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Regional priorities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific

Defining regional priorities and status of the integration and implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific

Note by the secretariat**

Summary

In September 2015, Member States of the United Nations adopted the transformative, integrative and holistic 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, seeking to shift the world to a more sustainable development path. The agenda and its framework of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 associated targets are aimed at mobilizing all countries and stakeholders towards achieving sustainable development by 2030.

Countries in Asia and the Pacific are already putting into place institutional systems to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region are streamlining sustainable development into national development plans. Yet, “hotspots” for action on sustainable development, often lying at the nexus of several interlinked challenges, remain and need to be addressed urgently through a wide, concerted and effective response.

The present document provides an overview of the implementation of the sustainable development agenda in the Asian and Pacific region and contains a discussion of priorities for regional implementation through the lens of regional megatrends and their relationship to the Sustainable Development Goals. It highlights effective approaches and success stories and reviews systemic issues that need to be addressed to support progress on the 2030 Agenda, including a regional road map and systematic follow-up and review facilitated through the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development as a key regional forum on sustainable development.

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I. Introduction

1. Since the inaugural session of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development in May 2014, extensive and inclusive consultations and negotiations have culminated in the adoption of a bold, ambitious global development agenda for ending poverty, fighting inequality and injustice, and tackling climate change.¹ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its framework of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 associated targets, was adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 and is aimed at mobilizing all countries and stakeholders towards achieving sustainable development by 2030.

2. The 2016 session of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development will support national and regional preparations to implement this new agenda. The Forum will consider a draft regional road map to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level. It will also agree on aspects of the form and function of the Forum beyond 2016, with particular reference to its role in supporting follow-up and review processes.

3. To inform these deliberations, the document provides an overview of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Asian and Pacific region. It also contains a discussion of priorities for regional implementation through the lens of regional megatrends and their relationship to the Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting effective approaches. Finally, it reviews the systemic issues that will have impacts on the progress towards attaining the 2030 Agenda.

4. In doing so, the document has been prepared to support the global deliberations at the high-level political forum on sustainable development, which will meet in New York from 11 to 20 July 2016.

II. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda in Asia and the Pacific

5. The secretariat's previous work highlighted the fact that implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires reformed institutional

¹ General Assembly resolution 70/1.

frameworks and strengthened capacities.² Such institutional reforms include national strategies and plans that are aimed at integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development, mechanisms for cross-sectoral coordination for integration and high-level coordination to ensure accountability through monitoring.

6. Countries in Asia and the Pacific, building on experiences that supported accomplishments of the Millennium Development Goals, are already putting in place institutional systems to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Many countries in the region have started developing sustainable development plans. In South-East Asia, for example 10 out of 11 countries have national strategies that incorporate sustainable development principles; full adherence to these principles characterizes the ASEAN Community vision document³ and the road map⁴ towards the realization of the vision by 2025 that was adopted by Heads of States on 21 November 2015. In the Pacific subregion, where sustainable development is the driving force behind the outcome document of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway,⁵ the majority of countries have developed national sustainable development strategies and plans; others are in the process of developing similar plans. In the North and Central Asian subregion, Tajikistan has developed a national development strategy based on the provisions of its constitution and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

7. Several member countries have also advanced with the creation of high-level, cross-sectoral coordination bodies, including Sri Lanka, with the establishment of the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Wildlife; the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the Iranian National Committee for Sustainable Development; and the Philippines, with the Philippine Council for Sustainable Development.

8. The ability of the region to deliver the comprehensive 2030 Agenda is also influenced by the availability of better data and information. Timely, reliable data and statistics are essential for effective follow-up and review to enable national and local governments, business, civil society and international organizations to identify, implement and report on their priorities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

9. Currently, few countries in Asia and the Pacific are able to produce the data required for the broad range of indicators as contained in the global monitoring framework. For instance, data on the international poverty line are reported for only half the countries in Asia and the Pacific, and for three quarters of the countries in terms of national poverty line. More data tend to be available where there are dedicated national government programmes, and national official statistical systems have regular statistical surveys and administrative data systems.

² *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2015* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.II.F.7).

³ The ASEAN Community Vision 2025 was adopted in the 27th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur on 21 November 2015.

⁴ ASEAN Secretariat, *ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together – one vision, one identity, one community* (Jakarta, 2015). Available from www.asean.org/storage/2015/12/ASEAN-2025-Forging-Ahead-Together-final.pdf. The road map was also adopted at the 27th ASEAN Summit.

⁵ A/CONF.223/10.

III. Priorities for implementation: addressing regional megatrends

10. Sustainable development is a universal aspiration. However, there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to development; more than one pathway to transformative change exists.

11. Megatrends, including regional inequalities and vulnerabilities, urbanization, climate change, changing consumption patterns and resource use, trade and economic regional integration, shape needs and abilities of individual countries and development outcomes, and should be taken into consideration to ensure that no one is left behind in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific.

A. Regional vulnerabilities and inequalities

12. At the global level, tremendous progress has been made in eradicating extreme poverty and much of that progress has been in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in China. Of the 1.2 billion who were lifted out of extreme poverty since 1990, 1.1 billion were from Asia and the Pacific.⁶ The share of people living in extreme poverty dropped from 70 per cent in 1990 to 53 per cent in 2012.

13. Despite these improvements, as many as 743 million people in the region continue to live in extreme poverty. Also, the gap between the rich and the poor has increased. Over the past 20 years, the Palma ratio – which measures the ratio of the income share of the top 10 per cent to the bottom 40 per cent of a country’s population – increased from 1.0 to 2.1 in China and from 0.8 to 2.0 in the Russian Federation. Even in countries where inequality is showing a downward trend, the ratio remains high. In addition, many marginalized social groups face inequalities in access to health care, water and sanitation, and education.

