

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

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**National progress and achievements on the 2030 Agenda
for Sustainable Development**

**Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development in Asia and the Pacific: the regional
dimension**

Note by the secretariat**

Summary

Effective follow-up and review is critical for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development not only highlights the critical role of follow-up and review but also recognizes the role of regional approach towards implementing the SDGs and emphasizes the importance of regional contributions in assessing the progress in delivering the Agenda. This paper aims to provide inputs to the discussion on regional follow-up and review to support efforts to achieve the SDGs at national and global levels. It informs the Forum about the latest developments on follow-up and review for the 2030 Agenda, including the agreements at various levels thus far. Second, it explains the value-added of regional follow-up and review and the principles that may be considered in defining its implementation arrangements. Finally, the paper outlines some issues for further consideration by the member States as they deliberate on the detailed implementation arrangements to operationalize the follow-up and review mandate of the APFSD.

I. Introduction

1. Effective follow-up and review is critical for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development devotes about 18 paragraphs on the importance of a systematic follow-up and review (originally referred to as “monitoring and accountability” in the early stages of negotiation on the post-2015 development agenda) its roles, objectives, and guiding principles. This extensive elaboration of follow-up and review is exceptional given the absence of such framework in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In addition, the 2030 Agenda not only highlights the critical role of follow-up

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and review but also recognizes the role of regional approach towards implementing the SDGs and emphasizes the importance of regional contributions in assessing the progress in delivering the Agenda.

2. The third session of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) in 2016 agreed to support to follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level as one of the agreed functions of the Forum. Furthermore, the member States agreed that “detailed implementation arrangements will be decided after agreement in the General Assembly and will be further discussed.”¹ ESCAP Resolution 72/6 on “Committing to the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific” endorsed this recommendation from the APFSD among others. Subsequently the General Assembly Resolution 70/299 on “Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level” which was adopted in July 2016, provides guidance for further discussion and decision-making on the role of follow-up and review at the regional level.

3. With these agreements in place, the fourth session of APFSD provides an opportunity for member States to consider how they wish to move forward with respect to defining the implementation arrangements of follow-up and review at the regional level, as called for by the third session of the Forum.

4. This paper aims to provide inputs to this discussion. It informs the Forum about the latest developments on follow-up and review for the 2030 Agenda, including the agreements at various levels thus far. Second, it explains the value-added of regional follow-up and review and the principles that may be considered in defining its implementation arrangements. Finally, the paper outlines some issues for further consideration by the member States as they deliberate on the detailed implementation arrangements to operationalize the follow-up and review mandate of the APFSD.

5. This paper builds on the technical paper on follow-up and review commissioned by the ESCAP secretariat² as well as on the background paper prepared by the Secretariat for the *Expert dialogue on effective follow-up and review for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific*³ held on 1-2 December 2016. Both papers significantly benefited from the insights and inputs from the 70 experts who participated in the dialogue.

II. Follow-up and review at the regional level: Context, value-added, and principles

A. Context

6. The 2030 Agenda provides for a three-tiered follow-up and review architecture at the national, regional, and global levels: (i) at the national level, Member States are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress (para 79); (ii) Follow-up and review at regional and

¹ Report of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development at its third session, paragraph 15 (iii). Available at www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/APFSD_2016_Report_English.pdf.

² Bhattacharya, D. (2017): 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Designing a Regional Follow-up and Review Mechanism. A paper prepared for ESCAP. Unpublished.

³ Available from: www.unescap.org/resources/background-note-follow-and-review-sustainable-development-goals-and-2030-agenda.

subregional levels⁴ is also recognized to provide useful opportunities for peer learning (para 80); and (iii) the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Political Forum will have a central role in overseeing a network of follow-up and review at the global level (para 82).

7. Every four years, the HLPF meets at the level of Heads of State and government under the auspices of the UN General Assembly. The HLPF also meets annually (for eight days) including a Ministerial segment (three days) within the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The core objective of the HLPF is to provide a platform for (i) sharing information on strategies to implement 2030 Agenda; (ii) presenting national (success stories); and (iii) critically analysing obstacles and setbacks in achieving SDGs.

8. Goal 17 emphasizes on strengthening the means of implementation, which will require coordinated action to address a number of systemic issues in areas such as finance, technology transfer, and trade. Therefore, follow-up and review exercise has to articulate and address these structural issues as well as indicate progress made in this regard. The mandate of the HLPF includes undertaking follow-up and review on the advancement of the implementation of sustainable development commitments “of all major United Nations Conferences and Summits in the economic, social and environmental fields, as well as the respective means of implementation” including Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

9. GA Resolution 70/299 “*Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level*” adopted on 29 July 2016 provides that the annual sessions of the HLPF will focus its attention on pre-determined themes every year. They will also focus on a pre-determined cluster of SDGs, with a view to completing a review of all 17 SDGs every four years. SDG 17 on the means of implementation will be reviewed every year at the HLPF. As the regional preparatory meeting for APFSD, the theme of the APFSD is aligned with the HLPF.

