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Seventh Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

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**Linking national, regional and global dimensions of
the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development**

**Highlights of system-wide contributions of the United
Nations at the regional level in support of the 2030
Agenda****

Summary

The present document provides an overview of regional challenges and regional responses of the United Nations at the regional level in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and highlights some examples of system-wide action and results at the regional level. The document responds to the call by the Secretary-General for annual reporting on system-wide results at the regional level.

The Forum is invited to take note of the report and provide the United Nations development system in Asia and the Pacific with further guidance on priority areas for joint assistance in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

I. Introduction

1. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, member States committed to achieving “a comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred set of universal and transformative Goals and targets”, which integrate the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and hinge on the promise of “leaving no one behind.”
2. In resolutions 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review and 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system, the General Assembly recognized the level of ambition of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and set the bar high for the United Nations development system to transform in order to rise to the challenge.
3. The 2030 Agenda recognizes the pivotal role of the regional dimension to promote integration and cooperation and translate global goals into national sustainable development realities. In his reports on the implementation of

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resolution 71/243, the Secretary-General also recognized the importance of the regional level and highlighted the critical need to step up the United Nations policy voice at the regional level.¹ He also emphasized how the delivery of strengthened results by a new generation of United Nations country teams very much depends on the support that the system receives at the regional level, where considerable capacities and expertise are available.

4. The Secretary-General outlined five transformative areas for restructuring United Nations regional assets in support of the 2030 Agenda.² These included a unified mechanism for regional coordination, the establishment of strong regional knowledge-management hubs, the consolidation of existing capacities on data and statistics, the identification of administrative services that could be provided through common back offices, and enhancing transparency and results-based management at the regional level, including through annual reporting on system-wide results of the United Nations at the regional level in support of the 2030 Agenda.

5. The present report is prepared in support of the annual reporting on system-wide results at the regional level. The report is not meant to duplicate neither country-level reporting, nor the established reporting mechanisms of each United Nations entity at the regional and/or global levels. Rather, the report seeks to complement and add value to these reports by presenting key elements of the value proposition of the United Nations development system in Asia and the Pacific and highlighting in this regard key results achieved in 2019, focusing on contributions to regional-level initiatives and to country level support.

II. Regional challenges and regional responses from the United Nations Development System in Asia and the Pacific

6. Despite remarkable progress in recent years, countries in Asia and the Pacific need to urgently accelerate progress if they are to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Over the past decades, 1.3 billion people have been lifted out of poverty, the number of hungry halved, and education and healthcare improved significantly. But the economic prosperity of the region is increasingly overshadowed by rising inequality and exclusion, expansion of informal labour, lack of social protection, environmental degradation and increased vulnerability to climate induced disasters. Meeting these challenges will be critical for the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

7. Even before the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the region was not on track to achieve any of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.³ The impact of COVID-19 in Asia-Pacific is proving tremendous due to the concentration of economic activities and demographics of the region and risks rolling back hard-won development gains and pushing the region further off-track in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁴

8. While the COVID-19 pandemic presents an unprecedented challenge to the world and the Asia-Pacific region, it also offers an opportunity for governments in the region to adopt policies and channel investments towards

¹ See A/72/124 – E/2018/3, A/73/63 – E/2018/8 and A/74/73 – E/2019/14.

² A/74/73 – E/2019/14.

³ *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.II.F.10).

⁴ The impact of and policy responses with regard to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/76/34).

areas that will help countries not only to mitigate and address the impact of the crisis, but also put them back on track on achieving the 2030 Agenda. Asia Pacific is a region of extraordinary ingenuity, technological innovation and financial potency, and it must channel these strengths towards delivering inclusive and sustainable development for its people.

