



Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**Seventy-fifth session**

Bangkok, 27–31 May 2019

Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

Dates and venue of and theme topic for the seventy-sixth session of the Commission (2020)**Dates and venue of and theme topic for the seventy-sixth session of the Commission (2020)****Note by the secretariat*****Summary*

The present note contains information on the proposed dates and venue of the seventy-sixth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, which is to be held in 2020, and proposals for a theme topic for that session.

The Commission may wish to make a decision on these matters.

I. Introduction

1. The present note contains suggestions made by the secretariat for the consideration of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) at its seventy-fifth session. The Commission may wish to consider the dates, venue and theme topic for its seventy-sixth session, to be held in 2020, and to provide the secretariat with guidance in this regard.

II. Dates and venue

2. Rule 1 of the rules of procedure of the Commission requires it to recommend the date and place for its next session, subject to the approval of the Economic and Social Council and in consultation with the Secretary-General. In accordance with established practice, at each session, the Commission recommends the convening of the next session. The actual dates and venue are then determined by the Executive Secretary in consultation with the members and the Chair of the Commission.

* ESCAP/75/L.1.

** The present note was submitted late owing to the need to take into account the views of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission, which were expressed at its formal and informal meetings, including on 17 May 2019.

3. In addition, in rule 1 of the rules of procedure, it is stated that sessions of the Commission shall ordinarily be held at the office of the United Nations in Asia and the Pacific, unless the Commission recommends otherwise.

4. It is proposed that the seventy-sixth session will be held in Bangkok from 18 to 22 May 2020, taking into account major meetings and holidays during April and May 2020 that could have an impact on both the servicing of and participation in the session.

III. Theme topic

5. The Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission considered proposals for a theme topic and outlines of issues to be covered. The Commission is invited to decide on the theme topic of its seventy-sixth session from the following proposals:

- (a) Investing in the oceans of Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development;
- (b) Leveraging digital technologies for sustainable development;
- (c) Navigating changing demographics for sustainable development.

A. Investing in the oceans of Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development

6. The recent ESCAP study, *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2019: Ambitions Beyond Growth*, has shown that as much as 14 to 15 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) is required by least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.¹ According to another ESCAP study, the *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2018*, these countries with special needs are far behind in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in multiple areas.² How can these groups of countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals? The proposed theme study for 2020 will demonstrate that economic growth and prosperity for least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States can be achieved through government investments in people and investments in the planet through regional cooperation and official assistance. Through proper planning, investment prioritization and partnerships, countries with special needs can indeed achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. Investing in the planet implies protecting the environment against disasters (cyclones, floods, droughts), overexploitation, mismanagement and abuse. Investing in the oceans is closely linked to the livelihood of the Pacific small island developing States. The loss in value of ecosystem services in the region could amount to \$4.7 trillion per year by 2050 versus a possible increase of \$3.3 trillion in the value of ecosystem services if the Sustainable Development Goals are achieved. Demonstrating how the region can act together to protect the oceans and, in turn, how small island developing States can prosper from regional cooperation and global-level official assistance will serve as a model for how landlocked developing countries and least developed

¹ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.F.6.

² United Nations publication, forthcoming.

countries can benefit from similar regional cooperation and official development assistance.

8. All countries are inextricably linked to the oceans, even landlocked countries. Oceans are the largest climate regulator on Earth and are a vital source of livelihoods, employment and economic growth. However, the oceans are under attack. Temperatures are rising, with unknown impact on microplankton, the largest source of oxygen in the atmosphere. If unaddressed, the impact on oceans will affect the future balance of nature and humanity. The physical health of oceans is impacted by what is put into them, such as, hazardous materials, toxic waste, fertilizer and solid waste, including plastics. Waste from distant inland areas finds its way into oceans through waterways and river systems. Nowadays, five countries in Asia produce 60 per cent of the total plastic waste entering the oceans. What is taken out from the oceans can be equally damaging. A staggering 50 per cent of the world's wetland ecosystems have been destroyed, up to 80 per cent of the coral reefs in Asia and the Pacific are at risk of bleaching and around 60 per cent of coastal mangroves in Asia and the Pacific have been cleared for development. If left unmitigated, the threats to oceans and the loss of marine and coastal ecosystems will endanger the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

9. The proposed theme study will assess, by numbers, how small island developing States and, by extension, landlocked developing countries and least developed countries, can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals through collective efforts to preserve the oceans. The study will also demonstrate the contributions of the Asia-Pacific region by investing in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, in advance of the second United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, to be held in June 2020.

B. Leveraging digital technologies for sustainable development

10. Technology has been heralded as a key means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As the fourth industrial revolution evolves, digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, 3D printing and the Internet of things are reshaping our economies, societies and the environment. They are also demonstrating their potential to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. Digital trade and finance are opening economic opportunities. From a social perspective, digital health care and education are providing cost-effective solutions at scale, and smart cities, energy and transport are offering alternative models for protecting the environment.