14. Vulnerabilities are also linked to environmental factors. The Asia-Pacific region is exposed to many natural disasters and there is evidence about disasters wiping out long-term development gains, especially in least developed countries and Pacific small island developing States.⁷ Over the period 2005-2014 approximately 500,000 people lost their lives, about 1.4 billion people were affected, and the economic damage was equivalent to \$523 billion.⁸

15. Progress on regional vulnerabilities and inequalities will be closely linked to achievements related to Goal 1 “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”, Goal 2 “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”, Goal 3 “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”, Goal 4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”, Goal 5 “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”,

⁶ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*. Available from www.unescap.org/resources/statistical-yearbook-asia-and-pacific-2015.

⁷ *Building Resilience to Natural Disasters and Major Economic Crises* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.II.F.3).

⁸ *Asia Pacific Disaster Report 2015: Disasters Without Borders – regional resilience for sustainable development* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.II.F.13).

Goal 8 “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”, Goal 10 “Reduce inequality within and among countries” and Goal 11 “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”.

16. Investments in universal and good-quality health care, education, labour market policies and social protection for all, should therefore be a priority in this region. Governments in Asia and the Pacific are already strengthening their efforts to broaden social protection coverage; of the 26 developing countries in the region for which data are available 21 recorded an increase in social protection spending as a share of total government expenditures during the past two decades.

17. Lack of access to social protection is a major obstacle to economic and social development. Inadequate or absent social protection coverage is associated with high and persistent levels of poverty and economic insecurity, and growing levels of inequality. Only the minority of the region’s population is effectively protected. In South Asia, less than 10.6 per cent of workers have social security coverage. Many of those not sufficiently protected live in poverty, are the working poor, or work in the informal economy.

18. In North and Central Asia, exclusion from the labour market, particularly for young people, remains a challenge. Young people may be at risk of discouragement, inactivity and skills obsolescence, often resulting from a mismatch between education and labour market demands. When faced with prospects of falling into poverty, young people may be forced into vulnerable employment and hazardous work conditions.

19. Out-of-pocket health expenditures in Asia and the Pacific are among the highest in the world; 80 per cent of the population has no access to affordable health care. These coverage gaps present both a challenge and an opportunity for member States to increase efforts in expanding and strengthening their social protection systems.

20. In South-East Asia, a country that has advanced in investing in good-quality health care for social inclusion is Thailand. Its Universal Coverage Scheme (UCS) was introduced in 2001 to ensure that all Thais would have access to effective health care. Thailand’s Universal Coverage Scheme is the product of a determined effort to move towards broad coverage for the informal sector, and is the result of the merger of formerly fragmented schemes towards a more integrated approach.

21. While significant progress has been made towards achieving gender equality, there are critical areas of concern, including women’s economic empowerment, political participation and addressing violence against women. In the Asia-Pacific region, the gender gaps in economic participation have barely changed in the last 20 years, and the gap is as high as 50 per cent in South Asia. Among those who are employed, women are, relative to men, more likely to be engaged in vulnerable employment. The gender pay gaps are persistent in the region, with women’s earnings, on average, 20 per cent less than that of men. Women remain the bedrock of the unpaid care economy, with implications on their ability to engage equally in political, public and economic life. In Asia, the female representation in national parliaments is 19 per cent, whereas in the Pacific, the average rate is 13 per cent, much lower than the global average of 23 per cent. Gender-based violence is prevalent across all subregions. Between 25 to 70 per cent of women and girls face violence at the hands of an intimate partner, with severe

consequences for women and their families, and resulting in economic and social costs to countries.

22. Access to good-quality education remains uneven, with stark differences between/among different regions, urban and rural areas and different schools. In South and South-West Asia, basic education for all needs to be expanded, including universalizing secondary education, while also enhancing the quality of education.

23. An example of good practice from South Asia highlighting the impact of investment in education in terms of improving skills is from Sri Lanka, which now enjoys high literacy rates of 99 per cent for girls and 98 per cent for boys. This positive trend is attributed to national policies, which allow for free education at primary, secondary and university levels and is compulsory for children between 5 and 13 years of age. The Government of Sri Lanka also uses the education system as a platform to promote child nutrition, through providing a mid-day meal for children in designated coverage areas.

24. The Asia-Pacific region is also facing unprecedented demographic changes, such as population ageing and migratory movements within, to and from the region.

25. The issues of population ageing and aged populations are particularly acute in the East and North-East Asian subregion. Population ageing is associated with shrinking populations in the working-age group, creating challenges for health care, access to jobs for older persons and pension systems. Japan is the most aged country in the world with one third of its population in 2015 being above 60. Population ageing will require a comprehensive approach to ensure that such issues as poverty and ill-health among older persons, as well as addressing the shrinking labour force, are addressed through social protection policies. For example only 30 per cent of persons above the retirement age receive an old-age pension; an estimated 8 out of 10 workers are still not covered by a pension scheme.

26. In an effort to provide access to effective income security for older persons, the Government of Samoa introduced the Senior Citizens Benefit Fund in 1990, which complements the 1972 Samoa National Provident Fund scheme covering only those in the formal sector. The Senior Citizens Benefit Fund is a non-contributory pension scheme available to all citizens and permanent residents aged 65 years or older. Citizens receive a benefit amounting to approximately 20 per cent of the average income. Currently, both Funds reach approximately 71 per cent of those aged 60 years or older. Claimants also receive a pension identification card providing access to free medication and free inter-island travel on public seagoing vessels. These investments form an essential part of Samoa's social protection floor and ensure that all Samoans receive an old-age pension.

