
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Seventh Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

Bangkok, 20 May 2020

Item 2 of the provisional agenda*

**Regional perspectives on accelerating progress on the
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

**Updates on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development at the subregional level****

Summary

Five subregional preparatory events for the Seventh Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development were organized between August and December 2019, in the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) region, to discuss progress on implementation of the 2030 Agenda with a subregional perspective. More than 500 government officials and other stakeholders participated in these consultations, focusing on unlocking the means of implementation to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as national achievements and challenges with respect to the Voluntary National Reviews. Participants in the consultations also provided their perspectives on the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development theme “Accelerating action on and delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific”. This information document provides updates on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the five ESCAP subregions.

I. Introduction

1. ESCAP resolution 72/6 on ‘Committing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific’ requests the Executive Secretary of ESCAP to “promote the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development and provide annual updates and recommendations to member States, including through the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development”. In addition, ESCAP resolution 73/1, which outlines the forms and functions of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, indicates that it “may consider subregional perspectives on the themes addressed by the Forum”.

2. This document aims to inform participants of the Seventh Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development on subregional perspectives of the theme of the Seventh APFSD “Accelerating action and delivery of the 2030 Agenda

* ESCAP/RFSD/2020/L.1/Rev.1.

** This document is being issued without formal editing.

in Asia and the Pacific” as discussed during the subregional consultations organized on 21–22 August 2019 in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan; on 3–4 October 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand; on 15–16 October 2019 in Vladivostok, Russian Federation; on 21–22 October 2019 in Apia, Samoa; and on 8–9 December 2019 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. More than 500 government officials and other stakeholders participated in these consultations.

3. The document is structured by subregion. Each chapter provides a brief background of the subregion in focus, and discusses national achievements and challenges with respect to the 2030 Agenda with specific focus to the voluntary national reviews reporting. Finally, it explores selected subregional actions for accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

II. South-East Asia

Subregional background

4. South-East Asia is a highly diverse region consisting of 11 countries¹ that registered a total population of 624.6 million in 2014. Income and wealth are highly disparate as two of the wealthiest (Brunei and Singapore) and two of the poorest (Cambodia and East Timor) countries in the world are found in the subregion. The subregion’s gross domestic product (GDP) has been growing fast and was placed at USD 2.5 trillion in 2014. The GDPs per capita wildly vary, ranging from 1,100 for Cambodia to USD 41,000 for Brunei and USD 56,300 for Singapore. There is much good news about the subregion but mostly in the economic front. The social, environmental, political and other dimensions are not as dynamic and need priority attention.² South-East Asia was the most successful subregion in Asia and the Pacific in terms of Millennium Development Goals achievement, despite its mixed performance.³ Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and indeed the wider 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will require comprehensive actions at the global, regional and subregional levels.

A. National achievements and challenges with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the voluntary national reviews

5. With the exception of Myanmar, all countries in the subregion will have submitted their voluntary national reviews by 2020. Brunei Darussalam will be presenting its first voluntary national review in 2020. Cambodia and Timor-Leste did so in 2019 along with Indonesia and Philippines who presented for the second time. Varying progress and approaches in implementing the 2030 Agenda and preparation of the voluntary national reviews were presented at the Third South-East Asia Forum on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2019 as described below.

6. In its implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Cambodia has adopted a whole of government approach. The country’s Voluntary National Review report highlights the establishment of institutions and mechanisms, efforts to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals within the National Strategic Development Plan 2019–2023 and public budgeting, and Sustainable

¹ Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; Indonesia; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Myanmar; Philippines; Singapore; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Viet Nam.

² Source: Southeast Asia Subregion Challenges and Priorities for Sustainable Development Goal Implementation, ESCAP.

³ Source: Asia-Pacific Regional MDG’s Report 2014/15, ESCAP-ADB-UNDP.

Development Goal advocacy and citizen engagement. At the Forum, specific challenges to Sustainable Development Goal implementation were discussed such as insufficient data, lack of awareness amongst stakeholders, weak integration into policy and planning systems at sub-national levels and limited finances.

7. Indonesia in its second voluntary national review report noted improvements in the areas of economic growth, education, climate action and disaster management, access to justice and inclusive institutions, innovations in development financing along with inclusive national processes and strategic partnership building. At the Forum, improved inclusion of disable groups during the country's second voluntary national review consultations was strongly highlighted. Challenges discussed were primarily around limited finances and quality of data. The proposed way forward includes sustaining economic growth, advancing bureaucratic reforms, strengthening connectivity and continuing to innovate around Sustainable Development Goal financing.

8. Since its first voluntary national review in 2018, Lao People's Democratic Republic has taken several follow up actions in its achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The country has integrated the Sustainable Development Goals into its 8th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan and is preparing to further integrate and localize the Sustainable Development Goals by streamlining it into the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021-2025. Lao People's Democratic Republic has set up a national Sustainable Development Goal steering committee and Sustainable Development Goal focal points across relevant ministries and has prepared a Sustainable Development Goal roadmap. Challenges discussed included limited finances for Sustainable Development Goal implementation, capacity and awareness gaps, lack of buy-in from government officials and data scarcity.

9. While the Philippines' first voluntary national review in 2016 took a whole of government approach, its second voluntary national review in 2019 took a whole of society approach to emphasize the synergies between government and non-government actions. The country has mainstreamed the Sustainable Development Goals in the Philippine Development Plan and other regional development and sectoral plans. Furthermore, the Philippines aims to establish a subcommittee on the Sustainable Development Goals which will provide a platform to link planning and budgeting to ensure that Sustainable Development Goals-supporting programmes and projects are adequately funded. This subcommittee is also expected to strengthen stakeholder engagement and direct civil society and private sector actions to complement national Sustainable Development Goal implementation efforts.

