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Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Seventy-first session

Bangkok, 25-29 May 2015

Item 3 (d) of the provisional agenda *

Review of issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission, including the work of the regional institutions: environment and development

Report of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development on its second session

Note by the secretariat **

Summary

The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development held its second session on 21 and 22 May 2015. The Forum had the objective of strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development at the regional level. It engaged member States, United Nations entities and other institutions, major groups and stakeholders in dialogue on four key issues: (a) practical approaches to integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development; (b) the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals; (c) the potential for a regional monitoring and review mechanism; and (d) the form and function of the Forum beyond 2015.

1. The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development 2015 was organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in Bangkok on 21 and 22 May 2015.
2. It was attended by more than 400 participants, including representatives of Governments, major groups and other stakeholders, United Nations bodies and programmes, and other international organizations and entities.
3. The Forum was attended by representatives of the following member States: Afghanistan; Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Fiji; Georgia; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kiribati; Kyrgyzstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Maldives; Mongolia; Myanmar; Nauru; Nepal; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea;

* E/ESCAP/71/L.1/Rev.1.

** The present note was submitted late owing to the fact that the Forum was held on 21 and 22 May 2015.

Russian Federation; Samoa; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Tuvalu; Uzbekistan; Vanuatu; and Viet Nam.

4. Representatives of one non-member State also attended as observers.

5. Opening statements were made by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP and General Tanasak Patimapragorn, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand. Welcoming remarks were delivered by the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. A video message from the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations was also delivered.

6. The Forum elected the following Bureau members:

(a) Co-Chairs:

Mr. Masoumeh Ebtekar, Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Mr. Siaosi 'Ofa ki Vahafola Sovaleni, Tonga
Mr. Soichiro Seki, Japan

(b) Vice-Chairs:

Mr. Constancio da Conceição Pinto, Timor-Leste
Mr. Maatia Toafa, Tuvalu
Mr. Vajira Narampanawa, Sri Lanka
Ms. Daw Lei Lei Thein, Myanmar

(c) Rapporteur:

Ms. Margarita R. Songco, Philippines

7. The Forum adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Defining Asia-Pacific sustainable development challenges and opportunities — strengthening integration, implementation and review for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.
5. Perspectives on the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015 and the sustainable development goals.
6. Regional monitoring and review mechanisms for implementation of the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015.
7. The form and function of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development beyond 2015.
8. Regional preparations for the Annual Ministerial Review: “Managing the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the sustainable development goals: What will it take?”
9. Other matters.

10. Review of the Chair's summary and adoption of the report.
11. Closing of the Forum.

8. The Forum benefited from the work completed at the Asia-Pacific Civil Society Forum on Sustainable Development, which was organized by ESCAP and the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, held in Bangkok on 17 and 18 May 2015, and the Regional Conference on Aligning Corporate Sustainability with SDGs, held in Bangkok on 20 May 2015.

9. Side events were also held, focusing on inclusive and sustainable industrial developments, lessons learned from the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in cities, the accountability of parliamentarians for development justice, national experiences on civil society participation in the monitoring and review of sustainable development policies and programmes and the country-led road map for the data revolution.

10. The present report was adopted on 22 May 2015. The Chair's summary of the views, experiences, achievements and challenges of countries in the region that had been expressed during the meeting is contained in the annex.

11. Participants concurred that the present report, including the annex, should be brought to the attention of the Commission at its seventy-first session, to be held from 25 to 29 May 2015, and to the global-level dialogue on sustainable development, including, in particular, the third session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, to be held under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council from 26 June to 8 July 2015 at Headquarters, on the theme of "Strengthening integration, implementation and review — the HLPF after 2015".