B. Urbanization

27. Levels and rates of urbanization in Asia and the Pacific are closely linked to levels of economic development. By 2020, the majority of the region's population will live in cities.

28. Targeted and integrated action at the city level can therefore substantially boost the achievement of several interlinked Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 11 “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”, and others such as Goal 6 “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”, Goal 7 “Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all”, Goal 9 “Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation” and Goal 13 “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”. Liveable, healthy and competitive cities and human settlements that support economic dynamism and diversification facilitate the effective delivery of basic services, are safe for all and promote social inclusion.

29. In the absence of adequate management and investment, this megatrend also holds the potential to reverse progress, fostering exclusion and causing environmental degradation. The impact is especially felt by vulnerable groups – the half a billion people in Asia and the Pacific who still live in slums, those who are particularly exposed to poor air quality that particularly affects South Asian cities,⁹ those who are without adequate access to basic infrastructure, such safe water and sanitation, and basic urban services, such as education and health.

30. Strengthening governance approaches will be critical, among other responses. Effective urban leadership as well as broad stakeholder participation will be essential. Mayors and city leaders have a critical role to play. Their effectiveness in developing partnerships, engaging the public and in mobilizing human and financial resources will largely determine success in meeting targets. The 2030 Agenda provides an opportunity for cities, their leaders, communities and key stakeholders to set ambitious targets and to develop coalitions that bring about change.

31. One important example can be found in the area of climate change. Under the umbrella of the Compact of Mayors,¹⁰ the world’s largest cooperative effort among mayors and city officials, they have pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Seoul Action Plan was initiated in 2015 to motivate more cities to take part in the Compact of Mayors. Through the Seoul Action Plan the Transformative Actions Programme taps the potential of local and subnational climate action. One element of the Transformative Actions Programme is to select 100 promising transformative projects every year ahead of the annual sessions of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change with the aim of enhancing capital flows to cities.¹¹ Such regional efforts are based upon the principle that local actions, when committed to collectively, can have a global impact.

⁹ South Asia is home to most of the top 20 most polluted cities in the world, as measured by PM 2.5 concentrations. See www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/13-out-of-20-most-polluted-cities-in-world-are-from-india-54104.html.

¹⁰ The Compact of Mayors was launched in 2014 by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his Special Envoy for Cities and Climate Change. To date, 447 cities (64 in the ESCAP region) have committed to the Compact, of which 45 (4 in ESCAP: Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Seoul) are already compliant.

¹¹ www.un.org/climatechange/blog/2015/04/mayors-announce-new-commitments-climate-action-ahead-2015-paris-climate-conference/.

32. There are other examples of “early movers” in the region on urban Sustainable Development Goal-related areas. Afghanistan has demonstrated innovative use of information and communications technology (geographic information systems) coupled with participatory mapping in identifying patterns of urban growth and gaps in planning; cities as diverse as Matale in Sri Lanka have demonstrated the effectiveness of resource recovery models based on new partnerships between municipal authorities, civil society organizations and the private sector in more effectively managing waste, which is pro-poor and more financially viable;¹² a number of urban communities in South-East Asia have been investigating innovative pathways to greater water security and more effective wastewater treatment through decentralized wastewater treatment systems in the absence of modern infrastructure;¹³ while a number of cities, including smaller urban centres, such as Lami in Fiji, and Chiang Rai in Thailand, have developed innovative resilience programmes through investing in ecosystems and waterways.¹⁴ Such examples are important to learn from and build upon, as is the experience of those cities, from New Delhi to Port Moresby, that are pursuing policies to ensure safer and more inclusive futures.

C. Environment and climate change

33. The Asian and Pacific region has experienced warming trends, increasing temperature extremes and sea level rises over the past century.¹⁵ Climate change drives a complex mix of unpredictable environmental changes, affecting the resilience of natural and man-made systems through impacts on food security, diseases and livelihoods. All subregions are affected by the impacts of climate change. In South Asia, this is manifested in increasingly devastating riverine floods and the onslaught of cyclones and unprecedented heavy rainfall in coastal areas. In the Pacific, impacts include sea level rise, cyclones, increasing air and sea surface temperatures, and changing rainfall patterns. In North and Central Asia, given the already very high level of water stress in many parts of this subregion, projected temperature increases and precipitation decreases could exacerbate problems of water shortage and distribution. Owing to projected sea level rise, the coasts of South Asia and South-East Asia will likely be at risk of flooding and salt inundation.

34. Asia and the Pacific is now responsible for over half of the global greenhouse emissions, which contribute to global warming – which in turn have been linked to increases in the frequency and severity of natural disasters. East and North-East Asia alone accounts for 33.3 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

¹² United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and Waste Concern, *Valuing Waste, Transforming Cities* (Bangkok, 2015).

¹³ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UN-Habitat and Asian Institute of Technology, *Policy Guidance Manual on Wastewater Management with a Special Emphasis on Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems* (Bangkok, 2015).

¹⁴ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UN-Habitat and Rockefeller Foundation, *Quick Guide for Policy Makers: Pro-Poor Urban Climate Resilience in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok, 2014).

¹⁵ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis – Working Group I Contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, T.F. Stocker and others, eds. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013).