10. Thailand's voluntary national review follow up efforts has seen the establishment of the National Committee on Sustainable Development and three separate task forces on the Sustainable Development Goals. At the Forum, stakeholder engagement was highlighted as a guiding principle for the Thai voluntary national review and in the future, communities will be engaged further. Challenges discussed were primarily around data and statistics. Feedback was also provided on the United Nations Secretary General's common reporting guidelines not being holistic enough to capture the cross-cutting nature of the Sustainable Development Goals.

11. Timor-Leste presented its first voluntary national review in 2019 and at the Forum shared national examples of policy coherence and cooperation across different levels of government. Data quality, Sustainable Development

Goals nationalization and monitoring resource allocation were identified as some of the key challenges.

12. Finally, Viet Nam has established an intersectoral task force for the Sustainable Development Goals. Additionally, an increasing number of ministries and provincial governments are issuing Sustainable Development Goal Action Plans. The country is also developing guidelines for monitoring and evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the importance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for this purpose was recognized at the Forum.

B. Selected actions for accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals

13. The Forum explored specific actions around four themes to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the subregion. They are as follows.

14. On the theme of disaster risk reduction and climate change, it was discussed that by managing increasingly complex risks, countries can positively contribute to a cluster of interconnected Sustainable Development Goals. Technological innovation and scientific advancement, infrastructure investment, big data, and information availability and mass awareness were identified as accelerators of risk reduction. Several initiatives from the subregion were identified to advance progress on this theme such as microfinancing in Indonesia, community outreach and voluntary fundraising through social media in Lao People's Democratic Republic, indigenous schools to promote local practices and innovation in the Philippines, community adaptation plans in Thailand, voluntary carbon trading scheme in Timor-Leste and institutions such as the National Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change in Viet Nam. Poor community awareness, time constraints, weak institutional arrangements for long-term financing, absent or complicated legal frameworks, and poor support from the central government were identified as common challenges.

15. On the theme of leaving no one behind, appropriate use of disaggregated data and social protection were identified as key drivers of Sustainable Development Goal acceleration in the subregion. Targeted initiatives focusing on availability, quality and continuity of data such as those from Cambodia and the Philippines were highlighted as promising examples of advancing progress. Partnerships and social dialogue between different stakeholders were identified to be crucial for empowering and promoting leadership amongst those at risk of being left behind. The need for additional financial resources for education and health in the CLM countries was also discussed. In this regard, participants considered the need to strengthen tax administrations and enhance tax revenues. Credit unions and microfinancing schemes were found to be important in supporting the empowerment of marginalized groups. Participants at the Forum suggested the idea of creating an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bank to further support the financing of social protection services in the subregion.

16. On the theme of connectivity, the ASEAN model of visa-free movement, and transportation associations and their contribution to the interchange of goods as well as the digitization of the supply chain were highlighted as key accelerators of the Sustainable Development Goals in the subregion. Improving land connectivity through the development of new and maintenance of existing roads were found to hold great potential for Myanmar and Lao People's Democratic Republic. Participants also discussed "dynamic"

and “static” infrastructure with the former allowing for benefits to be enjoyed by communities across borders.

17. On the theme of natural resource management, support for sustainable consumption and production practices in Indonesia, land protection measures in the Philippines and engagement of forest farmers in Thailand were identified as good examples of accelerating progress. To protect the environment from pollution and damage, the Government of Indonesia has implemented regulatory measures that require businesses to apply Environmental Management System in all activities. In the Philippines, as part of its Sustainable Development Goal implementation efforts, the government has a programme in place that regulates land usage for farmers living in forest areas. In Thailand, farmers living in forest areas are trained on the need for environmental conservation and on alternative business models that do not limit their economic activities too much. Common challenges faced by these initiatives were limited finances, poor community awareness and resistance, and absence of necessary frameworks or roadmaps.

C. Conclusions

18. Though South-East Asia is ahead in some of the Sustainable Development Goals compared to other subregions, the development pace needs to be accelerated if the 2030 Agenda is to be met on time. As a way forward in addressing the insufficient progress made, the Forum highlighted the need to strengthen the Science, Technology, and Innovation Framework, including enhancing scientific policies with the creation of Science, Technology, and Innovation roadmaps; strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships and enhance Sustainable Development Goal accountability through the engagement of civil society organizations, parliamentarians, audit institutions, trade unions etc.; and promote private sector initiatives that utilize bottom-up financing and do not require government interventions.

III. East and North-East Asia

Subregional background

19. The East and North-East Asia (ENEA) subregion, comprising China (including Hong Kong, China; and Macau, China), the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation, covers an area accounting for more than half the total land area of the ESCAP region. The population of the ENEA subregion alone is over 1.7 billion or a quarter of the global population. The ENEA as a group is the strongest economic subregion in Asia and the Pacific, with four member countries among the world’s 12 largest economies.

20. While wealthier than other subregions, the ENEA subregion sees a large income disparity within and among countries. In addition, despite significant achievements of socio-economic development across the subregion, challenges remain in reaching many who are still left behind. For instance, there are still deep pockets of people in poverty despite a significant reduction in the poverty rate. People with disability in the subregion face higher disparity in poverty incidents, access to education and employment. In addition, demographic shift potentially increases the poverty among the elderly population, as the subregion holds fastest growing (Republic of Korea), largest pool (China), and highest rate (Japan) of ageing population in the world.

21. Its advances in socio-economic development have also been at the cost of environmental sustainability. Increasing its resource efficiency and decarbonizing its energy system and economy together with a rapid change in demographic structure, are posing serious challenges for the subregion.

A. National achievements and challenges with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the voluntary national reviews

22. All the countries will have submitted their voluntary national review by 2020. China (2016), Japan (2017), Republic of Korea (2016), Mongolia (2019) have submitted its first voluntary national review, while Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation plan to do so in 2020. Varying progress and approaches in implementing the 2030 Agenda are presented at the Forum.