9. To channel these strengths, action must go beyond a single country's borders. It requires regional cooperation for common solutions to the shared challenges. It requires bringing together and bridging the connections across borders and diverse stakeholders. The United Nations development system's regional mandate to convene dialogue, capacity to advance regional norms and standards, scale up common solutions for countries, and mobilize global, regional, and national actors, is intrinsic to the value it can bring in support of accelerated action by governments and United Nations country teams in Asia-Pacific to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

10. Our work is guided by the universal values of the United Nations Charter. In the words of the Secretary-General, *"The United Nations Charter sends a clear message to us all: put people first. The first words of the Charter — 'we the peoples' — are a summons to place people at the centre of our work. Every day. Everywhere. People with anxieties and aspirations. People with heartbreaks and hopes. Above all, people with rights."* Applying these values is key part of our value added. We envision a regional United Nations development system in Asia Pacific whose work is characterized by these shared values and shared principles of collaboration, innovation, openness and effectiveness.

11. The United Nations development system in Asia Pacific, working out of regional and subregional hubs, including the central hub of Bangkok, offers a unique value proposition in supporting countries to achieve inclusive, resilient and sustainable development through five main entry points.

- Firstly, through our collective ability to **address regional, subregional, transboundary challenges** to sustainable development, ones that transcend borders, such as unregulated migration, air pollution, natural and man-made disasters, conflicts or the transboundary spread of diseases.
- Secondly, by bridging between the global and national levels and **supporting United Nations Country Teams** to help the countries they serve.
- Thirdly, through the role we play in **developing and scaling up solutions to common challenges** and transferring them to countries.
- Fourthly, by helping ensure implementation and **follow up and review of global and regional norms, standards and frameworks**.
- Finally, **by fostering and facilitating engagement and collaboration with subregional intergovernmental organizations** such as the Pacific Island Forum, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

III. Highlights of system-wide results at the regional level in 2019

12. This section provides selected highlights of our joint work in the past year, which showcase and illustrate the contribution of the regional United Nations development system in Asia-Pacific in assisting member States accelerate action towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

A. Addressing transboundary challenges

Partnership to strengthen cross-border child protection

13. Analysis from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) shows that, in 2019, one in seven international migrants in ASEAN countries was a child, representing a total of 1.4 million children. While migration can benefit children and their families, it can also place children in situations of risk. This is particularly the case where children are moving outside of safe and legal pathways and are, thus, vulnerable to exploitation by smugglers and traffickers; and where children are denied access to basic services and to legal recognition by host governments. Children left behind by migrating parents may also find themselves in circumstances of inadequate care and protection.

14. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Myanmar is the largest migration source country in the Greater Mekong Subregion, while Thailand is the main destination country and is home to 4.9 million non-Thais, approximately 76 per cent of whom are from Myanmar. Thailand alone has been home to over half a million international migrants under the age of 18 in 2019.

15. UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have joined efforts to strengthen national child protection systems by training professionals and government authorities to identify, refer and assist vulnerable migrant children to ensure their access to social assistance, legal aid, counselling and birth registration.

16. With UNICEF's support, bilateral discussions on the memorandum of understanding for cross-border child protection between the governments of Myanmar and Thailand have advanced, establishing a functioning cross-border child protection mechanism and framework, including case management standard operating procedures. The Government of Thailand signed the memorandum of understanding in January 2019 and adopted related standard operating procedures in September 2019 aimed at ending immigration detention of children. UNICEF and UNHCR, together with partners from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), jointly strengthened the capacity of government officials in Myanmar and Thailand on case management on children affected by migration. In Myanmar, UNHCR and UNICEF finalized a joint strategy for addressing childhood statelessness in Myanmar to strengthen joint advocacy, service delivery and capacity building on case management of migration detention cases.

Addressing cross-border disease outbreaks

17. Several Pacific island Countries and Territories faced measles outbreaks in 2019, with more than 6,000 cases reported in Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa and Tonga. Of these, Samoa reported 5,695 cases, mainly among children under 5 years of age. The high number of cases in Samoa was due to a dramatic decrease in immunization rates after the country suspended its immunization programme in

2018. With relatively small populations and frequent travel between countries and territories, the Pacific is considered one epidemiological region. UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) identified Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federal State of Micronesia, Nauru, Tonga and Vanuatu as the countries with the highest risk of escalation of the outbreak or onset of an outbreak.

