

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

Ninth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

Bangkok and online, 28–31 March 2022

**Summary of round table discussions\****Summary*

The present document is an addendum to ESCAP/RFSD/2022/5, the report of the Ninth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. As agreed during the adoption of the report on 31 March 2022, the addendum provides the summaries of the outcomes of five round tables conducted under agenda 2 on the review of regional progress on Sustainable Development Goals 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17.

**I. Goal 4: Quality education**

1. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 4 were informed by the relevant goal profile<sup>1</sup> and focused attention on the following action areas for Asia and the Pacific.

2. **Continue safe school reopening and prioritize learning recovery strategies with targeted policies and a strong equity focus.** In order to build back better, more emphasis is required on making schools more adequate and welcoming to better serve all learners, particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups such as children with disabilities and those who face high levels of discrimination such as LGBTQI+ learners. Learning recovery strategies should address the high levels of mental and academic stress and inadequate mental health and psychosocial support, not only reported by learners but also teachers, who both require stronger well-being and support systems, including those that prepare them for future shocks. Moreover, young people need to be more concretely engaged as collaborators on driving forward Goal 4. Quality education targeted in learning recovery should include access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services and information, including through comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). It should be more flexible and consider strategies for peer-to-peer and lifelong learning and address the digital divide in the region that contributed to learning loss as many poor and vulnerable learners did not benefit from remote learning approaches. The

\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

<sup>1</sup> [www.unescap.org/kp/2022/sdg-4-goal-profile](http://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/sdg-4-goal-profile).

important social orientation role of education should be emphasized and more attention paid to schools (mainstream, as well as schools for children with disabilities), and particularly for technical and vocational schools and training opportunities.

3. **Strengthen teaching and teacher support to address existing low levels of learning and narrow the learning divide.** The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) also impacted teachers' well-being and their rights to be protected, to work in decent conditions and to social protection, including health insurance. These impacts were felt across the teaching profession including those in private institutions, from early childhood through to higher education levels and migrant teachers. Programmes and policies are needed to improve teacher readiness to support newer and flexible learning modalities, enabled by appropriate resources for teachers and students. To continue to uphold the highest standards of education, the rights of the teachers and education sector workers are called for, including researchers, supply and substitute teachers who have lost their employment and other contract opportunities.

4. **Make early childhood care and education (ECCE) and learning flexible and universal.** ECCE has been historically deprioritized and underfunded and is at heightened risk of increased budget cuts in the wake of COVID-19. Beyond the milestone of ECCE access should be that of ensuring transition of learners to Grade 1. Education policies should recognize mother tongue learning, especially during the early years with transitions into national and international languages using contextually appropriate strategies such as recruitment of teachers who share the same mother tongue as students and provision of diverse learning materials.

5. **Build on the experience gained during COVID-19-related school closures and embrace and strengthen equitable flexible learning modalities and learners' pathways, including skills development for adolescents.** Education systems must develop in-school and out-of-school strategies, as many children remain disengaged from formal school settings. Flexible learning opportunities – both formal and non-formal – should also be responsive to especially vulnerable learners including girls, refugees and migrant learners, indigenous learners and those with disabilities. Flexible learning approaches for learners with disabilities should address the key barriers to learning participation including accessible infrastructure, availability of assistive devices and access to social protection measures such as cash transfers. Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic should be applied to the design of learning recovery programmes and also recognize the situation of learners who may be engaged in both schooling and work. Skills development of adolescents should be supported comprehensively, spanning skills need for engagement in the workforce and society overall to skills for respectful and gender-equitable interpersonal relationships and good health and well-being, including sexual and reproductive health.

6. **Build stronger school links with families, communities, and cross-sectoral policies and programmes to create effective and protective learning environments in and around schools.** Institutionalizing learning communities, community-based learning and ensuring stronger integration with classroom-based approaches need to be prioritized as part of creating effective learning environments that address multiple domains of learning: cognitive, behavioural and socio-emotional, and which enable the realization of Sustainable Development Goal target 4.7 across all levels of education. Characteristics of effective learning environments need to be further promoted. In addition to protective dimensions, such as keeping school

safe from violence and attacks, as well as well-being dimensions, such as institutionalized support for mental health and psychosocial well-being, effective learning environments are those that have good infrastructure – including digital infrastructure, for learning.