12. The Forum agreed that:

(a) It should be convened as an intergovernmental meeting prior to the High-level Political Forum in 2016, on a theme consistent with that of the latter;

(b) Its objectives in 2016 should be to support the full and balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development and the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda in Asia and the Pacific, including follow-up and review, while being consistent with the objectives, form, function and modalities of the High-level Political Forum as identified in General Assembly resolution 67/290 of 9 July 2013;

(c) It will initiate the development of a regional road map for implementing the post-2015 development agenda at its session in 2016. The regional road map will be defined in consultation with member States at its third session in 2016;

(d) Based on the outcome of the seventieth session of the General Assembly, the form, function and modalities of the Forum after 2016 will be decided at its third session in 2016 through an intergovernmental consultative process.

Annex

Chair's summary of discussions at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development 2015

1. During the two-day meeting, participants discussed: sustainable development challenges and opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region; regional monitoring and review mechanisms; perspectives on the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals; the form and function of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development beyond 2015; and the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the sustainable development goals. The Forum also showcased national examples and experiences in sustainable development, with a focus on integration of its three dimensions.

Session 1: Defining Asia-Pacific sustainable development challenges and opportunities — strengthening integration, implementation and review for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific

2. Participants called for enhanced political commitment and leadership in order to realize the aspiration of sustainable development. Participants emphasized the need for inclusive, balanced and sustained economic growth, wherein planetary boundaries and human rights are respected; highlighting the urgency of pursuing sustainable and inclusive development paradigms in which the three dimensions of sustainable development are integrated.

3. The Forum agreed that emphasis needed to be placed on more inclusive, balanced and sustained growth, while respecting planetary boundaries. Integrated approaches that would lead to a more sustainable and inclusive development paradigm and synergize the three dimensions of sustainable development should be urgently promoted.

4. The Forum emphasized the need for normative policy shifts, whereby quality of growth would be redefined and notions of well-being and growth would go beyond gross domestic product.

5. Consensus emerged from the discussion on the need to balance the three dimensions of sustainable development in national policymaking. Several member States highlighted the efforts they had made in bringing about the balanced integration of policymaking with a view to achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth despite deficiencies in implementation capacity and financing. Among the examples highlighted were: the Gross National Happiness model in Bhutan and the Government's eleventh five-year plan, in which, inter alia, disability and gender were mainstreamed; the green growth road map in Cambodia, which combined green technology with inclusive development; the energy road map in Tonga, which sought to achieve energy security and reduce dependence on fossil fuels while reducing the fiscal burden of fuel imports; the adoption in Pakistan of socioeconomic targets in relation to poverty alleviation, good governance, environmental safeguards and social justice; and universal health coverage in Sri Lanka. In particular, major groups and other stakeholders called for social justice to be a central focus of the sustainable development agenda in the future in order to empower all people to have control over their lives and their futures. This would require the

implementation of the sustainable development agenda with the engagement of civil society organizations, the private sector and other key stakeholders.

6. Many participants also highlighted gender equality and the empowerment of women as major factors in ensuring sustainable development. In relation to the centrality of gender equality to sustainable development, the increased participation of women in the labour market and their access to decent work, their equal participation in policymaking processes and addressing their rights to basic services were highlighted.

7. Member States highlighted the progress that had been made in integrating the social pillar into their sustainable development policies and plans, including by focusing on education, health care, women and youth employment, human rights, gender mainstreaming and focusing on vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities.

8. In addition, the need to maximize the development potential of migration for migrants, families and societies was underlined.

9. The Forum called for the effective utilization of regional coordination mechanisms to ensure that all United Nations agencies, regional development banks and other relevant entities coordinated effectively to support the post-2015 development agenda, including with respect to statistics capacity.

10. It was noted that the outcomes of the first Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific, which had been convened by the United Nations Environment Programme, identified key environmental and sustainable development issues for Asia and the Pacific that would be brought to the second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, to be held in 2016. The Forum also highlighted the need for national sustainable development goal data assessments.

11. Global mobilization of a broad range of development actors, including the private sector and civil society organizations, through understanding and defining their specific roles, responsibilities and levels of action in different development contexts, should be a critical component in all efforts to achieve sustainable development.