18. The joint UNICEF/WHO response to the measles outbreak demonstrated efficient and effective coordination in working together on a Pacific response plan, situation reports, and common coordination meetings with governments, donors and stakeholders. UNICEF distributed more than 1.25 million doses of measles containing vaccine to 13 countries and territories and more than 235,000 children were vaccinated against measles in 14 countries and territories. UNICEF also provided technical assistance on immunization and risk communication and procured essential medical equipment. UNICEF and WHO supported Pacific health authorities to respond to new measles cases; strengthen their systems to ensure the rapid detection and response to cases; and increase and sustain high immunization coverage rates for all vaccine-preventable diseases.

19. In 2019 Afghanistan and Pakistan, two of the three poliomyelitis (polio) endemic countries in the world, saw a surge in polio cases from a combined cases of less than 30 in two countries in 2018 to 29 reported cases in Afghanistan and 139 cases in Pakistan, in mainly under-served and access-constrained border areas between the two countries. The joint UNICEF/WHO response to the outbreak focused on community engagement and communication initiatives to overcome vaccine hesitancy. In Pakistan, UNICEF provided enhanced training to community-based vaccinators, engaged with key influencers including religious leaders, and supported an integrated basic service package for 40 high-risk union councils. In Afghanistan, UNICEF supported the deployment of 7,500 social mobilisers, of whom 37 per cent were female, to deliver key messages to engage with communities to reduce refusals in high risk areas. In 2019, UNICEF supported the procurement of 91 million doses of polio vaccines in Afghanistan and 206 million doses in Pakistan. UNICEF and WHO's joint action contributed to the vaccination of 10 million children and 39.5 million children under-five years of age against polio in Afghanistan and Pakistan, respectively.

Protecting decent work for migrant workers

20. In Asia, the single largest driver of migration flows is to take up work abroad. Current labour market trends show that there is an increasing number of workers migrating between countries within ASEAN and outside in search for work. It is estimated that there are currently 20.2 million migrants originating from ASEAN countries, of which nearly 6.9 million have migrated within the region. Migrant workers contribute to the economies of their host countries, and the remittances they send home help to boost the economies of their countries of origin. Yet, migrant workers often suffer from inadequate social protection and are vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking.

21. The International Labour Organization (ILO), in collaboration with development partners and stakeholders, assists Governments apply ILO standards on migration in both countries of origin and of destination to manage migration flows and ensure adequate protection for this vulnerable category of workers. In Myanmar, for example, ILO, IOM and UN-Women worked with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, other governmental bodies and civil society organizations, to develop and launch in 2019 the second five year National Plan of Action on the Management of International Labour Migration (2018–2022).

B. Joint support to United Nations country teams

Joint assistance to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on disaster risk reduction and data and statistics

22. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is recurrently exposed to natural hazards which threaten the national food security by causing severe damage and loss to the cropping, livestock, fishing and forestry sectors. Recognizing this as a developmental priority, the Strategic Framework for Cooperation between the United Nations and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (2017–2021). calls for an integrated approach to disaster risk management, climate change adaptation and mitigation and ecosystem management.

23. In order to deliver on this priority and support the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in implementing its National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, and in response to a request of the Resident Coordinator, a joint technical mission was organized in June 2019. The joint mission was led by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), and comprising the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

24. The mission identified opportunities to establish an integrated data system inclusive of indicators related to both disaster risk reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals, to address data gaps. Moreover, needs and opportunities for capacity building to develop risk information from global/regional resources for enhancing early warning systems for floods and droughts were identified. A nation-wide survey, such as the World Food Programme (WFP)'s Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping, was discussed to increase understanding of vulnerability in the national context. Moreover, the mission highlighted the linkages between environmental degradation and the impacts of climate change and their effect on the country's food production.

25. The Strategic Framework for Cooperation between the United Nations and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (2017–2021) also identifies data and data management as a strategic priority and calls on the United Nations system to support the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the development and implementation of internationally approved technical standards established in the context of the United Nations.

26. In response, ESCAP in collaboration with the United Nations Resident Coordinator in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNDP and UNEP, organized two regional workshops to support the implementation of internationally approved technical standards for the global follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, providing an opportunity for officials in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to engage with the global custodians of the Sustainable Development Goal indicators and exchange national practices with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The technical assistance provided is enabling the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to prepare its first Voluntary National Review for submission to the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2020. The further analyses of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey released in 2019 with support from UNICEF has also enabled availability of key Sustainable Development Goals data to facilitate the Voluntary National Review.