10. The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are the main instruments for national reporting at the HLPF. The first batch of such reports was presented at the HLPF meeting in July 2016. The second batch is slated for presentation in July this year. The first year of experience of preparing the VNRs indicate that there is a wide range of variability in the format and content of the report as well as in the process of preparing them.

11. The 2030 Agenda explicitly recognises the need to have an adequate mechanism for monitoring progress of SDGs and for taking necessary corrective actions at the regional (and subregional) level. The 2030 Agenda has also indicated that the task of designing such an arrangement has to be performed by the national governments (in the region) with support from the relevant UN Regional Commission, i.e. ESCAP in the Asia and the Pacific, along with other UN agencies and multilateral development organisations.

12. The guidance provided in paragraph 80 of the 2030 Agenda regarding regional follow-up and review for the agenda reads as follows. “Follow-up and review at the regional and subregional levels can, as appropriate, provide useful opportunities for peer learning, including through voluntary reviews,

⁴ Pacific Island countries have initiated the development of an integrated roadmap for regional reporting and implementation of the SDGs, SAMOA Pathway, and the Framework for Pacific Regionalism including an indicator framework. Approval is scheduled for September 2017.

sharing of best practices and discussion on shared targets. We welcome in this respect the cooperation of regional and subregional commissions and organizations. Inclusive regional processes will draw on national-level reviews and contribute to follow-up and review at the global level, including at the high-level political forum on sustainable development.” Further discussion is however needed to clarify how the regional level feeds into national level implementation.

13. Although the 2030 Agenda does not specifically say what constitutes a “region”, by reading the above paragraph in conjunction with other provisions mentioned elsewhere that such “region” essentially implies the broad continental spaces covered by different regional commission of the UN. However, what needs to be noted that paragraph 80 also provides for follow-up and review at “subregional” level.

14. While the 2030 Agenda does not provide any other specific guidelines regarding the formation, operation and management of the regional follow-up and review mechanism, such guidelines may be safely inferred from the principles for global follow-up and review as stated in paragraph 74. These principles may be summarised as follows.

(a) Governments have the primary responsibility for the follow-up and review at all levels including regional.

(b) To ensure national ownership, “foundation” of follow-up and review at regional level (similar to the global level) will be the outcomes of the national processes.

(c) The follow-up and review process will track progress in implementing the universal goals and targets including those relating to means of implementation. This will be done in integrated manner, interrelating the three dimensions of sustainable development.

(d) The follow-up and review process should take a “longer-term orientation” and in order to support the countries in making informed policy choices, need to identify achievements and challenges as well as critical success factors and gaps in this regard.

(e) The follow-up and review has to be “open, inclusive, participatory and transparent” for all people. Moreover, the process will support reporting by all relevant stakeholders.

(f) The follow-up and review has to be “rigorous and informed by country-led evaluations and data”. The data to be used for this purpose has to be of “high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated”.

(g) The follow-up and review has to be coupled with “enhanced capacity-building support for developing countries (e.g. least developed countries, small island development States, landlocked developing countries and middle-income countries), particularly in the areas of strengthening national system and evaluation programmes.

(h) The UN system and other multilateral institutions are to provide “active support” to the follow-up and review process.

15. In addition to the above-mentioned guidance, the 2030 Agenda in its paragraph 72 mentions six attributes of the contemplated follow-up and review framework i.e. it has to be “robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated”. Indeed, these six mentioned attributes of the envisaged follow-up and review process are fully consistent with the guiding principles, scope and outcome of the follow-up and review framework. In the same paragraph, it is mentioned that the objective of the follow-up and

review framework is to “make a vital contribution to the implementation and help countries to maximize and track progress in implementing this Agenda in order to ensure no one is left behind”.

B. Value-Added

16. A perspective is emerging that follow-up and review at the regional level is necessary to reinforce the weak spots in the review architecture or the aspects that are not addressed in global or national reviews.⁵ Concretely, the additional value of a regional follow-up and review are as follows:

17. *It provides a congenial space for discussion.* Relative to a global platform, a regional platform can provide a more congenial space for the member States to discuss their developmental challenges in an open and candid manner, leading to strengthening of mutual and collective trust. The regional follow-up and review can instil transparency in the interpretation of diverse regional trends (including subregional and mega trends) and increase accountability of the regional efforts to implement SDGs.

18. *It can foster regional cooperation to address shared challenges.* The regional follow-up and review can be the most competent platform to monitor provisioning of regional public goods. It can provide regional solutions by providing necessary policy guidance, and technical assistance to the member States in response to their agreed priorities. It can channel inputs to supplement the data and information deficit affecting effective implementation of SDGs in the region.

19. *It can foster peer learning and capacity building.* Regional follow-up and review can be the most effective platform for peer learning and exchanging views on good practices discussing what works and what does not. In that sense, it may promote South-South cooperation. It can also provide spaces for stakeholders to extend capacity building support to national implementation. For example, it can provide a platform for the private sector to think about its role in the context of SDGs. It can also enable civil society organizations, think tanks and academic institutions to contribute to making progress in policy coherence and systemic issues as called for by the 2030 Agenda.