11. The opportunities for economies and societies through digitization cannot be fully exploited without necessary infrastructure, an enabling policy environment, investment and technological, individual and institutional capacity. In addition, the wave of optimism surrounding the transformative potential of digital technologies has been tempered by increasing concerns about its potential negative societal impacts, including on the future of work, widening technological inequality and the environmental impact of technologies in terms of energy consumption. In particular, how middle-income countries can move up the technological value chain is an urgent question facing many countries in the region. Furthermore, as developed countries move ahead with emerging technologies, digital technologies that

can assist vulnerable groups in society are not gaining sufficient attention to realize the ambition of the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind.

12. The key message of the proposed theme study will be that digital technologies will only have the desired impact on the Sustainable Development Goals if enabling factors are in place to mitigate potential negative impacts and ensure inclusivity. The theme study will outline policy frameworks that maximize the potential of digital technologies for sustainable development.

C. Navigating changing demographics for sustainable development

13. The demographic trends in countries across the Asia-Pacific region are quite different from one another. What they have in common is that all countries see their populations ageing, some much faster than others. Population ageing is a positive consequence of declining fertility rates and increasing longevity, often as a result of socioeconomic development. It means that people will live longer and healthier lives. It also means that fewer children are born and many more infants survive their first critical year. As a result, more women and girls have the opportunity to complete their education, participate in the labour force and make more independent decisions.

14. The Asia-Pacific region is ageing at a faster pace compared to most other regions. By 2050, the number of older persons in the region is projected to more than double, reaching 1.3 billion, and one in four people will be 60 years old or older. Preparing for this transition and the economic and social challenges associated with it is of particular importance for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 1 (No poverty), Goal 3 (Good health and well-being), Goal 5 (Gender equality), Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth), Goal 10 (Reduced inequalities) and Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities).

15. The proposed theme study will focus on socioeconomic outcomes likely to result from the ongoing demographic transition. The social dimension will cover the impact of ageing on gender equality, changing family and household structures, and the requirement for higher investments in social protection and new public services. The economic dimension will cover the impact of ageing on labour shortages, GDP growth, consumption and saving patterns, and the competitiveness of companies. Drawing on good practices and experiences from the region, the study will also provide a discussion of available solutions to harness the benefits of the demographic transition underway, while mitigating negative impacts that could occur if relevant policies are not in place.

IV. Previous theme topics

16. For reference, a list of the theme topics of previous Commission sessions is contained in the annex to the present note.

Annex

List of theme topics of previous Commission sessions

<i>Session^a</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Theme topic</i>
40	1984	Technology for development
41	1985	Technology for development
42	1986	Human resources development
43	1987	Human resources development
44	1988	Human resources development
45	1989	Restructuring the developing ESCAP economies in the 1990s
46	1990	Restructuring the developing ESCAP economies in the 1990s
47	1991	Industrial restructuring in Asia and the Pacific, in particular with a view to strengthening regional cooperation
48	1992	Regional economic cooperation in the ESCAP region: prospects, priorities and policy options
49	1993	Expansion of investment and intraregional trade as a vehicle for enhancing regional economic cooperation and development
50	1994	Infrastructure development as key to economic growth and regional economic cooperation
51	1995	Strengthening of regional cooperation in human resources development with special reference to the social implications of sustainable economic growth in Asia and the Pacific
52	1996	Sustainable development and poverty alleviation in Asia and the Pacific
53	1997	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: opportunities and challenges for ESCAP
54	1998	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: status of and prospects for social development
55	1999	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: information technology, globalization, economic security and development
56	2000	Development through globalization and partnership in the twenty-first century: an Asia-Pacific perspective for integrating developing countries and economies in transition into the international trading system on a fair and equitable basis
57	2001	Balanced development of urban and rural areas and regions within the countries of Asia and the Pacific
58	2002	Sustainable social development in a period of rapid globalization: challenges, opportunities and policy options
59	2003	Integrating economic and social concerns, especially HIV/AIDS, in meeting the needs of the region
60	2004	Meeting the challenges in an era of globalization by strengthening regional development cooperation
61	2005	Implementing the Monterrey Consensus in the Asian and Pacific region: achieving coherence and consistency

<i>Session^a</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Theme topic</i>
62	2006	Enhancing regional cooperation in infrastructure development, including that related to disaster management
63	2007	Development of health systems in the context of enhancing economic growth towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific
64	2008	Energy security and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific
65	2009	Towards sustainable agriculture and food security in the Asia-Pacific region
66	2010	Addressing challenges in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals: promoting a stable and supportive financial system; and green growth or environmentally sustainable economic growth, including through technology and financing
67	2011	Beyond the crises: long-term perspectives on social protection and development in Asia and the Pacific
68	2012	Enhancing regional economic integration in Asia and the Pacific
69	2013	Opportunities to build resilience to natural disasters and major economic crises
70	2014	Regional connectivity for shared prosperity
71	2015	Balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development: from integration to implementation
72	2016	Science, technology and innovation for sustainable development
73	2017	Regional cooperation for sustainable energy
74	2018	Inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
75	2019	Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality

^a From the fortieth to the seventy-fifth session.