Joint assistance to the Islamic Republic of Iran in flood response and mitigation

27. The Islamic Republic of Iran was impacted by widespread floods from mid-March to April 2019. A total of 26 of the country's 31 provinces were flooded. More than 70 people died, particularly during the flash floods, while 10 million were affected, and 500,000 displaced – half of them children. The initial estimates suggest that the floods have caused \$4.2 billion in damages to roads, bridges, homes and agricultural land. Unlike earthquakes, to which Iran is used and well-experienced to respond, climate and weather-related wide-scale hazards such as massive floods are a relatively new phenomenon and the country is striving to improve its capacities to better reduce the risk and negative impacts of such disasters in the future.

28. In response, a coordinated assistance was provided by the Asia-Pacific United Nations development system, coordinated by the Resident Coordinator and comprising ESCAP, FAO, UNDP and UNDRR. Inputs were rapidly incorporated from a number of United Nations specialized agencies and initial field assessments. A joint post-disaster needs assessment was conducted and a national response strategy was developed by resident United Nations agencies and submitted to the Plan and Budget Organization of Iran. A complementary matrix of support was established. The Asia-Pacific United Nations development system's response to the floods presented a unique opportunity to integrate seamlessly the post-disaster needs assessment with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework Mid-term Review. These joint response initiatives enabled a smooth transition from emergency response to resilience recovery and sustainable development.

29. In order to share knowledge and lessons learned, a workshop on South-South and Regional Cooperation for Flood Risk Management in Islamic Republic of Iran was organized in Teheran from 9 to 10 October 2019, in partnership with the Special Reporting Committee on Iran Flood 2019 and the University of Tehran. The workshop allowed developing recommendations and a follow-up action plan for the networking of Iranian national institutions with regional and global centres of excellence in flood and water-related disasters.

30. The assistance provided to both the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea shows the comprehensive, multi-agency offer of service for countries at risk by the Asia-Pacific United Nations development system, which can also ensure that the lessons learned from previous experience can guide strategic preparedness and future response plans at both the regional and the national level.

C. Developing and scaling up solutions to common challenges

Developing a common approach to measuring food security and nutrition

31. Asia-Pacific is home to well over half of all people worldwide who do not obtain sufficient dietary energy to maintain normal, active, healthy lives. But the problem goes well beyond calories. In most countries in the region, the diets of more than half of all very young children (aged 6–23 months) fail to meet minimum standards of diversity, leading to micronutrient deficiencies that affect child development and therefore the potential of future generations. The high prevalence of stunting and wasting among children under five years of age is a result of these deficiencies. Sustainable Development Goal 2 (zero hunger) aims to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition. However, addressing food security and nutrition is a multi-dimensional challenge, with many linkages to several other Goals, and in particular Goal 1 (no poverty).

32. In order to provide a common methodological framework for assessing progress towards the achievement of Goals 2, FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO have joined forces since 2018 to produce the annual *Asia and Pacific Regional Overview of Food Security* report. In addition to assessing progress towards Goal 2, the report analyses developments that may affect regional food security and nutrition in the medium to long term, including in terms of national legislation and fiscal policies.

33. Having developed a common regional analytical framework, FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO are now helping countries in the region adopt it at the national level, to address data and analysis gaps and foster collaboration among key stakeholders.

34. The first country in the region to successfully produce a national report is Pakistan which in 2019 issued the *Pakistan Overview of Food Security and Nutrition: Improving Access to Food*. In addition from the support from the four United Nations partners above, the development of the report brought together the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform, and Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, with the cooperation of provincial governments and many other stakeholders. The success of this first national report has prompted a repeat on an annual basis bringing on board the full United Nations country team and making it a model for other countries to follow. As a result, Bhutan and the Philippines are now also developing national reports.

