and society to drive collective action as we strive towards net zero by 2050.”**

**Meredith Ng**

Senior Executive (Outreach & Engagement),  
Member of MSE's 2023 VNR Taskforce

**“My day-to-day work revolves around international law, including marine and coastal law. Working on SDG 14 – which is about marine conservation – allowed me to meaningfully contribute my knowledge towards the cause. The opportunity to work on the VNR, and contribute to our efforts on the SDGs, helped put my work into perspective.”**

**Kamalpreet Singh**

Foreign Service Officer,  
Member of MFA's 2023 VNR Taskforce



## Sustainable Alliances: Partnerships for Climate Action

Climate change is a global crisis that cannot be solved by one country alone. Cooperation – both on a national and international scale – is crucial for effective climate action. Singapore's proactive approach towards fostering alliances has engendered positive outcomes for the low-lying city-state.



**L**ow-lying land, land scarcity and lack of natural resources – these are a few of the challenges that Singapore faces. These in turn, have been exacerbated by rising sea levels, increasing rainfall intensity and elevated temperatures. Mr Rueban Manokara, Assistant Director, Global Partnerships, National Climate Change Secretariat, said, “As a small island state, we recognise that we do not have all the solutions, which is why much of our efforts take a collaborative approach – working with academics, corporates, non-governmental organisations and bigger ecosystem players.”

### Advancing Partnerships from Home

Singapore has come a long way in our sustainability efforts since independence, with generous help from partners and friends from all over the world. We have made huge strides in overcoming our challenges such as limited land and scarce resources. To pay it forward, Singapore initiated the Climate Action Package (CAP) in 2018, to share our experiences in addressing climate change issues with fellow developing countries. By the programme's conclusion in 2023, SCP has organised 60

courses for more than 1,500 participants from 130 countries, territories and intergovernmental organisations.

Mr Lim Tian Kuay, then Head of Thought Leadership & International Training of the Singapore Environment Institute, National Environment Agency (NEA), recalled, “The ASEAN Chair in 2018, Singapore launched CAP to support our region's climate change efforts. That was how I came to be developing the CAP programme, including curating the content for five courses, with the intention of developing regional capacity for key areas. We also tapped on the expertise of various government agencies including NEA, National Parks Board, Building and Construction Authority, Energy Market Authority, Land Transport Authority, and Maritime Port Authority of Singapore to cover topics from disaster risk management to green finance.”

The five courses Mr Lim developed under CAP were Environmental Conservation and Sustainability, Managing Coastal Biodiversity Under Urbanisation and Climate Change Pressures, Sustainable Waste Management and Smart

Urbanisation, Clean Energy and Emission Reduction, and Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies.

On the rationale behind the course curation, Mr Lim said, “The lessons we picked up along the way are valuable. Now that we have gone through this journey ourselves, we wanted to share our learnings with other countries. Even if our situations are not exactly the same, there are still many common points where developing countries can adapt and learn from one another's experiences.”

He continued, “One good example would be Semakau Landfill, Singapore's first and only offshore landfill. Land-use optimisation, waste management and biodiversity conservation have not only contributed to its thriving biodiversity, but also transformed Semakau Landfill into a picturesque island. There is much to learn from this achievement and the CAP offered an avenue for us to share our knowledge.”

To continue the progress that we have achieved under the CAP, a three-year Sustainability Action Package (SAP) was launched at



the Singapore Cooperation Programme's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 25 October 2023 to succeed the CAP.

The SAP adopts a broad focus on sustainability and is consistent with the Singapore Green Plan 2030, Singapore's whole-of-nation effort to achieve its sustainable development goals that was announced in February 2021. SAP themes such as low carbon development, and green project management and financing also align with the Plan's five pillars – City in Nature, Sustainable Living, Energy Reset, Green Economy and Resilient Future. In addition, SAP covers other topics like consumption, clean energy and coastal protection, which shares Singapore's best practices, from both the public and private sector, on sustainability issues.



#### Did you know?

Read more about the Sustainability Action Package (SAP) on page 10.