35. During the past five years, the Asia-Pacific region permanently lost the equivalent of approximately 27,000 square metres of primary forest per day.¹⁶ In South-East Asia, deforestation rates were higher than almost anywhere else on Earth, because of land conversion for other purposes, such as palm oil production and logging.

36. Environmental pollution has become an increasingly serious issue in East and North-East Asia, exacerbated by the subregion's fast economic development and its transition to heavy and chemical industrialization. The subregion accounts for 81.5 per cent of ozone depleting substance consumption in the ESCAP region and 60 per cent worldwide. The use of hazardous chemicals and pollution of air and water have caused increases in the subregion's death rate and the number of people suffering from diseases.

37. The future direction and speed of climate change in the region will be impacted by achievements in Sustainable Development Goal 13 "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts", but also Goal 7 "Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all", Goal 14 "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development", and Goal 15 "Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss".

38. Climate change poses one of the most significant challenges to achieving sustainable development. Therefore, mitigation of and adaptation to climate change should be of utmost priority in all five subregions. In the context of intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs), post-2020 climate change mitigation and adaptation ambitions are outlined based on national priorities, circumstances and capabilities, and in order to achieve the objectives of Article 2 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. While the Asian and Pacific countries' INDCs are as diverse as the region itself, those submitted point to an increasing link between national policies and related instruments for low-emission and climate-resilient development to global commitments under the Convention. INDCs also point to the increasing prominence of climate change on national political agendas, which in many cases has been driven by interministerial coordination arrangements and the mainstreaming of climate change into national and sectoral development priorities.

39. Climate adaptation measures will require major investments in climate-proofing of flood protection works, city drainage systems and of roads, rail and other infrastructure. Countries in the South and South-West Asian subregion have made major commitments to mitigation efforts in Paris, which would require moving to renewable energy sources and enforcing low carbon production and consumption pathways involving a major switch to green technologies, accessing which will be a very major challenge.

40. China's INDC, in line with the country's national 13th five-year plan, proposes to peak carbon emissions by 2030, to lower emissions' intensity by 60 to 65 per cent from the 2005 levels; to increase the share of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption to about 20 per cent; and to increase forest stock volume by about 4.5 billion cubic metres based on the 2005 level.

¹⁶ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*. Available from www.unescap.org/resources/statistical-yearbook-asia-and-pacific-2015.

41. Indonesia through its INDC has committed to reduce, by 26 per cent by 2020 and 29 per cent by 2030, greenhouse gas emissions unconditionally, increasing to 41 per cent by 2030 conditional to provision of assistance through bilateral cooperation covering technology transfer, capacity-building, payment for performance mechanisms, technical cooperation and access to financial resources.

42. India has committed to cut greenhouse gas emissions for each unit of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 33-35 per cent from 2005 levels by 2030.

43. Kazakhstan, already strongly committed to low carbon growth and the transition to a green economy, has proposed a 15 per cent unconditional and a 25 per cent conditional emissions reduction target by 2030 from 1990 levels, representing a significant increase in ambition from the 7 per cent reduction target by 2020 from 1990 levels.

44. Mongolia's fully conditional INDC is similarly grounded in the country's green development policy. Its INDC was formulated through a multi-stakeholder consultation process and is largely based on existing national legal frameworks and policies.

45. Bangladesh and Bhutan, despite their least developed country status and minimal emissions, have formulated INDCs with ambitious mitigation targets. Bhutan formulated its INDC based on existing national constitutional and legal commitments to remain carbon neutral, and maintain a 60 per cent forest cover indefinitely,¹⁷ while Bangladesh proposed up to a 15 per cent conditional reduction in emissions from business-as-usual scenarios.

46. In the Pacific, all countries share the concern that climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihood, security and well-being of the people. Leaders called for the adoption of an ambitious and legally binding agreement at the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as well as endorsed the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Declaration on Climate Change Action. The Pacific island countries are serious about reducing greenhouse gas emissions and are committed to show leadership through ambitious submissions of INDCs, implement commitments under the Majuro Declaration for Climate Leadership in 2013 to reduce emissions and reliance on fossil fuels and promote low carbon development through supporting initiatives, such as Sustainable Energy for All, Small Island Developing States Sustainable Energy Initiative (SIDS DOCK) and REDD+. Two regional frameworks of great relevance are also the Pacific Islands' Framework for Action on Climate Change, Climate Variability, and Sea Level Rise and the Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Framework for Action.

¹⁷ Bhutan's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution was submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat on 30 September 2015. Available from www4.unfccc.int/submissions/INDC/Published%20Documents/Bhutan/1/Bhutan-INDC-20150930.pdf.

D. Resource use

47. Resource use trends in the Asia-Pacific region – which shows significant increase both in total and per person use – suggest that efforts need to be intensified to address efficiency in use as well as distribution. The use of biomass, fossil fuels, metal ores and non-metallic minerals in the Asia-Pacific region has increased threefold between 1990 and 2010 – faster than both the population growth rate and GDP growth.¹⁶ The region accounts for 59 per cent of global resource use despite contributing just 35 per cent to the global GDP. Both developed and developing countries in the region registered improvements in energy efficiency, with the latter group driving this trend. However, these efficiency improvements are still not on par relative to global rates and are overcompensated by economic growth. The gaps described here show that there is wide scope for using resources more efficiently, which may be achieved by transforming economic structures and making deliberate efforts to move towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns.