7. **Protect public financial investments and efficiency in education and encourage equitable funding mechanisms.** More innovation is needed around generating financing for education through multiple channels such as public taxes and private investment. Such efforts should occur in tandem with creating incentives for investment in education, which link to data quality that can demonstrate evidence of the return on this investment. Equitable funding approaches that target the most vulnerable learners should apply a dual approach of limiting school dropout while providing quality alternative learning opportunities to out-of-school students. In addition to enhancing financing, more attention is needed to confront conditionalities of international financing mechanisms.

8. **Strengthen inclusive and robust monitoring data mechanisms, and work towards more resilient governance structures that allow education systems to respond to future shocks, including related to climate change.** Disaggregated data is crucial to more accurately capture the situation of especially vulnerable learners, so that education systems are appropriately responsive. Data disaggregation should support education equity, as pre-COVID-19 some vulnerable and marginalized learners such as LGBTQI+ learners were not adequately being captured in data or were otherwise excluded on the basis of the binary formulation of education indicators. Improving data quality must therefore involve re-examining the types of data that should be collected, addressing systems inefficiencies and expanding partnerships for data collection with education stakeholders such as universities and academics who can supplement statistical capacities. Partnerships for improving education data quality also exist outside the education sector. Beyond improvements in data quality is the need to strengthen data use in sectoral planning. Towards more resilient governance structures, efforts must be strengthened for regulating and enforcing laws relating to private sector actors in education. Enhanced social dialogue and stronger linkage between governments and unions of education workers will also aid in addressing a broader range of issues, including shocks related to climate change.

## II. Goal 5: Gender equality

9. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 5 were informed by the relevant goal profile<sup>2</sup> and focused attention on the following action areas for Asia and the Pacific.

10. **Continue to ensure decent work and address gender-based discrimination and violence in the world of work.** Governments need to strengthen legislation and policies to close the increasing gender gaps in economic participation and wages, and address the intersectional discrimination and barriers for women, LGBTQI+ people, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples so that they can equally participate in the labour market. Governments should also improve labour standards, social protection and other programmes to support workers in informal sectors and the transition to formal employment, and generate decent work through

<sup>2</sup> [www.unescap.org/kp/2022/sdg-5-goal-profile](http://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/sdg-5-goal-profile).

strengthening the care economy as part of the job-rich recovery strategies from COVID-19.

**11. Promote a gender-responsive ecosystem to support women entrepreneurs in all sectors.** Governments need to strengthen enabling policies to remove gender-based barriers long faced by women entrepreneurs and join forces with private-sector stakeholders to mobilize innovative financing and utilize digital tools to boost women-led businesses. Policy and innovative market-based means can especially encourage and support women's entrepreneurship in emerging sustainable business sectors such as renewable energy. Economic stimulus and policies for socioeconomic recoveries from COVID-19 must include tailored solutions to support employment and businesses led by women and the distinct groups aforementioned, as well as women in rural areas, that are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

**12. Strengthen gender-responsive, care-responsive and inclusive social protection to build resilience for all.** Governments urgently need to ensure that social protection benefits sufficiently cover populations currently underserved including women, informal workers, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people, and indigenous peoples. Governments also must adopt care-responsive policies to counter the negative effects of unpaid care and domestic work burdens on women's equal participation in education, economic and social activities, leadership and decision-making. These include investments in more affordable, accessible and quality care services for children, older persons and persons with disabilities, and more accessible and sustainable built and digital infrastructures. Governments also need to consider policy means such as paid family or parental leaves, tax breaks and other initiatives, which could incentivize a more equal distribution of unpaid care and domestic responsibilities between women and men.