Scaling up solutions for sustainable food production

35. Rice is one of Asia's most important crops. It sustains lives and livelihoods. It is produced over 160 million hectares, mostly by 144 million smallholders. At the same time, rice production consumes between 34 and 43 per cent of the world's irrigation water and is responsible for up to 10 per cent of emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. As the region's population grows, demand for rice will increase. To meet this future demand in a sustainable way, a consortium was forged to find innovative solutions to meet this challenge: the Sustainable Rice Landscapes Initiative. The Initiative is a partnership of FAO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), together with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, the International Rice Research Institute and the Sustainable Rice Platform.

36. The initiative is promoting sustainable and inclusive rice production landscapes that link farmers to markets and employ best practices and new technologies to generate a range of global environmental benefits including increased agrobiodiversity, ecosystem resilience, enhanced water and fertilizer use efficiency, reduced chemical usage and lower greenhouse gas emissions. The initiative is helping farmers improve quality and diversify cropping systems through access to extension services, technology deployment and strengthening local networks of value chain actors to reduce inputs costs and connect to market.

37. With support from the Global Environmental Facility in the order of US\$ 60 million, projects are being developed in seven countries (Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam), mobilizing co-financing from public and private sources in the order of US\$ 750 million. At the regional level, the initiative provides a platform linking the country projects for experience-sharing and scaling up of common solutions.

Scaling up forecast based financing, early warning and action and shock responsive social protection for disaster resilience in ASEAN

38. The increasing frequency, intensity and impacts of disasters, especially climate related events, in ASEAN countries has prompted an urgent need to transform humanitarian action and disaster management towards forecast-based early warning and early actions, especially for slow-on-set disasters such as drought, and more timely, effective response through innovative instruments such as social protection.

39. Experiences in ASEAN and elsewhere have proven that social protection interventions, if designed to be shock-responsive and gearing toward building resilience, can strengthen the capacity of poor households to cope with, effectively respond to and withstand crises. Access to predictable, regular and shock-responsive social protection can, in the short term, protect poor households from the impacts of shocks, including erosion of productive assets, and minimize negative coping practices. In the longer term, it can help build capacity, smooth consumption and allow for investments that contribute to building people's resilience to future threats and crisis.

40. As reported above, the United Nations development system has assisted ASEAN in developing the ASEAN Guidelines for Disaster Responsive Social Protection, through an extensive capacity building process involving three sectors in ASEAN: social welfare, disaster risk management and health. In addition, country road maps have been developed in Cambodia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Vietnam to establish shock responsive social protection to build resilience. A new joint United Nations programme in ASEAN has also been initiated in 2019 to support the Guidelines and national road map implementation, to shift from reactive response to proactive vulnerability reduction, bridging humanitarian assistance and development.

Scaling up solutions for social protection

41. Despite its progress in reducing poverty, the Asian and Pacific region has seen inequalities increase in the past two decades. Social protection can be particularly effective in reducing inequality, as well as extreme and moderate poverty. However, 60 per cent of people in the region is still excluded from adequate social protection coverage and remain greatly exposed to the economic and social risks related to old-age, illness as well as recurrent natural disasters. While public expenditure on social protection has been increasing in the past two decades, it remains about a third of the global average.

42. ILO, in collaboration with ESCAP and other development partners, has been assisting member States strengthen social protection systems. For example, ILO, ESCAP, the Organization for Economic Co-operation (OECD) and the European Union, convened an Expert Group Meeting on Inclusive Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific, providing an opportunity for knowledge exchange and the dissemination of national good practices amongst some policy-makers, academics, members of civil society and development partners in the region. In order to strengthen institutional capacities to address the challenges and opportunities for pension system in the region, a regional Executive Training on Pensions was co-organized by ILO, ESCAP, Help Age International and the Employees Provident Fund in Malaysia. The Asia-Pacific Social Protection Week 2019, co-organized by ILO, ESCAP, FAO, UNICEF, and WFP with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), allowed sharing knowledge and discussing challenges and opportunities to expand social protection in Asia and the Pacific region in response to demographic shifts and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Harmonizing measurement frameworks for monitoring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals

43. To take a common approach towards assessing progress on the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific, ESCAP, ILO, UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF, joined forces and produced a joint 2020 Asia Pacific Sustainable Development Goal progress report, building on the progress methodology developed by ESCAP. ESCAP's Sustainable Development Goals Gateway was also leveraged and updated with new features to provide a one-stop knowledge source on Sustainable Development Goal data analysis for the region. Moreover, ESCAP and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization are collaborating to produce a progress dashboard for Goal 9.