23. China's National Plan on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda is in line with the 2030 Agenda and its 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development. China's key achievements include poverty reduction through targeted approach; fight against corruption, as well as environment protection through, for instance, low carbon development and investment in energy. The targeted approach helped rural poverty reduction from 55.75 million (2015) to 16.6 million (2018). Remaining challenges include pockets of deep poverty and the need to strengthen the safety-net function. China also pursue the concept of green development and international cooperation.

24. Democratic People's Republic of Korea developed its national Sustainable Development Goals, combining the global Sustainable Development Goals and the National Economic Development Strategy (2016-2020). For voluntary national review preparation, the Government established National Task Force under the cabinet in 2018, supported by 6 technical committees. Central Bureau of Statistics is tasked with assessment of the progress. The voluntary national review will be based on the national statistics and results of health and nutrition surveys. The national Sustainable Development Goal⁴ Goal 1 and 2 are amongst the top priorities. Goal 7 is off-track with challenges for increasing renewable energy due to lack of technology, capacity and funds. Capacity building and collaboration with international communities are vital in such area as natural disaster risks (Goal 11) and climate change (Goal 13).

25. The Government of Japan established the Sustainable Development Goal Promotion Headquarter in 2016, followed by the development of Sustainable Development Goal Implementation Guiding Principles and Sustainable Development Goal Action Plans which have evolved into Expanded Sustainable Development Goal Action Plan 2019. The Plan is developed in line with Japan's Sustainable Development Goal Model which focuses on (i) promotion of Society 5.0, including science, technology and innovation for Sustainable Development Goals; (ii) regional revitalization driven by the Sustainable Development Goals; and (iii) empowerment of the next generation and women. The Principles issued in 2016 is revised in 2019, aiming to reflect views of a wide range of stakeholders.

⁴ National Sustainable Development Goal Goal 1. Improving people's living standard; Goal 2. Sustainable development of agriculture, self-sufficiency of food; Goal 7: Ensure access to reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; Goal 11: Ensure living conditions and environment for more affluent and civilised life; Goal 13: Combat climate change and its impacts (Source: Presentation by Democratic People's Republic of Korea official at the Forum 2019).

26. Mongolia is an early adopter of the Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainable Development Vision 2030 approved in 2016 spells out its long-term strategy to achieve sustainable development with democratic governance. The Government also aligned medium and short-term policies with the Sustainable Development Goals. While classified as a medium-low income country and with high human development, Mongolia is vulnerable to external factors. Despite the achievement in poverty reduction, disparities are growing in various front, including poverty and inequality, social service delivery and opportunities for decent work. Coherent policies and institutional coordination also remain the challenge in achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

27. Republic of Korea's 3rd National Basic Plan for Sustainable Development (2016–2035) is coherent with the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals. The government developed Korea's national Sustainable Development Goals in 2018 with its own set of targets and indicators reflecting domestic and local situation. The process of Korea's national Sustainable Development Goals development involved engagement with various stakeholders and consultation with line ministries. To support other countries, policies of international development cooperation also reflect the Sustainable Development Goals. Assessment of its Sustainable Development Goal progress is mixed, according to National Sustainable Development Report 2018. Achievements in several goals are regressing, including zero hunger (Goal 2), sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12), water and sanitation (Goal 6), gender equality (Goal 5).

28. In the Russian Federation, the Analytical Center, Foreign Ministry and the Federal State Statistics Service play key roles in coordination and preparation of voluntary national review. Thematic Working Groups for each Sustainable Development Goal consists of representatives of federal government bodies, public and expert organizations, and the business community. The draft report will be discussed at a series of public discussions to incorporate the views of various stakeholders. The government is also developing Sustainable Development Goal indicators and reporting system. The Presidential Decree on National Goals and Strategic Objectives for the Period up to 2024, issued in 2018, identifies 12 national priority areas critical to ensure sustainable development.

B. Selected actions for accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals

29. Data and technologies: Appropriate use of the latest technology would help the involvement of multi-stakeholders including the private sector in achieving Sustainable Development Goals. For example, in western China, the use of technology and e-commerce helped to reduce poverty through private company's support for farmers to sell melons online. In Republic of Korea, mobile phone company developed smartphone application for Sustainable Development Goal through which people can donate money to United Nations Development Programme.

30. Knowledge and technologies can also increase resilience to disasters. For example, early warning for *zud* (severe winter conditions) in Mongolia helped people to be better prepared in saving livestock. Dissemination of hazard map in Japan, involving various stakeholders including local government and communities, raised the awareness of the public for emergency evacuation. Dissemination of disaster information through mobile phone in Republic of Korea has enabled faster information sharing in multiple languages.

31. Institutional infrastructure for disaster management and data is also crucial for building a resilient society. For example, Democratic People's Republic of Korea established State Committee for Emergency and Disaster Management. Consequently, the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction has been adopted and disaster management database was created for better management of flood risks, although disaster database is yet to cover the entire country.

32. Multi-stakeholder participation: It ensures inclusive and accelerated implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. Coherent government engagement is required for both vertical and horizontal directions, i.e., both national and local levels, and across various ministries and departments. Awareness-raising and a better understanding of Sustainable Development Goals are required, particularly for local governments. More extensive engagement of academia and private sectors will also fill the remaining gap in "ensuring equality" in policies and in the society. The academia can increase the awareness and the academic enquiry on Sustainable Development Goals, as seen in recent increase in published articles on Sustainable Development Goals. Some view that the private sector is also increasingly keen to engage in Sustainable Development Goals and collaborate with the government, although there are gaps in how they understand the Sustainable Development Goals.

33. Countries have or are trying to involve multi-stakeholders in voluntary national review and other Sustainable Development Goal initiatives. For instance, Mongolia's VNR preparation includes national working group involving about 30 civil society organizations. In the Republic of Korea, the civil society organizations engagement led to setting up of public forums organized by relevant ministries.