### Taking Collaborations Beyond Borders

At the recent COP28 – United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Dubai, Singapore reaffirmed our commitment to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 and reduce emissions to 60 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030. However, limited land area, low wind speeds, slow-flowing rivers and urban density render Singapore

an alternative energy-disadvantaged country.

Nonetheless, that does not stop Singapore from introducing more renewable sources into our energy mix. In June 2022, Singapore began importing renewable electricity from Laos in a two-year pilot – setting the stage for similar agreements in future. Discussions are also underway with countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam for similar low-carbon electricity imports.

In addition to decarbonising the electricity grid with renewables, Singapore is also taking steps to mitigate carbon emissions – including being the first country in Southeast Asia to implement a carbon tax in 2019. The tax is levied on facilities that emit at least 25,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually.

From 2024, these taxable companies will be able to tap on high-quality international carbon credits to offset up to 5% of their taxable emissions. Carbon credits offer an alternative pathway to decarbonisation, especially for companies with hard-to-abate emissions. To facilitate this, Singapore has signed Memorandums of Understanding, or is in advanced stages of discussion, with over 20 countries in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia.

Additionally, Singapore entered into a partnership with the International Emissions Trading Association and World Bank in 2022 to launch the Climate Action



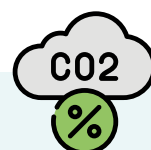
Starting from 2024, companies can offset up to

**5%**

of taxable emissions using high-quality international carbon credits.

Data Trust. The aim is to strengthen the nascent carbon markets and international carbon credit trade. Mr Manokara said, “We may not be the largest player in the market but there are opportunities for us to play an outsized role. We are taking an active approach in helping set up standards and frameworks through our representation in international organisations such as ICAO and the UNFCCC Article 6.4 Supervisory Body.”

Singapore is not stopping there – with ambitions to become a carbon services and trading hub. Mr Manokara continued, “Much has been said about Singapore's challenges – but here is where we have many distinct advantages. Our open economy, our position as a financial and professional services hub, and proximity to carbon credit sources in Southeast Asia – all put us on good footing in our aspirations.”



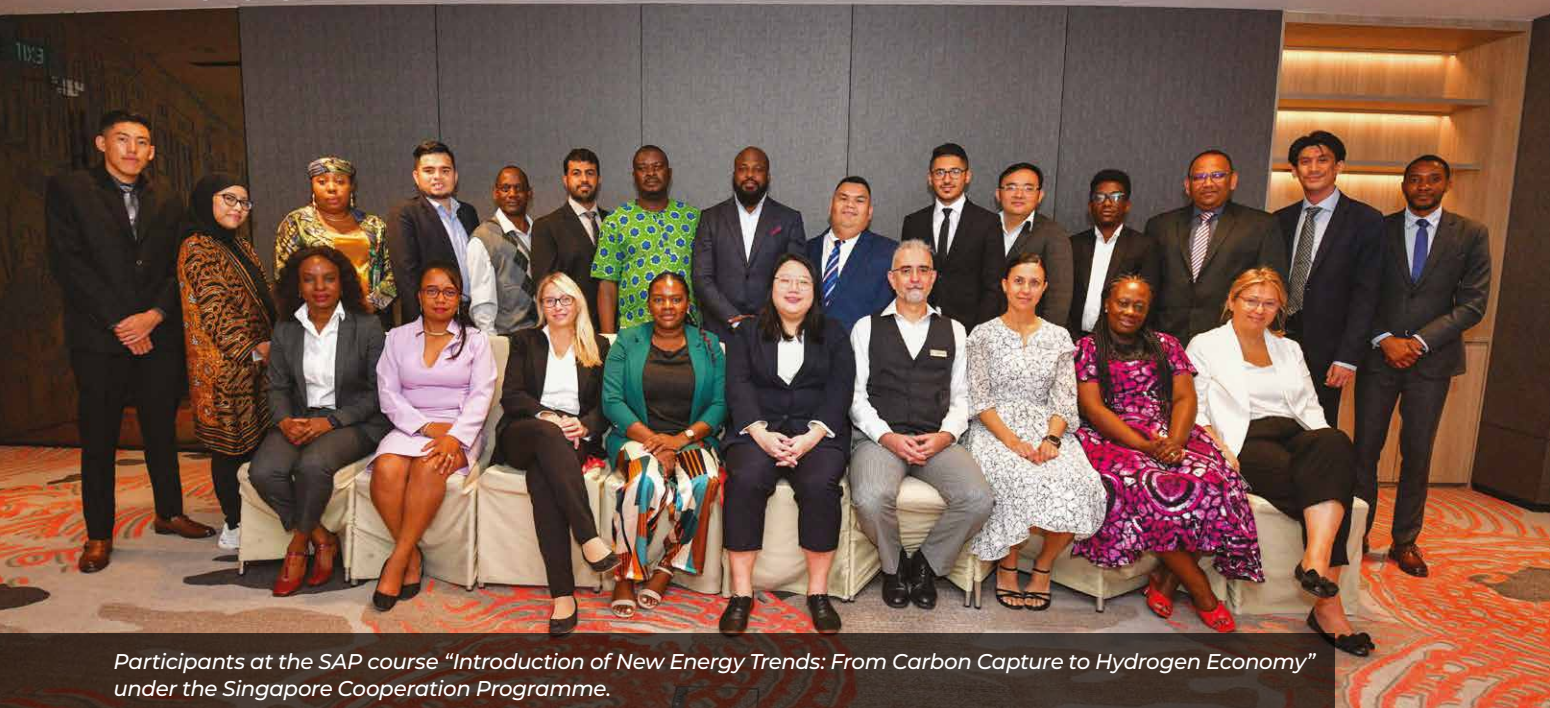
### Carbon Credits Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for offset of taxable carbon emissions, the carbon credits should come from countries with standing implementation agreements and comply with the seven principles of the International Carbon Credits (ICC) Framework:

- ☒ Not double-counted
- ☒ Additional
- ☒ Real
- ☒ Quantified and verified
- ☒ Permanent
- ☒ No net harm
- ☒ No leakage

Read more!





Participants at the SAP course "Introduction of New Energy Trends: From Carbon Capture to Hydrogen Economy" under the Singapore Cooperation Programme.

## Sustainability Matters:

# From Shared Experience to Collective Action

With increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events, it is clear – there is urgency for the world to take decisive action on climate change. For a low-lying city island like Singapore, regional partnerships and global collaboration are integral to our sustainability agenda.

**A**t the recent COP28 summit held in Dubai, Singapore reaffirmed our commitment to promote knowledge sharing and mutual learning among countries through the Sustainability Action Package (SAP) under our Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP).

### A Broad Focus on Sustainability

Launched on 25 October 2022 by Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan at the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the SCP, the SAP builds on the foundation of the

Climate Action Package to support the sustainability and climate change capacity-building needs of developing countries. Dr Balakrishnan said, "In line with our support for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Singapore will continue to share our experience in areas of interest with developing countries."

Through a suite of sustainability-themed courses, the SAP offers a platform for countries to share knowledge and exchange new ideas on issues such as building resilience for water

### Sustainability Action Package at a Glance

(as of December 2023)



Launched on  
**25 October 2022**



Runs for 3 years  
from **2023 – 2026**



Preceded by the  
**Climate Action Package (2018 – 2023)**



Hosted **220** government officials from **over 65** countries, territories, and intergovernmental organisations (between Apr to Dec 2023)

resources and food security, developing low carbon and sustainable infrastructure, and managing carbon markets. Relevant case studies and site visits included in the course programmes will also provide participants with first-hand experience on how Singapore integrates these sustainable solutions into its green projects. Besides the capacity-building programmes, the SAP also sponsors longer-term advisory projects in the region which are aimed at deepening capabilities on sustainability. From April to December 2023, 220 officials from over 65 countries, territories, and intergovernmental organisations have benefitted from these courses.