**13. Incorporate deliberate actions in COVID-19 response and recovery to address gender-based violence, harmful practices, and sexual and reproductive health, including addressing the specific needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups.** Building back better would not be possible without placing gender equality at the centre and recognizing that gender-based violence, harmful practices and sexual and reproductive health and rights operate across the social, economic and environmental dimensions. COVID-19 has exacerbated the multiple and intersecting inequalities and vulnerabilities that women and girls as well as other distinct groups face. This has resulted in an increased risk of exposure to gender-based violence and harmful practices, especially child marriage. COVID-19 recovery efforts undertaken by Governments and all stakeholders, with regards to addressing gender-based violence, harmful practices and sexual and reproductive health and rights, need to embrace intersectionality and respond to the specific needs and rights of LGBTQI+ people, individuals with gender diverse identities, women and girls with disabilities and indigenous women.

**14. Prioritise gender transformative strategies to address gender-based violence and harmful practices.** Governments and other stakeholders need to strengthen relevant legal frameworks, provide comprehensive, inclusive and multi-sectoral programmes, and increase investment in capacity building and evidence generation that target gender-based violence and harmful practices in all spheres – at home, in public and online. This should also include the promotion of universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights by repealing restrictive laws and eliminating barriers, particularly those faced by groups in marginalized and vulnerable situations. Priority should be given to gender transformative approaches which

are holistic, community-based and participatory in the processes of implementation, monitoring progress and identifying emerging trends.

15. **Empower women and women leaders from diverse backgrounds to initiate and lead reform and social and political changes.** Barriers to women's leadership have their ground in patriarchal norms which disadvantage women and LGBTIQ+ people from diverse socioeconomic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Priorities need to be given to enhancing women's leadership, including across high-level political spaces, private sector, technology industry and other specialised technical fields, and empowering young women leaders to initiate, lead and advocate for change in their communities and beyond, including on climate change and other emerging issues. Also, men and boys need to be engaged as partners in advancing gender equality, women's rights, and women's leadership, in order to challenge patriarchal norms.

16. **Employ innovative methods and new technologies to support women's leadership and participation in governance and decision-making.** Governments need to strengthen innovative and multi-sectoral approaches to enhance women's leadership in influencing government policy and wider decision-making processes, including the increased usage of technological solutions to preparedness and response to conflict and climate crisis. In light of the effects of climate change on the security situation across Asia and the Pacific, employing innovative and multi-sectoral approaches to enhance women's leadership, particularly young women and indigenous women, is central to preventing, mitigating and responding to the diverse security and safety challenges the region faces. Broadening the definition of conflict in the region can promote further recognition of women's diverse roles in prevention, response and peacebuilding across the peace continuum.

17. **Adopt and adequately finance holistic, inclusive and gender-responsive planning and budgeting, especially for initiatives currently underfunded.** Governments need to establish policies and governance frameworks that mandate gender-responsive planning and budgeting, involving all stakeholders, to inform and ensure the financing and monitoring of public-sector spending at different levels towards gender equality and women's empowerment. With shrinking fiscal spaces, Governments especially need to prioritise and adequately plan and finance gender-responsive and inclusive policies, services, initiatives and innovations that can deliver tangible results.

18. **Invest in closing critical gaps in gender statistics and data.** Gender-responsive policies and actions must be informed by effective gender analysis with sufficient and quality gender statistics and data, that is further disaggregated by other intersectional identities. Governments and national statistical offices need to integrate gender into national statistical strategies. Governments also need to invest in closing the gender data gaps across sectors through financing and building capacities to collect, analyse and use disaggregated gender data. Capacities need to be strengthened for ethical and safe collection of gender data, including data on the prevalence of violence against women and harmful practices, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and time spent on unpaid care and domestic work to enable a more comprehensive assessment of progress across all dimensions of Goal 5.

19. **Strengthen partnerships at all levels to ensure coherent and effective implementation of Goal 5.** It is more urgent than ever that the region adopts a whole-of-society approach to address gender gaps on all fronts. Accelerating progress towards gender equality calls for strengthened

collaboration between governments, civil society organisations, international organisations and the private sector for joint advocacy, evidence-informed planning and policymaking, and the provision of comprehensive, people-centred, and inclusive actions on all fronts. Governments need to make sure all stakeholders and groups concerned are involved in the process of gender-responsive and inclusive planning, budgeting and decision making.

### III. Goal 14: Life below water

20. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 14 were informed by the relevant goal profile<sup>3</sup> and focused attention on the following action areas for Asia and the Pacific.