34. Finance: Compared to other subregions, the financial needs to implement the Sustainable Development Goals in East and Northeast Asia are relatively modest. It is important, however, that enough financial resources are channeled to the most needed areas, including urban infrastructure and services, and action on climate. While at the national level, the allocation of financial resources is influenced by political decisions and the country's power structure, local government can take initiatives to enhance financing for their urban development and climate goals, including through the provision of tax incentives to investors.

35. Donors of development assistance should see how to strengthen "vertical" coordination – among developed and developing countries – although such discussion has currently stalled as Common But Differentiated Responsibilities has become too political. The international community may explore upgraded Common But Differentiated Responsibilities 2 which are acceptable for both developed and developing countries. Developing countries also need to set their goals for their own financial resource mobilization.

36. Building awareness: Awareness and understanding of Sustainable Development Goal among the general public is still insufficient. For instance, in countries like Japan and Republic of Korea, people often perceive Sustainable Development Goals as an international affair rather than the challenges in their own countries. Also, in China, the public has yet to become familiar with the term Sustainable Development Goal.

37. Lack of priorities and financial resources allocated for those left behind partly reflect the lack of understanding and awareness of the problems. For example, wheel-chair accessible buildings reflect lack of understanding of

the problems, rather than financial resources *per se*. Involving various stakeholders from the designing stage of the building may enable to build accessible infrastructure with less costs.

C. Conclusions

38. All the countries in the subregion have made an explicit commitment to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. All the governments will have completed their voluntary national review by the end of 2020, making conscious efforts to align their national strategies with Sustainable Development Goals, establish institutional framework to promote Sustainable Development Goal, and engage stakeholders in the discourses of Sustainable Development Goal implementation in the country.

39. The subregion is ahead of progress in many development indicators such as no poverty, no hunger, access to education, and is making steady progress in access to basic needs such as clean water, sanitation, and clean energy. However, behind the progress, the subregion faces the challenges to move away from resource-intensive, environmentally degrading pattern of economic growth as well as to accelerate its efforts to ensure no one is left behind in the socio-economic progress they have achieved so far.

40. The Forum highlighted involvement and engagement of multi-stakeholders as an effective strategy to accelerate Sustainable Development Goal implementation with leaving one behind. It will offer the opportunity to mobilize available human and financial resources, share experiences, and ensure that voices of vulnerable and deprived population are taken into account in designing and implementing policies and programmes.

IV. South and South-West Asia

Subregional background

41. Despite its economic dynamism, South Asia subregion remains critical to global achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, with a disproportionate one third share of all people living in extreme poverty and hunger. Sustainable Development Goals provide a unique opportunity to South Asia for eradicating hunger and poverty and provide a life of dignity to all within a generation. South Asia is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and natural disasters. The subregion suffers from wide gender gaps and other aspects of human development, poor productive capacities, inadequate decent employment opportunities, and insufficient access to affordable energy. Despite being a continuous landmass, South Asia has not been able to harness the potential of regional economic cooperation, due to poor transport connectivity and facilitation at the borders. Three out of four least developed countries of South Asia are in a process of graduation in coming years that will bring additional challenges.

A. National achievements and challenges with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the voluntary national reviews

42. Except for Islamic Republic of Iran, all the countries in the subregion have submitted their voluntary national reviews by 2019. Bangladesh, India and Nepal will do their second voluntary national review in 2020. The progress and approaches in implementing the 2030 agenda summarized below are based on the discussions at the third South Asia Forum on Sustainable Development Goals held in Dhaka on 8–9 December 2019.

43. Afghanistan has made efforts towards nationalization and contextualization of Sustainable Development Goals from 2016 onwards. A high-level Sustainable Development Goal Executive Committee serviced by the Sustainable Development Goal Secretariat has been established under the Council of Ministers. 110 local targets and 177 indicators have been identified and aligned with Sustainable Development Goals while 41 indicators could not be aligned on account of non-availability of data. The second phase (2020–2030) will be the decade of actions towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals including national budget to have Sustainable Development Goal component. Afghanistan is also integrating Sustainable Development Goals with the national budget and programmes. The main challenges are resource mobilization, accelerating economic growth, access to technology and meaningful market access.

44. Bangladesh has aligned Sustainable Development Goals with the 7th Five Year Plan (2016–20), with a strong ownership of Sustainable Development Goals by the top leadership and establishment of Sustainable Development Goal Coordination Office within the Prime Minister’s Office. The government has set up National Data Coordination Committee to address the data gaps and Monitoring and Evaluation framework has been established with 5-yearly milestones and Sustainable Development Goals have been localized at the districts and sub-districts levels. The progress is on track on poverty reduction, government spending on health, education and social protection, access to electricity, improving child health, political empowerment of women, manufacturing sector led growth, increasing per capita GDP and access to information and communications technology (ICT) is increasing. Bangladesh is facing bigger challenges in terms of resource mobilization (an amount of USD 95.8 billion is needed), attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), skill development and quality education, strengthening international development cooperation and building effective partnerships, natural disasters and climate change mitigation. Over 1.1 million Rohingya refugees and Sustainable Development Goals localization are other challenges.

45. Bhutan has aligned its 12th Five Year Plan (2019–23) with Sustainable Development Goals and has integrated Sustainable Development Goals at national, sub-national and local levels’ key result areas. Bhutan has been successful in reducing income poverty and multidimensional poverty, addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, good progress was made on education, health, environment and economic growth. Despite the economy growing at 7.5 per cent over last few decades, it faces problems of economic diversification, youth unemployment, market access etc. The new challenge that it faces relates to graduation from least developed countries by 2023 and thus Bhutan is looking forward to technical assistance on sustainable graduation, financing for development, for attracting FDI inflows and for harnessing Public Private Partnerships.