48. While there is a need to improve efficiency so that the rate of resource use is not coupled in the same ratio as GDP growth and environmental impacts, it is also equally important to look at inequalities and vulnerabilities in relation to the distribution of resource use. Data from some least developed and landlocked developing countries in the region, such as Afghanistan, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Nepal, show that the actual consumption taking place within the national borders (material footprint of consumption) are actually smaller than their production of goods and services (material use).¹⁸ Many of these countries are also those that have shortcomings in meeting the water, food and energy needs of their population. While energy consumption has expanded dramatically, 455 million people still lack access to electricity, with about 80 per cent of them living in South and South-West Asia.¹⁹

49. There will be impacts on this megatrend by achievements through Sustainable Development Goal 12 “Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”, Goal 2 “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture” and its targets related to sustainable agriculture, Goal 6 “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”, Goal 7 “Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all”, Goal 8 “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”, Goal 9 “Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation” as well as the two Sustainable Development Goals addressing maritime and terrestrial resources, Goal 14 “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development” and Goal 15 “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”.

¹⁸ United Nations Environment Programme, “Resource use in the Asia-Pacific: a booklet of infographics”. Available from www.switch-asia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/RPSC/Publications/09Infographic_Low-resolution_.pdf.

¹⁹ ESCAP Asia Pacific energy portal, based on data from SE4ALL Global Tracking Framework. Available from: <http://asiapacificenergy.org/>.

50. Within the region, there is wide room for improvement and a role for regional cooperation.

51. A number of recent policy initiatives in the region are aimed at combining high-level policy initiatives with social support. Grounding high-level leadership in a more bottom-up approach could be an effective strategy for instigating transformation in patterns of resource use and in the management of their environmental impacts. Beyond decoupling, some countries in the region (Bhutan, China and Pacific island countries) have also put into place initiatives that manage resources in a way that recognizes environmental limits.²⁰

52. China's success in increasing energy efficiency demonstrates the importance of setting high-level policy standards. In its eleventh five-year plan (2005-2010), the Government set a target to improve its energy efficiency by 20 per cent. An assessment²¹ found that industrial energy efficiency policies were effective in achieving the energy conservation target and collectively accounted for close to 60 per cent of the achieved energy savings from 2006 to 2010. The remaining savings were achieved through autonomous technology improvement and sector-level structural shift. The subsequent twelfth five-year plan set an additional 16 per cent energy efficiency improvement goal for the period 2011-2015. However, China still needs more energy per unit of economic output compared with many industrialized countries, suggesting that there is room for improvement.

53. Policymakers have taken on the task of transforming economic activity towards resource efficiency and minimization of waste and emissions. China has operationalized "circular economy" principles and pollution control into its national policy frameworks, while its "eco-civilization" strengthens this approach by integrating environmental protection with societal and economic goals. China has also established the concept of "three red lines", which establishes a holistic approach to water resource management that respects environmental limits.

54. Since 2005, Singapore has rolled out three green-building master plans that introduced a comprehensive suite of financial incentives, legislation, industry training programmes and public outreach campaigns to facilitate the adoption of a green-building certification programme. In just eight years (2005-2013), the number of green buildings in the country increased a hundred times, from 17 to about 1,700. The latest government green-building master plan (2014) is aimed at certifying 80 per cent of the country's buildings by 2030. Singapore's success with green buildings reflects mandatory building codes and the broad social consensus on the importance of using resources wisely.

55. The Republic of Korea introduced policy instruments which are aimed at affecting resource price and the volume of waste generated. The success in reducing solid waste in the Republic of Korea is primarily attributed to the introduction of a volume-based waste fee system in 1995 (as opposed to a

²⁰ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations University and Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, *Transformations for Sustainable Development: Promoting Environmental Sustainability in Asia and the Pacific 2015* (Bangkok, 2016).

²¹ Yuqing Yu and others, "Ex-post assessment of China's industrial energy efficiency policies during the 11th five-year plan", *Energy Policy*, vol. 76, pp. 132–145.

fixed monthly rate). A similar approach was employed to reduce food waste in early 2000. The Republic of Korea now has one of the highest levels of resource and environmental taxation in the region, at roughly 10 per cent of its fiscal revenues, compared with about 6 per cent in typical European Union countries and 3 per cent in the United States of America.

56. In 2010, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government introduced a mandatory carbon dioxide emission reduction and a cap-and-trade emission trading scheme. It is the world's first such scheme that sets binding targets for buildings. The scheme has resulted in a transformation in the city's emissions, with the total greenhouse gas emissions reduced by 23 per cent on average from the base years and 10 per cent below the average of other parts of the country before the end of the first compliance period of five years (2010-2014). By the end of fiscal year 2013, total emissions were reduced by 23 per cent on average from the base years; 90 per cent of nearly 1,350 regulated facilities achieved the first reduction target and 69 per cent of them even met the 2019 targets. This scheme is one of the most innovative initiatives to address greenhouse gas emissions from urban centres.

57. Pacific countries continue to reaffirm the central importance of increasing economic returns and ensuring the sustainable management of fisheries as well as strengthening maritime surveillance and enforcement, noting the multidimensional nature of these issues. Current management approaches (such as the "Vessel Day Scheme") have brought significant economic return to Parties to the Nauru Agreement. There is, however, a need to ensure that the partnerships in place for the sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources are well managed to ensure equitable benefits for all partners involved.

E. Regional cooperation and integration

58. The past decade has witnessed increased economic regional integration in the Asia-Pacific region. Interregional trade and economic relations are supporting the emergence of the region as the fulcrum of the emerging international trade scenario. Many countries are negotiating major trade agreements, and intraregional foreign direct investment is also expanding in importance.