### Sharing Experiences

At the course “Introduction of New Energy Trends: From Carbon Capture to Hydrogen Economy” that was held in Singapore between 16 to 20 October 2023, 25 participants from 19 countries engaged in discussions on global energy trends, carbon capture and hydrogen economy. They visited the Sembcorp Tengeh Floating Solar Farm – one of the largest inland floating solar systems in the world – and saw first-hand how the solar farm’s operations contribute towards Singapore’s energy sustainability.

Ms Ishuna Niita Amakutsi, Deputy Director, Energy Funds Department, Ministry of Mines and Energy, Namibia, was one of the participants. This is the first SAP course that Ms Niita has attended. Sharing her experience, she

**“I would like to thank the Singapore Cooperation Programme for organising the training and opening it up to countries to participate. The power of being able to share knowledge and discuss topics relevant to our countries’ situation is helpful and inspiring. I would encourage others to join the courses.”**

#### Ms Ishuna Niita Amakutsi

Deputy Director, Energy Funds Department, Ministry of Mines and Energy, Namibia



**25**

participants from

**19**

countries took part in the SAP course “Introduction of New Energy Trends: From Carbon Capture to Hydrogen Economy”.

said, “The course was well-curated and highly relevant to my area of work. Particularly, the experts’ sharing about Bangladesh’s success story on energy access caught my attention. Like Bangladesh, Namibia faced similar challenges in ensuring universal access to electricity services in rural areas – so we could really learn from some of their lessons.”

Ms Niita continued, “Not forgetting, topics like carbon markets, clean cooking and green hydrogen are also very interesting for Namibia. These are areas that we would like to learn more about and explore how we can apply to



our situation. Another notable highlight for me was the site visit to the Sembcorp Tengeh Floating Solar Farm. I was fascinated by how Singapore was able to overcome land space constraints with an innovative solution to generate 60 megawatt-peak capacity.

“I have gained much insights from the course – and I am excited to share what I have learnt with my colleagues and apply some of these lessons to benefit Namibia. On a personal level, this course mentally prepared me for my studies in Sustainable Energy Management in the upcoming months.”

### 4 Fun Facts about Sembcorp Tengeh Floating Solar Farm



**Powers 5**  
local water  
treatment  
plants



**Reduces carbon**  
emissions equivalent  
to taking **7,000** cars  
off the road



**Offsets about 7% of**  
Singapore’s annual  
energy needs



**Powers about**  
**16,000** four-room  
apartments

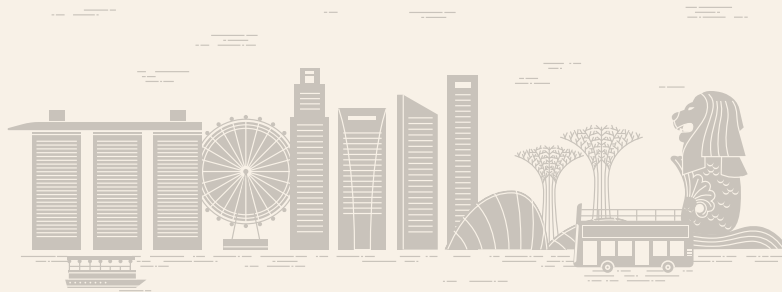


Find out more about  
upcoming SAP and other  
sustainability-focused  
courses!





# SCP Calendar



Start	End	Course
4-Mar-24	8-Mar-24	Aircraft Accident Investigation Management
4-Mar-24	8-Mar-24	Public-Private Partnership in Development of Infrastructure Projects
<b>4-Mar-24</b>	<b>8-Mar-24</b>	<b>Sustainable Integrated Water Resources Management</b> 
4-Mar-24	15-Mar-24	Search and Rescue Administrators
11-Mar-24	15-Mar-24	Industry 4.0 and Innovation Management
11-Mar-24	15-Mar-24	Strategic Leadership and Public Governance
<b>18-Mar-24</b>	<b>22-Mar-24</b>	<b>Building Smart and Sustainable Cities</b> 
18-Mar-24	22-Mar-24	Healthcare Management



Sustainability  
Action Package

**Download SCP Calendar**



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