12. It was underscored that as Asia and the Pacific was the most disaster-prone region in the world, building resilience to disasters was critical in view of the devastating effects of disasters on reversing sustainable development gains. It was recognized that the region needed to take urgent action in the area of disaster preparedness and invest more in order to enhance resilience and reduce the tremendous losses. In that context, the Forum noted that disaster risk reduction should be adequately integrated in the post-2015 development agenda. Drawing on lessons learned following recent disasters, the participants emphasized that information and communications technologies (ICT) were critical for effective disaster risk reduction and management.

13. Echoing the outcome of the inaugural Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, the Forum recalled the importance of deepening regional integration and connectivity to promote access to ICT. Participants

also emphasized the importance of access to information and knowledge as one of the factors that would facilitate green growth.

14. The private sector also recognized the need to take into account the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, including by addressing supply chains. While efforts to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development were already under way in many countries, regional cooperation was underlined as a critical factor for overcoming the barriers to the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, ensuring cross-fertilization and maximizing opportunities.

15. Major groups and other stakeholders highlighted that the discussion on the integration and monitoring of sustainable development in the post-2015 era necessitated an articulation of the principles required in defining truly sustainable and just development, whereby all sectors would be engaged in the process, including civil society and social movements. This required enabling conditions to exist in multilateral and State processes. Participants stressed the need for development to be promoted within the framework of, and entirely consistent with, universal human rights and development justice principles.

Session 2: Perspectives on the sustainable development goals

16. During the session, participants discussed the global process to develop the post-2015 development agenda, the related processes, the outcomes to date in the form of the sustainable development goals and the issues that would shape the debate going forward.

17. The implementation of the sustainable development agenda should take a people-centred and human rights-based approach, focusing on vulnerable and marginalized groups, and engaging civil society organizations in policymaking processes and review frameworks. Social capital should be built through investment in social protection systems in order to enhance social inclusion, boost productivity and ensure sustainability.

18. Successful implementation of the sustainable development goals required fostering national and local ownership, through adoption of the goals by respective national parliaments and the design of appropriate supportive national financing strategies. This would facilitate ownership of the goals and ensure that they were seen as national goals for development. Implementation of actions towards the sustainable development goals should utilize existing national and regional frameworks. Subregional meetings were also noted to be important to coordinate and facilitate the implementation of the goals.

19. Implementation of the sustainable development goals needed to be harnessed by inclusive and green growth strategies that were mainstreamed both in development planning and fiscal strategies, with specific emphasis on adequate support for the goals.

20. Member States emphasized the challenges of implementing the post-2015 development agenda in a manner that supported all three dimensions of sustainable development. This complex challenge required specific policies to be able to advance the agenda. The needs of indigenous

and disadvantaged communities should be taken into account in its implementation. Financing as a means of implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and the discussions on financing for development were complementary. The need for the global agenda to be reflected in national sustainable development frameworks was highlighted.

21. Major groups and other stakeholders highlighted that Governments should take the lead in considering the goals at the country level in order to identify which policies could most economically and efficiently achieve the desired outcomes. As investments in some key sectors relating to the sustainable development goals, such as energy infrastructure, had long lifespans, it was important to incentivize green investments to tilt the balance in favour of renewable or cleaner energy.

22. Civil society organizations noted that bilateral trade and investment agreements should undergo human rights impact assessments and be considered in relation to issues of public health and environmental degradation. Inequality and marginalization remained some of the most central issues. Equitable access and control over land, productive resources and appropriate and environmentally sound technology were identified as key enabling factors for sustainable agriculture and improved livelihoods for marginalized communities. Global and regional efforts to effectively combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, which contributed to over-exploitation of fish stocks, were underlined.

23. The United Nations and other international organizations were invited to strengthen their engagement on issues related to trade, technology and finance as essential means of implementation of all the sustainable development goals, and to support member States in the implementation of their global commitments.

Session 3: Regional mechanisms for monitoring and review for implementation of the post-2015 development agenda

24. In session 3, participants discussed regional monitoring and review mechanisms for implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. The specific objectives of the session were to reach a common understanding of the key elements of a regional monitoring and review mechanism for the post-2015 development agenda; and to make concrete recommendations on how a regional monitoring and review mechanism could be operationalized.