59. However, the majority of regional cooperation and integration initiatives that have taken place are aimed at market integration, trade liberalization and financial cooperation, leaving behind the political, environmental and sociocultural aspects of cooperation.²² While enhanced regional cooperation on trade can provide benefits, such as technology and information transfer and investments in green technologies, it can also impose risks to the environment, such as resource extraction and greater movement of goods and services.

60. Regional integration should therefore address promoting and mainstreaming sustainable development to "make existing regional integration efforts in trade, investment and infrastructure consistent with sustainable development."²¹ For example, trade integration could establish

²² Magnus Bengtsson and Satoshi Kojima, "Regional integration and sustainable development: experiences from Asia and beyond", in *Greening Integration in Asia: How Regional Integration Can Benefit People and the Environment*, IGES White Paper V, Thomas Hamilton, Emma Fushimi and Eiko Kitamura, eds. (Hayama, Kanagawa, Japan, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, 2015).

mechanisms to promote resource productivity and sustainability across the entire production and supply chain and allow freer movement of labour to help reduce inequalities between countries. This megatrend interrelates with all the Sustainable Development Goals and will dramatically benefit from regional integration in approaching the set targets.

61. In South-East Asia, for example, the economic conditions have been influenced by the integration of the economies of the 10 countries composing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The economic integration became fully operational in January 2016 but even before that, the nominal GDP of South-East Asia already reached about \$2.6 trillion, making it the seventh largest economy in the world. Yet, the political, environmental and sociocultural aspects of ASEAN cooperation have not been keeping pace with its rapid economic progress. In view of this, ASEAN is forging ahead with a 10-year comprehensive agenda that would attain its vision of a community that is rules-based, people-oriented and people-centred by 2025.²³

62. Infrastructure connectivity, as well as access to financing for development, exchanges in science, technology transfers, and increased trade and investment are of particular importance in North and Central Asia, which is one of the least integrated subregions of the Asia-Pacific region. The attainment of qualitative improvements in social development goals is a critical enabler as is the need to reverse environmental degradation. By bringing countries around a common purpose of integration, interconnectivity and institution-building, ESCAP can support North and Central Asia's national efforts in wider regional strategies for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

63. With seven of the nine member States of North and Central Asia being landlocked, the modernization of infrastructure related to transport, power generation and communication is an essential contributor to sustainable development. Opportunities for regional trade for energy security and renewables in the energy mix can be further enhanced. Equally important, is the prioritization of intercountry infrastructure connectivity across all sectors, without which participation in the regional and global economy would be stymied by geographic remoteness.

64. In the Pacific, regional integration, mainstreaming the Samoa Pathway and aligning monitoring and review processes represent a clear opportunity to strengthen the Sustainable Development Goal framework. Subregional support and cooperation for the Sustainable Development Goals will be critical and is strongly mandated in the 2030 Agenda and by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in the Forum Communique. The Forum Compact is potentially a key mechanism to help Pacific Island Forum countries translate the appropriate elements of the 2030 Agenda into national sustainable development plans.

65. Regional integration is a major development need also in South and South-West Asia where insufficient subregional cooperation has become an obstacle to its future development. Immediate needs are to promote regional infrastructure, cross-border connectivity, disaster risk reduction, trade and the protection of migrant workers. The special problems of least developed

²³ ASEAN Secretariat, *ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together – one vision, one identity, one community* (Jakarta, 2015). Available from www.asean.org/storage/2015/12/ASEAN-2025-Forging-Ahead-Together-final.pdf.

countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States (a number of which are in South and South-West Asia) require accelerated implementation of international agreements, such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and the Istanbul Programme of Action.

66. For historical reasons, full regional cooperation continues to be a challenge in East and North-East Asia. However, a more extensive partnership could be established by making full use of existing mechanisms. These include efforts to strengthen economic integration by further developing and expanding subregional cooperation zones (such as the Tumen River Economic Development Area, the Yellow Sea Free Economic Zone and Bohai Economic Rim, and the Japan Sea Rim Economic Zone) and environmental cooperation, such as the North East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation, the Northwest Pacific Action Plan, and the Long-range Transboundary Air Pollutants in North East Asia.

IV. Operationalizing and mainstreaming: addressing systemic issues in delivering sustainable development

67. The consultations and negotiations on the 2030 Agenda emphasized the need for strengthening the capacity of Governments to deliver the agenda. Goal 17 “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development” emphasizes four means of implementation, namely trade, capacity-building, technology and finance.

68. The 2030 Agenda building on the “Rio+20” processes additionally recognizes three systemic issues as target areas to strengthen delivery of the means of implementation. These three systemic issues – policy and institutional coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships and data, monitoring and accountability – are discussed below and are critical for strengthening the required global and regional policy action.

A. Policy and institutional coherence

69. The Sustainable Development Goals taken together comprise a complex, integrated and interrelated system. Underlying the concept of sustainable development itself is an inherently complex, integrated systems perspective, which requires assimilation of a wide variety of society’s needs – both current and future – such as equity within and across generations as well as socially just prosperity and environmental sustainability.

70. Countries in the region require the tools, models and capacities to effectively integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development into national and regional policy frameworks and strategies. Effective and targeted capacity development, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, is necessary to support the development and implementation of regional and national plans to implement the Sustainable Development Goals holistically and in a balanced manner.

71. Policymakers must be able to reconcile public and private interest and Governments require enhanced capacity to coordinate policies in different domains. Goal 16 “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” recognizes the critical role of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions in implementing the 2030 Agenda,

including the need for responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

72. Governments require strengthened capacity to analyse and evaluate various policy options, based on economic, social and environmental criteria, as well as to monitor progress and policy impacts.