46. India has aligned all ministries, programmes and schemes to Sustainable Development Goal targets, developed a national indicator framework, developed Sustainable Development Goal India Index for periodic ranking of States and Union Territories in terms of Sustainable Development Goal performance, and has operationalized half-yearly review mechanism with States/UTs. As per the Sustainable Development Goal India Index, India is on track in four Goals (8,10,15 and 16) out of the 13 Goals, for which data is available, on 5 Goals (1, 3, 4, 6 and 7) the performance is average and for 4 Goals (2, 5, 9 and 11), the performance was not satisfactory. There are three Goals (12,13 and 14) where adequate data is not available representing all the

States and union territories. India has identified the focus areas which include, Sustainable Development Goal financing, enhancing spending efficiency and rationalization of spending, assessing fiscal sustainability and space, engaging the private sector, strengthening data systems, leveraging science, technology and innovation to leave no one behind and use science, technology and innovation platforms to promote entrepreneurship and business development.

47. Maldives incorporated Sustainable Development Goals into 5 Year Island Development Plan (2017–21) to be implemented by the Island Councils. It took several actions in 2018 towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals which included Rapid Integrated Assessment for identifying the National Priority, Communication Strategy and Sustainable Development Goals Baseline report was finalized. In 2019 Maldives incorporated the Sustainable Development Goals into the government Strategic Plans and the 8th National Development Plan. The current challenges in achieving Sustainable Development Goals are in the form of lack of coordination and poor inter-agency collaboration, low capacity of agencies, financing for development and data collection and processing. Localization and prioritization of Sustainable Development Goals, increasing the role of civil society organizations, private sector and academia, strengthening data, financing for development and costing of Sustainable Development Goals are important areas of work in future.

48. Nepal has mainstreamed Sustainable Development Goals in its 14th and 15th Plans and Sustainable Development Goal coding has been introduced in annual budget/projects. Initiatives for localization of Sustainable Development Goals have also been taken through preparation of guidelines, capacity development, assisting in preparing results framework at sub-national levels. Baseline indicators for provinces and manual for localization has been prepared. Nepal requires an amount of USD 19 billion per annum to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Nepal has developed the financial strategies which include reorienting investments towards Sustainable Development Goals, formulating investment friendly laws, mobilize internal resources through tax reforms, using ICT in revenue collection, attracting FDI and using public–private partnership models for Sustainable Development Goal financing, etc. Nepal is facing challenges relating to resource generation, mainstreaming and localization of Sustainable Development Goals, lack of disaggregated data, capacity constraint and weak governance, monitoring and evaluation, and coordination.

49. Pakistan has included Sustainable Development Goals in its planning and programmes at national, provincial and local levels. National Economic Council has been established which is headed by the Prime Minister, Sustainable Development Goal Secretariat has been established in National Parliament to support the members of Parliament on Sustainable Development Goals. Pakistan has carried out a Constitutional amendment to transfer powers from the Federal government to Provincial Governments on social sector to implement the Sustainable Development Goals more successfully. The National Development Goals have identified the Sustainable Development Goal priorities and their implementation. Through identification of priority areas using seven criteria, target mapping in terms of short, medium, and long-term plans have been carried out.

50. Sri Lanka has created a Task Force, chaired by Secretary (Sustainable Development Goals). The Sustainable Development Council along with stakeholders is engaged in three main activities which include preparations of National Policy and Strategy on Sustainable Development with national targets; Sustainable Development Goal mainstreamed Public Service Delivery

Strategies for all Ministries including Departments and Statutory boards; and development of a Digital Data and Communication Platform to facilitate evidence based decision making, Sustainable Development Goal progress tracking and stakeholder engagement. A Cabinet memorandum has also been issued by the Government expressing the commitment for Sustainable Development Goals by all departments and agencies.

B. Selected actions for accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals

51. Leaving no one behind: Despite receding poverty in South Asia, inequality has increased, there are challenges relating to lack of disaggregated data, mainstreaming of vulnerable groups, lack of connectivity and weak human resources. To accelerate the progress of Sustainable Development Goals, actions need to be taken with a strong coordination between government and multiple stakeholders. The countries need to strengthen social security measures, promote gender sensitivity, promote use of digital technology to address the connectivity and health concerns. Judicial reforms, identifying vulnerable groups and creating disaggregate data for minority groups and decentralizing of governance, dedicate institutional arrangements for poverty also need to be addressed to accelerate implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.

52. Disaster risk reduction and resilience: South Asia is highly vulnerable natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, droughts, cyclones, which have led to loss of lives and hampered development. The negative effects of disasters are more severe on women, child and other vulnerable groups of the society. Hence, they tend to widen inequalities. To accelerate the process, steps need to be taken for reserving separate funds for emergency, establishing rescue teams and a better network of early warning systems. To make South Asia a disaster resilient subregion, a strong political will and commitment will be important which can pave the way for a strong regional cooperation given the increasingly transboundary nature of disasters. Member States recommended that, to harness emerging solutions in a rapid manner, the South Asia Hydromet Forum should contribute to the South Asia Forum on Sustainable Development Goals by establishing institutional linkages and evolving an action plan to enhance and implement disaster and climate resilience measures.

53. Global environmental commons and climate change: There is not enough recognition of transboundary nature of problems relating to climate change and environmental commons as they continue to be confined at a national level. For accelerating Sustainable Development Goals, actions at regional level through regional cooperation must be taken including building strong partnerships amongst all stakeholders. Accelerating Sustainable Development Goals also require promoting partnerships with stakeholders including private sector within the country as well as outside. Due importance should be given to traditional knowledge and localization of climate action and community-based approaches.