21. **Improve data collection and sharing.** Increased and sustained investments in data and statistics are necessary to ensure regular and long-term data collection and to build the required capacities for data processing, accounting and statistics production and use. Local action on data collection, processing and use must be prioritized to support local policy action, for example for coastal communities dependent on small-scale fishing. Innovation and technology, including geospatial data and Internet of Things (IoT), should be utilized to strengthen availability, relevance and timeliness of ocean data and statistics. Capacity-building programmes for local communities are needed for data collection at the local level. Local authorities should also engage in data collection, understand the data collected and benefit from it.

22. **Enhance policy design and implementation.** Some policies to address the challenges of the ocean already exist, but a stronger focus on their implementation is needed. For issues such as waste management and marine pollution, there are strong needs for material flow analysis, material flow accounting and waste accounting to understand how plastic debris enters waterways. The implementation must embrace governments at all levels, including local governments in the forms of municipalities or local councils. Implementation must also be human-centred and using a participative approach.

23. **Increase financing for sustainable practices.** Financing must be made available to small-scale fisherfolks to protect their livelihoods and to guarantee they can also benefit from the blue economy. This includes access to capital and markets and should be accompanied by technical support and legal safeguards, preventing any form of discrimination. Financing provisions must be understood within the context of competition with industrial trawlers and commercial fishing. Financing options should also be made available to improve data collection.

24. **Enforce international treaties and regulations.** Additional efforts must be made to implement and enforce the Port State Measures to prevent unauthorized fishing, to eliminate illegal fishing practices, and to undertake monitoring, control, and surveillance, in order to develop and promote responsible fishing practices. While governments have ratified the agreement, there are opportunities to strengthen knowledge and skills at the local level, working closely with coastal authorities and municipalities, and capitalizing on available electronic monitoring, artificial intelligence, innovative technologies, and information sharing.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.unescap.org/kp/2022/sdg-14-goal-profile](http://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/sdg-14-goal-profile).

25. **Promote regional cooperation to strengthen ocean governance.** Cooperation to strengthen ocean governance should leverage the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science and the opportunities it presents to bridge science and policy interfaces. This encompasses reinforcing partnership between scientists and statisticians to develop appropriate measurements and methodologies to harmonize data, establishing and strengthening data governance to facilitate data sharing through enhanced innovation and technological developments.

#### IV. Goal 15: Life on land

26. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 15 were informed by the relevant goal profile<sup>4</sup> and focused attention on the following action areas for Asia and the Pacific.

27. **Catalyse a shift toward nature-positive, regenerative, and resilient agriculture, fisheries, and forestry systems.** Achieving this priority will involve implementing agricultural practices that maintain pollinator habitats, shrink impacts on nature, restore soil productivity, sequester carbon, secure water supplies, minimize disease, and foster genetic and crop diversity. This objective includes a movement toward agroforestry and agroecological practices such as sustainable land and forest management to ensure the production of key commodities on a sustainable basis, focusing on long-term productivity over short-term gains. Sustainable land management is especially necessary across agricultural land and forest production areas but also in urban areas, which have received less attention as protected areas, yet involve the highest levels of threats and extinctions. These efforts can build on the outcomes of the United Nations Food Systems Summit held in September 2021 and can be integrated with efforts to implement the national pathways toward sustainable food systems. Rights of indigenous people and farmers and their traditional practices need to be recognized as well as the importance of agroecological based approaches. Food sovereignty and the displacement of people due to mega projects were also highlighted as key issues.

28. **Enhance a holistic One-Health approach in the post-COVID-19 world.** Raising awareness and enhancing the knowledge base about connections between zoonotic diseases and environmental integrity is essential. Adopting a One Health approach at all levels of decision-making from the global to the local; recognizing the complex interconnections among the health of people, animals, plants, and our shared environment; and fostering cross-sectoral collaboration can reduce the risk of future outbreaks of zoonotic diseases. To minimize these risks, the post-COVID-19 recovery process must incentivize more sustainable and nature-positive activities and not augment environmental externalities such as carbon emissions and pressure on biodiversity and ecosystems. Other key issues include: the need to enhance public investment in health; awareness raising; addressing the health implications of chemical pesticides and fertilizers; recognize traditional practices; ensuring local community and farmer participation in decision making and address land grabbing. Action on adaptation under on Goal 13 on climate was lagging.