25. During the session, elements of possible frameworks, objectives and the value addition of a regional monitoring and review mechanism were outlined, together with the focus of regional monitoring (regional public goods; regional programmes of action; and regional priority sustainable development goals and targets) and operational modalities (monitoring and reporting mechanisms and options for reviewing national progress), including the role of existing intergovernmental forums.

26. The panel discussion confirmed the critical importance of a regional monitoring and review mechanism to address sustainable development issues at the regional level. The panellists recommended that the monitoring and review mechanism should involve a broad range of stakeholders, including Governments, the private sector and civil society organizations.

The panel took note of the role of civil society organizations in narrowing the gaps between intended policy outcomes and implementation.

27. The panel further highlighted the importance of high-quality statistics for informing policies and programmes to effectively achieve the sustainable development goals. Discussions emphasized the need for strengthening statistical systems for the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda through regional cooperation, including by considering the establishment of a regional trust fund for data and statistics.

28. Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the strengthening of statistical systems, including improving analytical capabilities through partnerships, and the development of statistics, in particular in the areas of civil registration and vital statistics and economic and social statistics.

29. Member States noted that follow-up and review in the context of the post-2015 development agenda should be streamlined, fit for purpose, aligned with existing reporting requirements at the global, subregional and national levels and adapted to the capacities and national priorities of member States. Appropriate incentives for Governments and other stakeholders should be built into the design of the follow-up and review mechanism to ensure that commitments pertaining to sustainable development goals and financing for development were fulfilled.

30. The Forum indicated that the design and development of monitoring and review mechanisms should be State-led and should take into account the needs of all sectors of society. The process should be voluntary, multidisciplinary and require multisectoral involvement, including the participation of civil society organizations and the private sector. The Forum also indicated that the mechanisms should be closely aligned with national planning and strategies.

31. Member States noted that regional mechanisms might be better adapted for voluntary sharing of country experiences based on self-assessment and discussing technical aspects of the post-2015 development agenda. The Forum could serve as an effective and important regional platform for review and stocktaking of the implementation of the sustainable development goals and to share best practices and explore innovations.

32. The Forum could play a pivotal role in translating the global discourse on sustainable development into tangible outcomes at the regional and local levels. ESCAP was encouraged to service the regional platform, including through offering advice on the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, building capacity and facilitating the sharing of knowledge and best practices for the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda in the region. Such a regional platform should engage policymakers and data producers to provide critical feedback to the statistical community through dialogue and with the objective to align national development plans and national strategies for the development of statistics.

33. Delegates representing business and industry noted that significant progress had been made in using “big data” technologies in Asia and the Pacific and that there was a great deal of skill and experience throughout the

region in using such technologies that could be tapped. It was proposed that ESCAP play an intermediating role by identifying and encouraging such businesses to help their respective Governments, especially those in emerging economies, to implement and benefit from the “data revolution” advocated by the panel.

34. Monitoring and review efforts should be based on global, regional and national partnerships and not divert resources from the efforts aimed at achieving the post-2015 development goals. Member States noted the existence of a range of gaps in human and institutional capacity, technology and data. Given the need to mobilize resources to support statistical capacity-building and data production, the Forum supported the establishment of a regional trust fund for statistical development. Both the secretariat and national statistical systems were in need of resources to monitor progress towards achieving the two targets on statistics development as contained in the Open Working Group proposals. The Forum highlighted that consideration of the resources needed for implementation, monitoring and review should be given priority at the third International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in Addis Ababa from 13 to 16 July 2015.

Session 4: The form and function of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development beyond 2015

35. The benefits proposed by ESCAP as a regional platform for the Forum and the high levels of influence that the region would exert on the global processes were noted. Ideas on various possible functions of the Forum were shared along two lines, supporting the global High-level Political Forum and supporting national processes. It was also mentioned that the Forum could provide a link between the national and global levels and, inter alia, mobilize civil society around the new agenda.