D. Advocating for and implementing global and regional norms

Regional Beijing+25 Review

44. The regional intergovernmental platform provided by the United Nations is an important mechanism for follow-up to and reporting on the implementation of international commitments, such as the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. In the lead up to the global commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of its adoption, Member States were requested to undertake comprehensive and inclusive national-level review processes to assess the progress made towards this framework.

45. In the Asia-Pacific region, the review process was led by ESCAP, with support from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the members of the Regional Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment of the Regional Coordination Mechanism. At the national level, United Nations Country Teams were mobilized to support governments in preparation of their national review reports, which resulted in a record submission from 45 Governments (the highest submission to date for such reviews). The process also saw a high level of representation of young persons (during both the national and regional review processes) as well as strong engagement by diverse civil societies through the support of an Asia-Pacific Beijing+25 Civil Society Steering Committee. Regional synthesis reports were jointly prepared by ESCAP and UN-Women based on inputs from the national reviews and civil society.

46. The regional review process culminated with the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+25 Review, which was held from 27 to 29 November 2019 in Bangkok, and attended by approximately 600 participants comprising representatives of governments, civil society, academia and private sector, from 54 countries. ESCAP and UN-Women, with support from UNFPA and several other United Nations agencies, effectively backstopped intense negotiations which culminated with the adoption by the conference of the Asia-Pacific Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+25 Review, a comprehensive set of commitments and actions on region-specific issues that aim to move forward the gender equality agenda in the course of the next 5 years. The Declaration serves also as a basis for coordinated efforts by the United Nations development system to support implementation of international commitments, monitoring of priority actions, regional reporting of results and strengthening the normative frameworks towards an inclusive and sustainable development.

Developing a conceptual framework for measuring impact of gender inequality

47. In 2019, UNICEF, UN-Women and UNFPA in partnership with FAO, UNDP, ESCAP, WFP and Plan International launched “Gender Counts”. This first of its kind review considers the impact of gender inequality on children and adolescents in Asia and the Pacific, with reports available for the four subregions Central Asia, East and Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Pacific. The impact of gender inequality on the health and wellbeing of children and adolescents is considered using a conceptual framework with six domains: socio-economic context, indicators of gender inequality at a societal level, health, education and employment, protection, and a safe environment. Over 100 indicators were defined across these domains and subsequently populated with the best available data for the low- and middle-income countries in the subregion.

Building capacity for the implementation of the global guidance on comprehensive sexuality education for out-of-school adolescents and youth

48. Every young person will one day have life-changing decisions to make about their sexual and reproductive health. Yet research shows that the majority of adolescents lack the knowledge required to make those decisions responsibly, leaving them vulnerable to coercion, sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy. Comprehensive sexuality education provides the skills needed for everyday relationships, communication, decision making, and other socioemotional skills, gender equitable attitudes, respect for others.

49. In the course of 2019 UNFPA, together with UNESCO, UNICEF and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and some international non-governmental organizations, have joined forces to build the capacities of government partners, civil society organizations and youth from 19 countries in Asia-Pacific in delivering comprehensive sexual education programmes, based on the draft Global Guidance on Comprehensive Sexuality Education for Out of School Youth. The capacity building activity was implemented as a part of a global project “Reaching those most left behind through Comprehensive Sexuality Education for out of school young people”, and highlighted how out of school comprehensive sexuality education can allow more flexibility than in-school education in delivering programmes that address the needs of specific groups.

50. Child marriage remains pervasive in South Asia. 30 per cent of women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18 and 4.3 per cent of men were married as boys. South Asia carries a shocking 40 per cent of the global burden of child brides. Under the Global Programme to End Child Marriage, UNICEF and UNFPA partnered with the South Asia Coordination Group to End Violence Against Children to generate key evidence to support efforts to end child marriage in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The partnership resulted in three key joint research on child marriage in 2019, including the publication of “Child Marriage in South Asia, An Evidence Review (2019), which highlights key evidence on the influence of gender norms, economics and societal expectations on child marriage, as well as the relationship between child marriage and health, education, violence and policies and laws. UNICEF and UNFPA also established a joint platform for disseminating and sharing evidence among the countries.