29. **Mainstream biodiversity across government sectors.** An essential conservation need is to integrate biodiversity considerations into decision-making across sectors including in ministries of finance, agriculture, infrastructure, planning, tourism, health, and education, among others. This

<sup>4</sup> [www.unescap.org/kp/2022/sdg-15-goal-profile](http://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/sdg-15-goal-profile).

could be done by adopting an integrated approach to sustainable development, planning, and implementation, taking into account the links between Sustainable Development Goal 15 and other Goals, such as Goal 2 (Zero hunger), Goal 3 (Good health and well-being), Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation), and Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production). There is a need to ensure that policies contribute to meeting targets. One of the primary levers for this priority is high-quality data availability for decision-making, including integrated land-use planning, by identifying areas important to protect, manage, and restore nature in order to maintain essential ecosystem services and achieve nature-dependent development goals. There is a need for strengthened coherence across national and local action plans and to involve indigenous communities. Other action identified includes considering commercial monoculture in addressing Goal 15; applying a human rights-based approach; and importance of addressing wild trafficking and poaching as part of COVID-19 recovery.

30. **Address the data deficit.** A recurring constraint is the lack of information and data to accurately assess the status, trends, risks, threats, and conservation needs for Goal 15 in the Asia-Pacific region. Further capacity development action is needed, including support from the relevant United Nations agencies and institutions that are the custodians of Goal 15 indicators, such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, FAO, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. For monitoring, the information and views of local governments and communities is essential given their local knowledge. Comprehensive approach is needed, recognizing the inter-linkage between Sustainable Development Goals. Need for better assessing the synergies between data on Goal 15 and other Goals. Measuring of impacts of industry (e.g. infrastructure, housing) is important including through application of standards such as the world green building framework developed by the World Green Building Council, and environmental and social governance frameworks such as the TCFD (Taskforce for Climate Related Disclosure); Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) for carbon reduction; CDP, a charitable organization supporting disclosure on climate, water security and forestry, which can also be expanded to biodiversity issues.

31. **Mobilize resources for nature from private, public, and global funds (targets 15.a and 15.b).** Seeking out multiple avenues to mobilize and realign financial resources for biodiversity conservation, social forest initiatives and sustainable use is key in Asia and the Pacific, including redirecting and realigning public and private finance flows, both domestic and international, from nature- and climate-harmful investments to nature-positive and climate-adaptive ones. This objective also involves catalysing and leveraging private-sector investment and philanthropic finance for nature-based solutions. There is potential for increased engagement with or replication of financing initiatives and for the application of economic instruments including ENCORE, Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN), the Agri3 Fund, the Restoration Seed Capital Facility, market-based instruments such as payments for ecosystem services, and efforts under the UNEP Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity for Agriculture and Food initiative. Other key action identified includes:

(a) Participating in the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use, backed by nearly US\$20 billion in public and private funding (this



is a good example of biodiversity and ecosystems-related efforts taking place under a climate change related framework);

(b) Applying tools such as ASEAN Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance that serves as a reference point to guide capital and funding towards activities that can help promote the systemic transformation needed for the region;

(c) Action by governments need to make use of regulations and plans to limit impact on biodiversity and integrate price of biodiversity risks especially in supply and value chains. Including recognizing biodiversity co-benefits of climate actions and climate co-benefits of biodiversity actions and integrate this into Nationally Determined contributions and reporting and in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs);

(d) Measured by sustainability aspects of investments in terms of SDG 15 Life on Land;

(e) Emphasizing the business case for environmental, social and governance (ESG) sustainability given the potential to into fast-growing ESG funds and sustainable bond markets.

