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

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Item 2 of the provisional agenda\*

**Regional perspectives on progress on the  
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

**Updates on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for  
Sustainable Development at the subregional level\*\***

*Summary*

A series of 5 subregional meetings was organized in September and October 2018 to discuss progress on implementation of the 2030 Agenda with a subregional perspective. More than 600 government officials and other stakeholders participated in these consultations, focusing on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under review in 2019 as well as national achievements and challenges with respect to the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Participants in the consultations also provided their perspectives on the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) and high-level political forum (HLPF) theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.”

**I. Introduction**

1. ESCAP resolution 72/6 on ‘Committing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific’ requests the Executive Secretary of ESCAP to “promote the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development and provide annual updates and recommendations to member States, including through the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development”. In addition, ESCAP resolution 73/1, which outlines the forms and functions of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD), indicates that it “may consider subregional perspectives on the themes addressed by the Forum”.

2. This document aims to inform participants of the Sixth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) on subregional perspectives on the theme of the 6<sup>th</sup> APFSD “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality” as discussed during the subregional consultations organized on 3-4 September 2018 in Tbilisi, Georgia; on 5-6 September 2018 in Ulan-Bator, Mongolia; on 11-12 September 2018 in Bangkok, Thailand; on

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24-25 September 2018 in Nadi, Fiji; and on 4-5 October 2018 in New Delhi, India. More than 600 government officials and other stakeholders participated in these consultations; the various contributions are also documented in the joint report for the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme.

3. The document is structured by subregion. Each chapter discusses where the subregions currently stand with respect to progress on the goals under in-depths review in 2019, national achievements and challenges with respect to the 2030 Agenda with specific focus to the voluntary national reviews reporting. Finally, it provides subregional perspectives on the APFSD and high-level political forum (HLPF) theme of “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”.

## **II. South-East Asia**

4. South-East Asia is a highly diverse region consisting of 11 countries<sup>1</sup> that registered a total population of 624.6 million in 2014. Income and wealth are highly disparate as two of the wealthiest (Brunei and Singapore) and two of the poorest (Cambodia and East Timor) countries in the world are found in the subregion. The subregion’s gross domestic product (GDP) has been growing fast and was placed at USD 2.5 trillion in 2014. The GDPs per capita wildly vary, ranging from USD 1,100 for Cambodia to USD 41,000 for Brunei and USD 56,300 for Singapore. There is much good news about the subregion but mostly in the economic front. The social, environmental, political and other dimensions are not as dynamic and need priority attention<sup>2</sup>. South-East Asia was the most successful subregion in Asia and the Pacific in terms of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) achievement, despite its mixed performance<sup>3</sup>. Implementation of the MDG’s successor - the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and indeed the wider 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will require comprehensive actions at the global, regional and subregional levels.

### **A. Subregional progress on implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals under review in 2019**

5. The following section presents the current situation of the South-East Asia subregion in terms of progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, presenting data from the ESCAP SDG Progress Report 2017<sup>4</sup> and other subregional assessments.

6. South-East Asia is on track to achieve Goal 4 (quality education), The subregion has, though, made no progress towards Goal 13 (climate action) including due to an increase of the greenhouse gas emissions per capita.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; Indonesia; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Myanmar; Philippines; Singapore; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Vietnam.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Southeast Asia Subregion Challenges and Priorities for SDG Implementation, ESCAP.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Asia-Pacific Regional MDGs Report 2014/15, ESCAP-ADB-UNDP.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2017, ESCAP.

<sup>5</sup> Source: “Complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” Report, 2017, ESCAP.

Natural resource use and waste and emissions are growing rapidly in most countries in the subregion and this growth in part is supporting industrialization and urbanization, rising incomes and a growing material standard of living. A regression has been noted for Goals 10 (reduced inequalities) and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). Given the current rate of progress, the subregion is expected to achieve 20 out of 53 targets and would fail to achieve any of the targets under Goals 10, 16. Almost half of the targets for which the situation has worsened in the subregion are related to Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth) and influenced by factors such as material productivity which is low in most ASEAN countries and well below the current world average of 0.75 US\$ per kg of material use.<sup>6</sup>

7. The largest gaps in the subregion are around reducing suicide mortality, reducing road traffic deaths, broadening access to safely managed drinking water, improving employment in manufacturing sector and ocean's health. Material footprint and domestic material consumption have increased in the subregion and the share of employed population from economic growth has decreased. The situation has deteriorated most notably when it comes to restraining the loss of land areas covered by natural forests.