73. Policy frameworks must achieve multiple objectives to support the needed shifts in policy stance, reshape market and other incentives, lengthen the time horizons and reduce policy uncertainty. Policymakers must be able to identify where the trade-offs between different dimensions of sustainable development occur, what the root causes are and then design policies that foster synergies between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

74. Different countries have different capacities and needs in this regard, depending on national circumstances and priorities. Best-practice and innovative tools are already being successfully developed and leveraged across the region. For example, ESCAP has developed capacity-building tools, including a modelling framework for analysing possible pathways to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, given country-specific conditions.

75. Under the framework it is recognized that the Sustainable Development Goals require a combination of various socioeconomic capacities, such as physical, human and social capital and institutional capacities, that enable countries to progress towards attainment of individual goals. The framework enables policymakers to think through relevant interactions among different goals and associated targets. It can also simulate alternative policies and pathways for progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, inform about potential benefits of those different pathways and ultimately provide for guidance that policymakers can incorporate into their national development plans as appropriate.

B. Data, monitoring and accountability

76. Member States have committed to systematic follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national, regional and global levels. Efforts have been focused on the development of a global monitoring framework, to be complemented by indicators at the regional and national levels. Member States are expected to develop their national indicators and targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances.²⁴

77. Such steps would include the setting up of national follow-up and review mechanisms that facilitate national statistical office coordination of data and statistics requirements. The international statistical community needs to expedite the development of measurement standards and guidelines where they do not exist or are insufficient for priority target areas, such as disaster risk reduction, climate change and data disaggregation.

78. Complete registration of vital events, such as births and death, is essential for monitoring health outcomes and population dynamics but, according to assessments conducted in 47 Asian and Pacific countries

²⁴ See General Assembly resolution 70/1, para. 55.

between 2010 and 2012, only 11 were categorized as satisfactory, while 36 were found to be dysfunctional, weak or inadequate. The Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade, 2015-2024 will ensure that countries generate internationally conformed vital statistics.

79. Asia and the Pacific is the most disaster prone region in the world, and decision makers require reliable statistics to develop policies, strategies and programmes in order to protect the most vulnerable populations and to effectively respond to disasters. Reliable disaster statistics, however, are difficult to obtain. ESCAP has therefore established an expert group comprising statisticians and disaster risk reduction experts to develop a regionally agreed basic range of disaster statistics.

80. Filling the existing gaps in good-quality data requires concerted efforts of a broad-based partnership. Improving data is a development agenda in its own right, and strengthening statistics should be an integral part of national plans of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals to ensure institutional support and adequate investment. Concerted capacity development efforts are also required at the regional and national level to build capacity to collect, assess and maintain disaggregated and complete statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals to guide implementation based on evidence, and follow-up and review processes.

C. Multi-stakeholder partnerships

81. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are identified in the 2030 Agenda as being important for mobilizing and sharing “knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries”, and for follow-up and review processes.

82. Several factors support the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships, including networking opportunities in which stakeholders are able to align their interests and values, but also supportive policy environments which bring the interests of different stakeholders together behind shared goals, such as promoting energy efficiency, expanding access to renewable energy, or to education and health services.

83. Effective partnerships between Governments and other stakeholders will be especially critical, and require political commitment, clear and legislated mandates, institutional capacity and dedicated resources. Some countries have implemented inclusive and substantive engagement mechanisms for engaging stakeholders as a first step in developing such partnerships. The Philippine Council for Sustainable Development, for example, includes civil society in decision-making mechanisms through the Civil Society Counterpart Council for Sustainable Development. Decisions of the Philippine Council for Sustainable Development are made through consensus-building, and equal rights are accorded to all officially designated representatives, including those of civil society and the private sector.

84. Other countries have used public consultation as a key engagement mechanism. Singapore used the participatory practice of consultation while formulating the Sustainable Singapore Blueprint, which engaged thousands of stakeholders. Timor-Leste held a conference on sustainable development, and consultations on the Summary Strategic Development Plan, From Conflict to Prosperity, the outcomes of which were reflected in the Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030.

D. Financing for development

85. Sustainable development requires stable and long-term financing. ESCAP estimates that it could cost between \$2.1 trillion and \$2.5 trillion per year to close infrastructure gaps, provide social protection (including health-care and education services) and to address climate mitigation and adaptation needs.

86. Greater efforts must be made to ensure that existing resources are invested within the region. However, it will also be critical to raise considerable additional resources, especially from domestic sources, including through effective tax policies and development of capital markets. South-South, triangular and regional cooperation will form further critical complementary elements of a financial strategy in support of sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.

E. Science, technology and innovation

87. The United Nations has recognized that to meet the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda; science, technology and innovation (STI) will be critical. By identifying STI as an important means of implementation in the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations is making a commitment to support countries to harness STI for inclusive and sustainable development.

88. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, countries will need to align their STI agendas with the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) and strengthen their STI capabilities and capacities. While STI strategies in the region have predominantly been focused on stimulating economic growth, there are potentially significant social and environmental gains to be made by also focusing STI strategies on social innovation.

89. In order to ensure that sustainable development is inclusive, it will also be important to ensure that the principles of inclusivity, openness and collaboration are integrated into STI policies and strategies.

F. The role of ESCAP

90. General Assembly resolution 70/1 assigns ESCAP, together with the other regional commissions a key role by providing an explicit and implicit mandate to assist member States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development, providing technical support for their implementation through effective leveraging of the means of implementation, and by facilitating effective follow-up and review.