**32. Engage with and implement relevant international environmental agreements.** Achieving this priority will involve encouraging active participation and strong commitment towards the finalization and adoption of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework at the second part of the fifteenth United Nations Biodiversity Conference of the Parties (COP15). Supporting its effective implementation will help scale up efforts to accomplish Goal 15. To halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030, it will also be essential to actively participate in relevant Paris Agreement and twenty-sixth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 26) initiatives, including the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forest and Land Use, and to integrate Goal 15 action into the nationally determined contributions. Need for a coordinated approach for implementing multiple multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) at the national level including through establishing task forces with representatives from environment, agriculture and other key sectors. Private sector can also contribute to MEAs through relevant mechanisms such as the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures and other ESG processes. Regional workshops for sharing knowledge and experiences among countries in implementing and financing MEAs are useful. United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions on sustainable lake management (UNEP/EA5/L8/REV.1) and nature based solutions for supporting sustainable development (UNEP/EA5/L9/REV.1) were highlighted as important international environmental commitments.

**33. Increase stakeholder engagement and awareness in addressing Goal 15.** Key strategies to expand protected areas and forest cover and their effective management, as well as to broaden action on Goal 15, include expanding the role of the private sector, women, civil society, indigenous peoples, local communities' social forestry programmes, children and youth, through innovative and diverse participatory governance models. This priority includes raising awareness of the contribution of biodiversity and ecosystems services to people's lives.

**34. Encourage decision-makers to apply the International Resource Panel's four principles of natural resource management that can help countries effectively implement biodiversity policy.** These principles are as follows: first, know your true impact; second, grow with nature; third, value nature, and fourth, plan together. Important approaches to employ include

value-chain transparency, integrated landscape planning, nature-based and circular solutions, and recognition of nature’s benefits as well as follow up on the post-2020 biodiversity framework.

35. **Acknowledge and support Goal 15-related priorities identified at the Fourth Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific, Suwon City, the Republic of Korea, 5-7 October 2021.** These priorities include the following:

- Focusing on nature-based solutions and an ecosystem-based approach and implementing United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions to promote sustainable and resilient ecosystems as part of COVID-19 recovery efforts;
- Supporting the Colombo Declaration on Sustainable Nitrogen Management, which is a roadmap for action on nitrogen challenges, including encouraging additional countries to join the initiative;
- Engaging with the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management, including for action on sand and dust storms.

Other issues highlighted included the need for sustainable lake management as well as sustainable consumption and production. In addition, a “One United Nations approach” could enable the coordination required to solve multidisciplinary environmental issues. Good examples of such an approach include the Partnership for Action on Green Economy and the Poverty Environment Action for SDGs. Cross-target interactions, synergies and intersectionality with the other Sustainable Development Goals is also needed, for example between Goals 17, 15, and 12.

## V. Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals

36. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 17 were informed by the relevant goal profile<sup>5</sup> and focused attention on the following action areas for Asia and the Pacific.

37. **Economies can build back better by prioritizing human rights and equality.** Many developing countries in Asia and the Pacific require fiscal space and liquidity to invest in economic and social rights, including in the production of disaggregated data to inform investment-related decisions and to uphold their minimum core obligations under international law. Progressive realization of economic and social rights and heightened investments in people during recovery can ensure a greener and more sustainable future that leaves no one behind. Reforming international financial architecture, making tax systems progressive, and introducing human rights-compliant budget and economic policies would contribute to this objective, in addition to policies that promote decent work and gender-sensitive social protection. The participation of civil society can support trade, budget planning, and monitoring; facilitate accountability; curb corruption; and promote trust and a new social contract for other economic policies.

38. **The modalities for development—North-South, South-South, and triangular cooperation—are all important and complementary.** International commitments to engage in foreign direct investment in the least developed countries (LDCs) and to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of the

<sup>5</sup> [www.unescap.org/kp/2022/sdg-17-goal-profile](http://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/sdg-17-goal-profile).

gross national income as official development assistance (ODA) must be honoured.

39. **Investments in national data governance, stewardship, and innovation, especially in the integration of geospatial, citizen-led, greater disaggregated data and statistical information, can guarantee data accessibility and ownership.** Such investments can also advance implementation of the 2030 Agenda, they can ensure equitable coverage of all people and geographical areas while maintaining consistency and comparability, and they can deliver on agreed upon follow-up and review mechanisms.

40. **Investments are critical to the shared vision within Asia and the Pacific of universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems.** These investments in turn can facilitate the realization of rights and support good governance, health, and development, including toward the 2030 Agenda. They can also further recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for the hardest-hit populations.