54. Energy and connectivity for the 2030 Agenda: Cooperation in South Asia on transport connectivity (including rail, roads and waterways), energy connectivity and ICT connectivity is the key to accelerate Sustainable Development Goals. Strengthening rail networks between India-Bangladesh, India-Nepal and India-Pakistan was emphasized as it is a more benign mode of transport. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Agreement on rail and road connectivity have been finalized but not implemented. One way forward is to follow a building block approach where connectivity issues

could be handled first on bilateral basis, which can then be connected to build a subregional network. Cooperation on energy is of utmost importance especially in the context of the landlocked least developed countries which have abundant natural resources and South Asia can connect to Central Asia through Afghanistan to meet its energy demands. Promoting ICT and broadband connectivity will also accelerate the process of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

55. Means of implementation: Addressing the issues of financing, trade, technology, partnerships and capacity building would accelerate Sustainable Development Goals. The subregion's financial needs for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals exceed 10 per cent of the GDP per year, with roughly have of that amount required for ending poverty and hunger and achieving health and education goals and the other half for clean energy, climate action, and other infrastructure investment. In this regard, domestic resource mobilization is key, which needs to raise tax-to-GDP ratios by bringing additional people under the tax net and imposition of carbon taxes. Regional cooperation on illicit financial flows across the subregion will also be able to help in strengthening tax compliance. The growth of South Asia was adversely affected by the increasing protectionism and the ongoing global trade war. Given that the trade has acted as engines of growth and for many of the countries in subregion, trade is important component of their economy and development, the recent stalemate on market access in World Trade Organization (WTO) is also adversely affecting the countries.

56. Sustainable Development Goals and sustainable graduation of least developed countries: For three out of the four least developed countries of South Asia, potential loss of preferential market access granted under the WTO and regional trade agreements, following their graduation, is a major concern. Conducting evidence-based research is important to accelerate Sustainable Development Goals on issues like impact assessment after graduation on sectoral market access, pros and cons of Generalized System of Preferences++ provisions, reducing high trade costs, identify countries for negotiating reciprocal market access etc. To improve export competitiveness efforts to promote FDI inflows, technology and innovations would be important. Having a more liberal transition periods for graduation which gives adequate time to the least developed countries for structural adjustments and to prepare their industries to become globally competitive was also stressed.

57. Regional cooperation for Sustainable Development Goals: While the primary responsibility of achieving Sustainable Development Goals lies with the national governments, yet, the regional interventions through cooperation on cross-border issues can play an important role in complementing the national strategies given the shared challenges and vulnerabilities that South Asians face: whether it is food security or malnutrition, energy security, climate change and pollution, disasters, gender empowerment etc. Sharing good practices and development experiences could also be very fruitful given the similarities of social, cultural milieu and systems of governance in the subregion.

58. The subregion faces common challenges of poverty, inequality, vulnerability, lack of data, food security, limited access to health and education, managing climate change challenges etc. The regional agenda for cooperation on Sustainable Development Goals in South Asia must focus on eight potential areas which include food security, health, regional connectivity for harnessing the potential of intra-regional trade, trade in services for promoting integrated labour market, energy, river water sharing and flood

management, conserving cross-border environmental resources, halting cross-border crime, and other means of implementation.

C. Conclusions

59. All the countries in the subregion are committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and are taking efforts to establish institutional frameworks, bringing in policy changes, creating national and subnational Sustainable Development Goal monitoring systems, localization and aligning their national strategies with Sustainable Development Goals. Data and statistics, financing for development, means of implementation, use of information technology and technology, etc. are some of the challenges that they are facing in accelerating their Sustainable Development Goal implementation.

60. ESCAP has already identified technical assistance needs on research, policy advisory and capacity building, and the future work of ESCAP will focus on enhancing capacity of South Asian least developed countries to accelerate Sustainable Development Goals implementation and sustainable graduation from least developed countries status. ESCAP will also continue to work on regional cooperation, cross-border connectivity, disaster, climate change, gender empowerment and economic integration to assist countries in accelerating implementation of Sustainable Development Goals besides creating an institutional framework for sharing of development experiences and good practices in Sustainable Development Goal acceleration, as agreed earlier.

V. Pacific

Subregional background

61. The Pacific, a diverse region of 12 member States and 7 associate member States of ESCAP,⁵ has long been recognized by the international community as a special case for sustainable development, given its geographic isolation, remoteness from export markets, diseconomies of scale in production and exchange of goods and services and high vulnerability to external market shocks (such as, global commodity price fluctuations, disruptions in the global supply chain and financial stress). Pacific Small island developing States have not sustained high levels of economic growth, owing in part to their vulnerabilities in the wake of ongoing negative impacts of environmental changes and external economic and financial shocks. The Pacific subregion is extremely vulnerable to climate change and natural hazards. Climatic events, either with a slow or sudden onset, have produced a clear correlation between disasters, income inequality and poverty. The Pacific Ocean is vital to the health of Pacific communities and Pacific economies. Fisheries represent the most important oceans resource for livelihoods, employment, nutrition and economic opportunity. Biodiversity in the Pacific is under intense pressure from natural and human-induced disturbance, invasive species, population growth and other threats.

⁵ The 12 Pacific island countries with a presence in the United Nations (Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu) are full members of ESCAP along with the following countries and territories as associate members: American Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Niue and the Northern Mariana Islands.

62. In the Pacific islands, much of the poverty and inequality challenges stem, in part, from the limited reach of government services, especially in rural and remote areas, and limited resource availability for development activities. The limited economic base of Pacific Small island developing States restricts their capacities to increase employment opportunities and improve social safety nets for the vulnerable and elderly. Pacific women still hold the lowest percentage of Parliamentary seats worldwide, while studies show that 63 per cent of women in Melanesia, 44 per cent in Micronesia and 43 per cent in Polynesia have experienced physical and sexual violence by an intimate partner over their lifetime.⁶

A. National achievements and challenges with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the voluntary national reviews

63. The main challenges affecting the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (and the SAMOA Pathway) in the Pacific include governance constraints faced by the mostly small administrations with limited capacities, resources and data/information readily available for policy responses; and a lack of coordination including at subregional and regional levels with numerous frameworks and commitments that Pacific countries have to work with and towards. The cost of climate change adaptation is beyond the capacity of many Pacific countries, leading to increased vulnerability, deepening inequalities, and limited access to infrastructure and basic services. Every disaster stunts the regions progress in development gains as funding and resources are continuously adjusted for relief and response aid.