20. *It can draw from multiple sources at the regional to enrich follow-up and review.* There are various resources that the ESCAP region can draw from in enriching a regional follow-up and review, particularly from the wide range of institutions (including the ESCAP subregional offices and regional institutes), regional programmes and frameworks, such as the North-East Asian Subregional Programme on Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) and the Regional Action Framework on the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in the region. Furthermore, the follow-up and review mechanism for Asia and the Pacific can also draw from regional cooperation initiatives that are active at the subregional level within the ESCAP region.

C. Principles

21. Preliminary guidance provided by the United Nations secretariat as elaborated in *Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive*

⁵ Together 2030 Global Advocacy Group. (2016). *Essential Elements for an ambitious, inclusive and participatory follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda*. Available from <http://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Essential-Elements-on-Follow-up-and-Review-Together-2030-FINAL-April-2016.pdf>.

follow-up and review at the global level (A/70/684) provides a foundation for further discussions on how to ensure that follow-up and review efforts strengthen implementation, not just add additional reporting requirements. Consistent with this, the outputs of the regional follow-up and review mechanism has to go much beyond the mere aggregation of the national and thematic reports, generating an integrated and inter-related distinctive regional perspective in the global context.

Focus on provision of regional public goods or core indicators that can support national implementation

22. A clear niche of regional-level monitoring is on keeping track of the provision of regional public goods that member States may wish to prioritize to effectively support efforts to achieve the SDGs. Once the member States identify the regional public goods that are crucial for supporting these efforts, analytical approaches and data needs should be identified in this regard.

23. Identification, development, and joint monitoring of a set of core indicators at the regional level could be also a niche of regional follow-up and review in the region. By focusing on implementation of various inter-governmental agreements, compliance of norms and standards, operationalization of guidelines for good practices in regional cooperation, the regional follow-up and review may provide a substantial support towards creating an enabling environment for delivery of the SDGs in the region, including for transboundary issues.

24. Towards implementing its monitoring function, the following inputs can be provided to regional follow-up and review by the ESCAP secretariat in cooperation with UN agencies and other development agencies: (i) thematic reports aligning with the annual theme of the HLPF; (ii) periodic report on the means of implementation; (iii) periodic report on state of delivery of selected regional public goods (e.g. climate-related measures, connectivity expansion and trade and investment treaties and agreement) should there be an agreement to monitor these jointly at the Asia-Pacific level or in its subregions; and (iv) periodic review of the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. The thematic report (i) and reports on the means of implementation; (ii) can be prepared for the APFSD. Feedback by member States and other actors on how to strengthen these reports as inputs to regional follow-up and review particularly in defining follow-up actions, are important as countries discuss the detailed implementation arrangement of follow-up and review at the regional level.

Multi-stakeholder participation and UN System coordination in review process

25. Follow-up and review at the regional level can serve as a platform for validating the interpretation of trends and required actions through multi-stakeholder participation in public forums, converging at the APFSD.

26. In order to further encourage a multi-stakeholder approach, the Forum may also invite, among others, representatives of the civil society, private sector and academia to directly engage in the inter-governmental process of regional follow-up and review. Moreover, ESCAP should strengthen its coordination mechanism involving other UN agencies as well as the international development organisations working in the region, as called for by ESCAP Commission Resolution 72/6. This inclusive approach will strengthen the quality and effectiveness, of the regional follow-up and review process as well as its accountability dimensions.

National ownership in defining follow-up actions

27. The distinctive contribution of the Asia-Pacific follow-up and review could also be with respect to the articulation of a set of regional perspectives on policy and institutional options for the consideration of member States in their pursuit for an accelerated, inclusive and transformative pathway for achieving the SDGs in the region. The member States of the ESCAP will have the primary responsibility of providing oversight to the regional follow-up and review process and national processes will provide the foundation for operationalizing the follow-up and review mechanism in the region.

Peer learning

28. Governments have stressed the value of follow-up and review for supporting peer learning, which is a valuable means of capacity-building. An equally critical area is providing support to enable member States to observe the norms and principles of follow-up and review, as stipulated in paragraph 74 of the 2030 Agenda.

III. Matters calling for the attention of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

29. In discussing the detailed implementation arrangements of the APFSD as a regional platform for supporting follow-up and review, the following are areas of consideration:

- (a) The scope, and objectives of follow-up and review at the regional level.
- (b) Modalities for strengthening the follow-up and review process.
 - (i) Ensuring the inputs of civil society organizations and business sector.
 - (ii) Possibility of creating standing expert/advisory groups to strengthen the credibility regional follow-up and review. The proposed expert groups, could, for example conceptualise the content and process of monitoring regional public goods, or undertake in-depth examination of progress on a goal by goal basis, or examine issues related to policy coherence across the goals
- (c) The required analytical work to underpin the design of the implementation arrangements, such as:
 - (i) Understanding the experiences of follow-up and review from other policy domains, such as human rights, trade, and development cooperation
 - (ii) The role of regional reports, and the HLPF's schedule of review in guiding regional follow-up and review.
 - (iii) Assessment of data availability and gaps along with a strategy to service the needs of the regional follow-up and review.
 - (iv) Identification of regional trends (including mega and subregional trends) that may facilitate the prioritisation of regional public goods that could be monitored jointly at the regional level.

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