91. The role of ESCAP in supporting the 2030 Agenda recognizes that there is significant interdependence between the global, regional and national levels of sustainable development. Regional action is critical for galvanizing national action on the Sustainable Development Goals and for global follow-up and review.

92. A key factor of success of the 2030 Agenda will be the ability to achieve integration across dimensions, spheres and partners. ESCAP, because of its unique convening power that includes outreach to Governments, its interdisciplinary work programme, its broad analytical capacity, civil society and development partners, and regional dimension that allows it to provide a link between the country and global levels is strategically positioned to

facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

93. ESCAP will support its member countries in the implementation of the new agenda and has identified specific areas through which it can facilitate regional implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. In agreement with other regional commissions of the United Nations system these include: (a) analytical work to promote policy integration, coherence and consistency and linkages among the different Sustainable Development Goals; (b) regional coordination of national statistical development and Sustainable Development Goal indicators; (c) support to follow-up and review processes; (d) mobilizing the necessary means of implementation; (e) translating regional models into global public goods; (f) coordinating the United Nations system at the regional level; and (g) regional integration to enhance productivity in the region and address cross-cutting issues, such as regional inclusiveness, inequality and poverty.

V. Conclusion

94. While the full framework of the Sustainable Development Goals is yet to be defined, an overview of the 17 goals based on available information shows that some of the “hotspots” for action on sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific development context lie at the nexus of several interlinked challenges.

95. While more than 50 per cent of the population in Asia and the Pacific were living in extreme poverty in 1990, that proportion was reduced to 15 per cent in 2012. The number of people lifted out of poverty in the region accounted for 1.1 billion out of 1.2 billion in the world. However, there are still 2.6 billion living on less than \$2 per day – a legacy of an unfinished Millennium Development agenda.

96. The region must keep up the momentum in several areas to continue to address poverty – expanding access to education for the more than 20 per cent of youths who do not attend secondary school; creating decent work, in particular for women who are more likely than men to be in low-paying, precarious jobs; and in expanding transport and communications networks.

97. Social protection must be strengthened in the Pacific, South and South-West Asia and in South-East Asia in particular, and social services better targeted. Basic services continue to be out of reach for many and focus needs to be especially on the rural sector. The majority of those without access to safe drinking water – 213 million out of 277 million in the region are rural residents. Almost half of rural residents do not have access to improved sanitation, and 2 billion are without access to modern forms of energy – despite the fact that residential electricity consumption per capita doubled between 1995 and 2012.

98. Most prominent among the shared challenges across the region is the need to ensure the place of women in decision-making. Elimination of all forms of discrimination, violence and harmful practices, and undertaking reforms to ensure women’s full and effective participation in political, economic and public life are critical to inclusive growth and sustainable development.

99. Low-income countries face the most important challenges in making the kinds of investments that will lift their status. In low-income countries, the lack of fundamental access to health care is a constraint to people fulfilling their potential. Maternal, infant and child mortality rates are multiple times higher than in high-income countries and life expectancies are still lower.

100. The region must invest into enhanced resource use efficiency and end the degradation of critical ecosystems. Water constraints are affecting countries in Central Asia in particular, where four out of five countries are withdrawing more than the critical 40 per cent of their internal renewable water resources. Regional material consumption is growing four times faster than the population, and faster than GDP. Although renewable energy use is growing, fossil fuels as a share of energy sources is still expanding at a higher rate.

101. The food supply and agricultural sector requires more support. While there has been significant success in increasing productivity, this has largely been based on energy and chemical inputs. The challenges faced by the agricultural sector will not be met without an expanded knowledge base, but investment into agricultural research and development is low across the entire region.

102. Forced labour and child labour arrangements still blatantly violate human rights and play a significant economic role. Whether this situation becomes entrenched, expands or is improved as economies grow will require coherent action across the region and commitment to operationalizing human rights commitments.

103. Rising risks, including those related to climate change, are critical to address. Almost 58 per cent of global deaths, and almost 90 per cent of the global total of affected persons are in this region.

104. Lifestyle changes must be kept in focus as economies expand. Dietary and lifestyle changes are reflected in the non-communicable disease rate, which is 3 to 22 times higher than that of communicable diseases and injury.

105. Finally, there is a need to think about how investments are made and where they are prioritized. The \$533 billion of foreign direct investment which entered the region should directly support sustainable development outcomes.

106. While the region has made significant progress on the Millennium Development Goals, in order to not fall behind in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda countries in Asia and the Pacific now need to pay urgent attention to the governance and institutional capacity shortcomings that will impede the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda requires that a wide, concerted and effective response be implemented that will specifically address the cross-cutting issues of poverty alleviation, inequality and inclusiveness; resource use and environmental impacts and economic transformation; and deployment of the means of implementation across all areas.

107. In Asia and the Pacific, this process will be supported by the regional road map that provides a framework for action. The road map provides a practical framework that creates, through ESCAP and its role in supporting integrated approaches to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level, opportunities for transformation and innovation.

108. The follow-up and review process for the 2030 Agenda in the Asian and Pacific region is facilitated and supported by the annual Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development, a key forum for the sustainable development agenda at the regional level.

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

109. Member States and other stakeholders are invited to review the present document with a view to:

(a) Sharing national perspectives on the issues raised at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and sharing best practice responses to the challenges identified;

(b) Making specific recommendations for follow-up at the regional level, including through the regional road map, ensuring that the road map reflects regional and subregional priorities and development contexts, as discussed under agenda item 5;

(c) Ensuring that the form, function and modalities of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development provide an appropriate forum for addressing regional and subregional priorities and development issues and for reviewing progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