64. Multi-stakeholder consultations have proven to be critical for successful voluntary national review processes, to raise ownership for actions needed to progress implementation. Civil society partners, academics, media, parliaments and private sector stakeholders are all critical to successfully raising demand for sustainable development outcomes, as well as, for partnering to implement development priorities.

65. The key issues identified through a systematic approach taken by member countries in the subregion to the voluntary national reviews are that effective national planning systems remain critical for implementing the national development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Pacific must align and integrate relevant global commitments when implementing master strategies for national plans. National budgets and development cooperation efforts need to be effectively linked to priorities outlined in the national (sector and corporate plans), to ensure desired results. This means adequately monitoring and reporting national development plans and sector plans that can be used for global reporting purposes (like voluntary national review) and provide the ability to regularly inform policy choices. Meaningful stakeholder consultations are critical for preparing plans and strategies as well as partnering to implement priority agendas. While data and statistics remain challenging areas, more can be done to analyse and visualize statistics to inform policy and inform the voluntary national review report. In doing so, it is an opportunity to take stock of progress, account for gaps and challenges, and identify steps to progress the implementation of development priorities.

⁶ Source: Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2018, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

66. Data availability makes it extremely hard for the Pacific region to progress with implementing the 2030 Agenda as without baseline data and a system which allows consistent and constant monitoring, progress measurements are weak and inaccurate. For example, only 50 per cent of the 132 indicators in the Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development could be measured. A lack of disaggregation across countries; and a silo approach persists with stunting statistical capacity building. At the national/country level, on average, less than 50 per cent of national indicators can be measured due to limited capacities and funding for national statistics offices and statistical systems; and a lack of demand for and capacity to analyse data.

B. Selected actions for accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals

67. The Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development is a viable pathway for securing a sustainable future for people in the Pacific. In order to accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development Goal achievement, countries can incorporate a stronger focus on risk and resilience into the region's strategies for financing development, and consider best options for mitigating risk and ensuring resilience in the medium to long term by assisting in building adaptive capacities and continue to invest in climate adaption for infrastructure and economies. Utilizing opportunities in green growth, renewable energy, sustainable fisheries, tourism and agriculture also offer opportunities for resilient economies.

68. Other opportunities include taking advantage of advances on ICT and connectivity to enable economic opportunities and empowerment, enhancing gender equality and opportunities for women, youth, the elderly and persons with disabilities, intensifying multisector efforts (i.e., include health, education, culture) and financing for addressing the non-communicable disease crisis in the Pacific. The region must work with other nations to address the issues around de-risking and its impact on remittances flows to the Pacific, tackling gender gaps in employment outcomes and high youth unemployment.

69. A priority for global financial and economic policies should be put in place to accelerate progress towards realizing the 2030 agenda. This can be done by integrating sustainability considerations into macroeconomic policies and financial regulations, promoting Sustainable Development Goal-aligned trade and investment agreements; and inclusive global taxation cooperation on fundamental and frontier issues. The second priority requires that countries boost domestic resource mobilization efforts to increase financing for Sustainable Development Goals, notably for social services. The Pacific region requires better access to sustainable and green finance, notably for disaster risk reduction and resilience. This will be achieved by strengthening international and regional cooperation, and country capacities to prevent, reduce and recover illicit financial flows. The third priority will require accelerated innovative and digital financing mechanisms for the Sustainable Development Goals.

70. More effectively utilization of existing financing, and mobilizing additional resources while strengthening coordination, capacities and institutions must be a priority including the development of innovative financing mechanisms. Private-public partnerships can be useful towards achieving the 2030 agenda. The private sector can offer access to greater service capacity, greater responsiveness, managerial expertise, technology, innovation, investment and funding but there must be conducive environments in which they are able to initiate and sustain effective relationships. Stronger

industry agencies mean more robust dialogue and contributions to national sustainable development aimed at the broader community.

71. Increasing investment in and ensuring availability of timely, accurate disaggregated data to monitor implementation across the three dimensions of sustainable development must remain a priority to strengthen evidence-based policy, planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and accountability. Effective national planning systems remain critical for implementing the national development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals through national plans which align relevant policy commitments, and function as the master overall guiding and accountability framework for implementing national priorities.

C. Conclusions

72. The Pacific subregion looks to the United Nations and development partners to continue to help build national capacity systems and institutions for planning, budgeting, public financial and aid management. It is important to use Pacific solutions that utilize local knowledge and resources when implementing the roadmap to the 2030 Agenda. The Pacific must retain the effort to rethink development in order to shape it to its own narrative by moving away from a one size fits all model and giving appropriate equity to the minorities and marginalized. The priority actions, reinforced by the SAMOA Pathway mid-term review are: (i) climate ‘emergency’ and Disaster Risk Reduction; (ii) sustainable management and use of the oceans; (iii) regional integration; (iv) social inclusion, poverty alleviation and gender equality; and (v) data, policy coherence and partnerships. The key takeaway messages arising from the SAMOA Pathway mid-term review for the Pacific including the need to focus on taking actions in the next five years, and urgently shifting towards low emissions development pathways, and reduce the impact of natural disasters. This will require enhanced investment in social sectors and infrastructure through innovative financing mechanisms. Integration and implementation of Pacific Small island developing States priorities through national plans and strategies, Sustainable Development Goal follow-up and review processes (including the voluntary national review process) can be more effectively supported by regional organizations and United Nations entities (through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks) and Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development and support for strengthened monitoring and reporting of implementation at national subregional and regional levels.