Advancing civil registration and vital statistics

51. The regional intergovernmental platform provided by the United Nations is also an important mechanism for the establishment of regional commitments, such as the 2015–2024 Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade, declared by member States at the seventy-first session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The Decade is a clear commitment by countries in Asia and the Pacific to leave no one behind and to place people firmly at the centre of the development agenda beyond 2015.

52. In South Asia, for example, 32 per cent of children under five do not have a birth certificate, making it home to the largest share of children without a birth certificate in the world. To support civil registration professionals address the lack of birth registration, as well as other shortfalls in the civil registration system, members of the regional partnership on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific supported the establishment of the Network for Civil Registration Professionals in South Asia. The network, modelled on the successful Pacific Civil Registrars' Network, allows sharing information, lessons learned, and good practices for strengthening civil registration and fosters coordination and integration of professionals' inputs and ideas into the implementation of the Regional Action Framework for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific. The network is serviced by UNICEF and ESCAP.

Building data and statistics capacity for the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

53. Data is a key component of follow-up and review mechanisms for most international and regional agreements and is one of the most sought out areas of assistance by countries. In Asia-Pacific, there is only sufficient data to monitor progress with 42 per cent of the globally agreed indicators for the 2030 Agenda, an improvement of 25 per cent from 2017, but still significantly below what is called for.

54. Disaster-related statistics are also an area of growing demand, and to address this need the Asia-Pacific Disaster-Related Statistics Framework was developed to support monitoring of the Sendai Framework for Disaster-Risk Reduction, the framework is a joint effort of ESCAP's Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and multiple members of the regional and global United Nations Development System including ESCAP, UNDRR, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Economic Commission for Europe. In 2019 the Asia-Pacific Disaster-Related Statistics Framework was endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission as a starting basis for a global framework for disaster-related statistics.

E. Engagement with subregional organizations

Helping ASEAN strengthen disaster risk management

55. Countries in South-East Asia are particularly prone to disasters. Recent research has shown that the subregion has one of the highest proportions of average annual loss to gross domestic product (GDP), with annualized estimates of US\$ 86.5 billion, or 3 per cent of GDP, with the proportion exceeding

7 per cent of GDP in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam.⁵

56. The Asia-Pacific United Nations development system has been lending support to the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response Work Programme, based on the ASEAN-United Nations Joint Strategic Plan of Action on Disaster Management 2016–2020. The Joint Strategic Plan of Action has brought greater coherence in the engagement of the United Nations with ASEAN on disaster risk reduction and management, serving as an overall framework and promotes consistency in engagement across the entire spectrum of disaster risk reduction and management, covering areas such as preparedness and response; risk assessment, early warning and monitoring; prevention, mitigation, outreach and mainstreaming.

57. Such enhanced and coordinated assistance has led to the adoption of the ASEAN Guidelines on Disaster-Responsive Social Protection to Increase Resilience and the ongoing process of developing the ASEAN Declaration on Drought for potential adoption by ASEAN member States. Both demonstrate the effectiveness of the regional United Nations development system's advocacy for implementing global norms by combining analytical work and pilot projects.

58. The joint United Nations-ASEAN study entitled "Ready for the Dry Years (2019)",⁶ which was developed under the guidance of the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management, prompted the current efforts to develop an ASEAN approach to drought resilience-building in South-East Asia. The study has received much attention from stakeholders and the media which demonstrates the importance of the United Nations and ASEAN speaking jointly on issues.

59. The experience in bringing about greater coherence in engagement with ASEAN offers a blueprint for a more strategic engagement with other subregional organizations.

Supporting ASEAN achieve a future of work with promotion of the rights of migrant workers

60. The world of work is changing fast today, particularly due to technological advancement, greening of our economies, climate change, demographic shifts and globalization. The transformation is rapid and has great impacts on various aspects of labour market, such as, form of employment, employment relationships, skill needed, social security, production technology, work organization, governance of work and tripartism. In South-East Asia, the future of work will likely be characterized by increasing internationalization and mobility.