41. **Public finance is critical to build back better from the coronavirus disease, to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and especially to ensuring public goods and equity (targets 17.1 and 17.2).** To enhance fiscal space, countries must widen their tax base, increase tax progressivity, tackle tax evasion, strengthen tax administration, and boost expenditure efficiency. Regional and global tax cooperation are also crucial. Low tax-to-GDP ratios in several Asia-Pacific economies are driven by large informal economies and widespread tax avoidance. To widen the tax base, Governments could consider taxes that have social or environmental benefits, such as a progressive income tax or carbon tax. Taxing the digital economy also offers substantial potential which remains largely untapped. To heighten compliance, policy options include expanding the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in tax operations and adopting risk-based compliance control. Where relevant, Governments can also re-evaluate tax exemptions and incentives currently offered to economic activities that do not directly contribute to inclusive or green development.

42. **Debt sustainability requires prudent debt management, innovative collaboration between monetary and fiscal authorities, more ambitious and broader debt relief, and a review of debt conditionalities.** Meeting quantitative ODA targets can enhance equity and mitigate risk. Integrated national financing frameworks can help align government budgets with national development plans and priority Goals and can facilitate collaborative efforts to mobilize international public resources and leverage private Goals-aligned innovative financing instruments and investments. Developing countries in Asia and the Pacific could reduce the risks associated with rising external debts by developing their local currency bond markets. Deep and efficient domestic debt markets can provide governments with a stable source of funding, including for large infrastructure investments, while increasing resilience to shocks by mitigating currency risks. For example, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam have well-developed local currency bond markets and are among the countries with the lowest exposure to external debt risks. Although the development of local currency bond markets is a long-term proposition, the recent experience of Bhutan, which issued its first sovereign bond in 2020 with support from ESCAP, suggests that even small LDCs have the capacity to begin the process. Besides their potential to furnish government financing, the development of local currency bond markets can also enable access to innovative financial instruments such as thematic bonds.

**43. Private finance must be leveraged at a much larger scale and directed more effectively to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.**

In order to advance sustainable and gender-inclusive development, countries must do the following: identify climate action and Goals-aligned development areas that can be financed privately, ideally as a part of integrated national financing frameworks; create an enabling environment and incentives for private investors to contribute in line with national development priorities and international human rights standards; ensure financial systems are inclusive and improve access to medium- and long-term financing; and leverage strong partnerships to use financing instruments such as blended finance to de-risk investments, public-private partnerships, and capital market instruments such as thematic bonds.

**44. Least developed countries and developing countries can be supported in navigating the continued digitalization of trade.**

Enhanced global and regional partnerships can help manage the regulatory heterogeneity of national digital trade policies, promote system interoperability, and reduce associated trade costs and barriers which disproportionately affect LDCs and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises. Such cooperation requires the development of mechanisms to promote interoperability—including the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, to which all ESCAP member States are invited to accede.

**45. Access to ICT can be broadened.**

Enhanced access to finance through digital technology can facilitate a more inclusive digital economy, with targeted efforts to close the most persistent digital and financial gender gaps. To narrow the digital divide and bring universal reliable, affordable connectivity by 2030, policymakers require support to enable deep economic, societal, structural changes for integrated corridor development. Landlocked countries can use regional cooperative mechanisms for transport, energy, and ICT transboundary connectivity to improve social and financial inclusion. Additionally, further progress must be made in developing instant, low-cost digital remittances.

**46. Through improved investment promotion and facilitation, among other measures, building and maintaining a favourable investment climate can be prioritized.**

Attaining this objective would improve the ease of doing business and ameliorate the investment prospects of LDCs. It would include ensuring openness and clear rules regarding foreign investment as well as establishing a business climate conducive to investment in sustainability related sectors. The development and implementation of investment policies and regulatory frameworks that are coherent, transparent, and appropriately designed can mobilize the investments that provide the greatest benefits in terms of sustainable development. Such policies and frameworks must strike a delicate balance between incentivizing foreign investors, ensuring financial stability, and achieving sustainable development policy objectives.

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