VI. North and Central Asia

Subregional background

73. The North and Central Asia (SONCA) subregion, comprising Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan is home to almost 233 million people i.e. 3 per cent of the world population. The Russian Federation and Kazakhstan account for almost 88 per cent of subregional GDP. All the countries are in the middle-income tier, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are closer to the low-income status threshold.⁷

⁷ Source: Fact sheet: North and Central Asia at a Glance 2019, ESCAP.

74. Although regional processes to enhance infrastructure and market connectivity in the subregion are going on at a higher speed and in an unprecedented scale, structural economic transformation remains slow. The similarity of North and Central Asian countries' economic structures results in relatively low intra-subregional trade compared to other subregions in Asia and the Pacific. The subregion is also less integrated into trade and value chain networks compared to others. Promoting the participation of SONCA countries in the global value chain could help diversify its economic base. Except for Georgia and the Russian Federation, all other countries in the subregion are landlocked. This along with the remoteness from seaports and major consumer markets, makes trading products and services from the subregion costly and time-consuming.

A. National achievements and challenges with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the voluntary national reviews

75. During HLPF in 2020 Armenia and Georgia have committed to present a second VNR, while Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan will present for the first time.

76. Countries highlighted the importance of integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national strategies and programmes as well as harmonizing budget planning with Sustainable Development Goal objectives and indicators. In this context, countries indicated gaps in statistic database, fragmented interaction of all interested parties, the need to nationalize methodologies on Sustainable Development Goals, insufficient funding for the necessary activities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

77. It referred to the creation of knowledge-intensive and innovative platforms for all stakeholders in order to discuss and implement new approaches and methodology to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Representatives of the countries shared their experience in creating such platforms and their impact on the development of fundamental sectors of the economy, as well as public administration. Moreover, in order to build an innovative economy, the countries stressed the importance of the development of information technologies for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which leads to accumulate available data and experience on projects, conduct analytical work, attract human and other capital, etc.

78. Highlighting the importance of financing the Sustainable Development Goals, the participants addressed the feasibility of existing and new drivers of economic growth in the North and Central Asian countries. Today countries have been adopting National Development Strategies with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which are ambitious and set high growth plans. The issues of revision of these strategies were discussed considering their natural resource dependence, experience of other countries (urbanization and industrialization), economic growth of neighboring countries.

79. In order to expand the assessment of the economy, the Inclusive Development Index was discussed. This approach is more comprehensive and allows countries to take into account not only traditional macroeconomic indicators, but also the welfare of the population and the quality of life. A composite index of inclusive growth in the European Economic Community countries and its role in determining joint priorities of socio-economic development were considered.

B. Selected actions for accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals

80. The Forum addressed the main transboundary issues in the region: the use of water and land resources, ecosystems, and infrastructures. Participants called for efforts to expand regional cooperation, including through the use of existing instruments. Regional economic integration contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and becomes an additional tool for maintaining the quality and sustainable growth of countries. The Forum participants suggested to systematize communication between intergovernmental groups and cross-border issues, to report on practical solutions and to plan these solutions in the following regional, subregional and international arenas.

81. The Forum participants considered four themes: Leaving no one behind; Disaster risk reduction, resilience and climate change; Management of natural resources, energy; and Connectivity for the 2030 Agenda. Participants were divided into four sub-groups to identify some of the key cross-border challenges in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and discussed specific actions for accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

82. They discussed the above topics in detail with a review of best practices in countries, the participants conveyed their views on the expansion, in particular:

83. The group “Leaving no one behind” identified the lack of data and capacity to identify vulnerable groups and developed the following recommendations: analysis of vulnerable groups and public policy measures; situation analysis on internal and external migration processes; development of an integrated database system (secured) on social protection support; data disaggregation; revise the definition of “Poor” and establish the definition “Most Left behind”; state policies on protecting most vulnerable; review criteria of input workers engaged in shadow sector to economic development and introduce appropriate policy measures to social protection; engagement of private sector, especially in financing social projects.

84. The groups “Disaster risk reduction, resilience and climate change” and “Management of natural resources, energy” pointed out the need to build capacity to conduct forecast data as well as access to water data in Central Asia; to increase funding in support of the Sustainable Development Goals for North and Central Asia, it is necessary to use opportunities of climate financing, including Green Climate Fund and Global Environment Fund, bilateral opportunities for development and implementation of projects/technologies; to implement advanced technologies focused on the development of the cycle in municipal development, industry and agriculture, diversification of energy sources, mutual energy supply; policy coherence on bilateral and multilateral agreements on integrated water resources management; gradual decision-making towards the depoliticization of water relations and their economic basis, including international obligations and national legislation on the safety of mining operations; to develop North-South and South-South for capacity building and pilot programmes.

85. The group “Connectivity for the 2030 Agenda” considered the need to harmonize the legislation of the North and Central Asia countries; conduct joint geopolitical analyses; identify of joint priorities and interests in the region; take into account the best practices in the region during the development of national

strategies and programmes; use and expand the activities of intergovernmental organizations.

86. The Forum also discussed ways to mobilize additional financial resources for the Sustainable Development Goals. Key priorities highlighted include (i) increasing tax revenue through tax reforms and better administration; (ii) leveraging private finance through public-private partnerships (PPPs) and the development of domestic capital markets; (iii) scaling-up climate finance; and (iv) improving the efficiency of state budget expenditures.

C. Conclusions

87. As a way forward in addressing insufficient progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, the forum highlighted the need to improve statistical database; to improve the efficiency of state budget expenditures (prioritizations) and efficient mobilization of public and private resources for the financing sustainable development in implementing the 2030 Agenda; stressed the importance of the development of technologies for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals; called for efforts to expand regional cooperation.