61. ILO, IOM, and UN-Women have assisted ASEAN prepare for the challenges and opportunities brought about by these changes future of work and migration, which resulted in the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers adopting 13 recommendations to enhance protection of migrant workers and employability of migrant workers. Most notably, the recommendations call for sharing of relevant labour market information,

⁵ Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2019: The Disaster Riskscape Across Asia-Pacific – Pathways for Resilience, Inclusion and Empowerment (United Nations Sales No. E.19.II.F.12).

⁶ United Nations Sales No. E.19.II.F.7.

including on available job opportunities and skills demands in the receiving states and skills supply in the sending states. The recommendations also call for: migrant workers' access to skilling, re-skilling and up-skilling; development of skills standards; certification of skills and prior learning; skills recognition systems; and gender equality in employment and trainings, including in non-traditional sectors and occupations.

Supporting the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation accelerate the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 4

62. Countries of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) harbour 39 per cent of the world's stunted children (59.4 million) and 53 per cent of the world's wasted children (26.5 million), with 90 per cent of these children concentrated in just three countries: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Key drivers of undernutrition include women's poor nutrition, young age at first pregnancy, and low decision-making authority, combined with poor feeding practices of children in early life and poor sanitation and hygiene. These poor diets contribute to the very high burden of malnutrition in the region and are slowing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal 2 targets on reducing stunting and wasting.

63. Against this background, UNICEF and partners are working to improve the organizational and technical leadership of SAARC and other regional platforms on nutrition through the Regional Initiatives to Strengthen Nutrition and Growth (RISING) programme. The initiative focuses on neglected areas of nutrition policy and programming, including women's nutrition and the diets of children in early life in the SAARC countries. Furthermore, in 2019, UNICEF, in collaboration with WHO, FAO and WFP and SAARC convened the regional conference on "Stop Stunting: Power of Maternal Nutrition", which brought together delegations from all eight SAARC countries, and other development partners, to discuss the nutritional care for women during pregnancy and postpartum in South Asia. The conference adopted an impactful "Call to Action" that contributes to strengthening SAARC policy environment and delivery of programmes at scale to improve the diet of millions of children of young children in the region. This includes a call for greater regional leadership by SAARC and others to provide regional level guidance on nutrition and track country progress on advancing nutrition to accelerate the progress on Goal 2.

64. Furthermore, SAARC member States endorsed the "SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030" at the Ministerial Meeting for Education convened by UNESCO and UNICEF in October 2019 in Malé, the Maldives. The Framework for Action facilitates regional cooperation and commitment between countries with regards to the monitoring and reporting of Goal 4 targets.

IV. Conclusion and way forward

65. The results achieved at the regional level through joint work highlighted above illustrate the value added that the regional United Nations development system in Asia-Pacific can provide in assisting member States accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In past years, joint activities have been spearheaded and coordinated in the context of both the Regional Coordination Mechanism and its Thematic Working Groups, as well as the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, but already since 2019 the regional United Nations development system in Asia-Pacific has operated these in a unified way

66. Going forward, the regional United Nations development system in Asia-Pacific proposes to come together through issue-based coalitions, which will enable a more coordinated response by the United Nations at regional level to key priority areas and cross-cutting challenges in the region, namely:

- (a) Climate change mitigation;
- (b) Building resilience;
- (c) Inclusion and empowerment;
- (d) Human mobility and urbanization;
- (e) Human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment.

67. Issue-based coalitions would further strengthen synergies among related areas of work of different United Nations entities, coordinate assistance to countries, Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country teams, and serve as regional platforms to reach out to other stakeholders.

68. The COVID-19 pandemic is having unprecedented health, social and economic impacts across the region, resulting in new and increased needs for support at the national level. The regional United Nations development systems is well-placed to assist countries in meeting these needs, as shown by the results highlighted in this report, including in terms of strengthening resilience and disaster risk reduction, promoting food security or addressing the transboundary spread of diseases. The issue-based coalitions will also allow for integrating and coordinating responses and assistance by the regional United Nations development system to the COVID-19 pandemic, and assist member States to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and build back better to help the region get back on track towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.