36. One delegation warned against creating duplicative structures and burdening Governments with additional reporting requirements, particularly those with limited capacity. Any follow-up and review mechanism should be fit for purpose, generate useful updates and information, and respond to the need for more sophisticated metrics to track the complex framework of goals and indicators. It was important to draw on existing institutions and processes.

37. Civil society organizations proposed that the Forum embody the spirit of the High-level Political Forum resolutions and the Secretary-General’s synthesis paper. The Forum should build on the experiences of available review mechanisms for sustainable development, create enabling conditions to foster knowledge-sharing and reciprocal learning, and promote shared accountability. In addition to universality, country-led and national ownership, coherence and consistency, any regional review mechanism should consider the regional and subregional levels. They also proposed that the Forum be guided by a substantive regional road map, which would include addressing regionally relevant issues both within and outside the post-2015 development agenda, such as an assessment of the impact of trade, technology and investments on sustainability. The supportive structure for the Forum should be adequately funded and include the widest possible participation of stakeholders at all levels, as established in General

Assembly resolution 67/290. Furthermore, the participation of civil society in that endeavour should not falter.

Special presentation: Asia-Pacific models of sustainable development

38. The session showcased unique models of sustainable development that were strongly based on Asia-Pacific culture and values. It also shed light on the examples of sustainable development across Asia and the Pacific.

39. During the discussion, a key topic was how the role of sustainable consumption and production policies would be instrumental in the creation of new engines of growth and for attracting new investments.

40. The models and approaches introduced included: the sufficiency economy of Thailand; the “3R” (reduce, reuse, recycle) model of Japan; the Japanese circular economy effort; the guiding philosophy of the Gross National Happiness model of Bhutan; efforts by Georgia to promote connectivity and cooperation through the silk road; and the approach of Vanuatu to incorporate the traditional and informal economy into its national sustainable development plan. Participants also stressed the importance of development justice and shifting people’s mindset to attain a more sustainable consumption pattern and lifestyle based on spiritual, cultural and ethical values. The session also included presentations during which the importance of integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development was highlighted. In addition, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation gave a report on the outcomes of the South Asia Consultation on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which also underlined that point.

41. Some models and approaches, such as the sufficiency economy and Global National Happiness, recognized that the pursuit of happiness and well-being were the premise for achieving sustainable development and focused on meeting needs without compromising those of future generations. Empowerment of people with income-generation and ICT skills was a key to the success of models, such as the Doi Tung Development Project in Thailand and a project dealing with disaster risk reduction in Vanuatu.

Session 5: Preparatory session for the 2015 Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council: “Managing the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the sustainable development goals: What will it take?”

42. The preparatory session for the 2015 Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council was organized as a panel discussion to provide perspectives from the Asia-Pacific region, particularly from the countries with special needs and regional organizations, while taking stock of ongoing and emerging challenges, progress and gains made in the region within the broader development framework.

43. Participants discussed the following: the post-2015 development agenda and managing the transition from Millennium Development Goals to sustainable development goals, including ongoing and emerging challenges inherent to the transition from a Millennium Development Goals-based to a universal sustainable development goals-based development agenda; the

implementation of programmes of action concerning countries with special needs; the role of regional cooperation and finance for development modalities and initiatives; a development framework that was applicable to all countries while respecting local realities and different levels of development; and a practical transitional path in development cooperation focusing on the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to sustainable development goals.

44. It was recognized that the Asia-Pacific region had been progressing well in terms of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals but the same level of progress had not been reflected across the region. To facilitate further progress, existing partnership mechanisms and structures should be built upon to ensure robust partnership arrangements for the implementation of an integrated sustainable development agenda during the transition period from the Millennium Development Goals to the sustainable development goals.

45. Development cooperation and financing should play a significant and unique role to support the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and to facilitate the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the sustainable development goals. The Forum also recognized that regional trade and investments were critical for shared prosperity and recognized the importance of an enabling framework and institutional arrangements to nudge the private sector towards sustainability.