## **B. National achievements and challenges with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the voluntary national reviews (VNRs)**

8. Analysis of previous voluntary national review reports and discussions at the South-East Asia Forum has shown that member States are motivated to embark on the voluntary national review process and consider it as a means to showcase Sustainable Development Goal progress at an international level (Indonesia, Viet Nam). The voluntary national review process was also found to have assisted countries in tracking their own progress (Indonesia, Philippines, Timor-Leste), in identifying areas to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals in the national agenda (Philippines, Timor-Leste) and in identifying financing challenges.

9. The engagement of stakeholders, data collection and time constraints have been identified as common challenges with voluntary national review preparations. Informing the relevant stakeholders and gathering inputs for the preparation of the report is key as well as the institutionalization of stakeholder engagement. Shadow reporting from civil society can be a means to ensure coherence and the integration of human rights in the voluntary national review.

10. At the 2018 HLPF, three countries from South-East Asia – Lao PDR, Singapore and Viet Nam, presented their VNRs. The first challenge highlighted by all three countries in the subregion lies with mobilising financial resources. Lao PDR reported experiencing an increment in both domestic and international private financial resources. Nevertheless, securing funds specifically for the Sustainable Development Goals remains a compelling task; to bridge this gap, in the 8th Five-Year National Socio-economic Development Plan (8th NSEDP) specific outputs and indicators have been included in relation to funding from domestic revenues, Foreign direct investment (FDI), Overseas Development Institute (ODI), and South-South cooperation.

11. In Singapore, the private sector has gotten increasingly involved in SDG initiatives and implementation, including funding schemes. For instance,

<sup>6</sup> Source: Report on the “Complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” Report, 2017, ESCAP.

the Development Bank of Singapore, with the incentives of the Monetary Authority of Singapore, has established a sustainable finance scheme through green bonds, in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.

12. With respect to Official development assistance (ODA) funds, international FDI in Viet Nam has stepped up after the country became a full member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). In addition, most of the funding from the Medium-term Public Investment Plan (2016-2020) are assigned to the SDGs. More engagement, particularly from the private sector is needed in terms of funding and resource availability. Viet Nam also stressed the fact that it is important to go beyond resource mobilization and ensure also the effective and efficient use of the finance. A higher level of participation from all stakeholders is deemed necessary an Integrated National Financing Framework through Socio-economic Development Plans (SEDPs), Medium-term Investment Programmes and three-year financial plans.

13. The second common challenge is around statistical data. Strengthening statistical capacity for tracking the Sustainable Development Goals among line ministries is highlighted by Lao PDR as an urgent need, along with bolstering the coverage of civil registration and vital statistics. Lack of systematic disaggregation of data by gender and by disability status has also been identified as a constraint. As a step forward, the Government is intended to establish baselines for all localized indicators and update existing ones.

14. The SDG nationalization process in Viet Nam has indicated shortage of metadata for numerous SDG indicators. In 2017, the General Statistics Office (GSO), supported by the UN Statistics Division and the UN country team, conducted a feasibility review of the global indicators. The study mapped the different agencies and ministries involved with SDG indicators, as well as data availability. Increased technical capacity of statistical staff especially at the local level is needed to enhance systematic data collection. The country is in the process of developing a roadmap and an indicator system for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the SDG progress. Furthermore, a statistical working group for SDG M&E has been set up, with representatives from different line ministries and led by the General Statistics Office.

15. The voluntary national reviews aim at facilitating the sharing experiences, lesson learnt and best practices. Around SDG localization, Lao PDR adopted their own national sustainable development goal, SDG 18 - Lives Safe from Unexploded Ordnance (UXO). They recognized that acknowledgement of UXO is essential as it is a large barrier to development in Lao PDR. By committing to SDG 18 in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, the country takes responsibility on curbing the impact on UXO on other goals in an interlinked way.

16. The summary presented above highlights the necessity to enhance regional follow-up and review and cooperation in two core areas: finance and statistical capacity. To this end, stronger regional/subregional collaboration focusing on capacity building and peer-learning can leverage some of the constraints that Member States are facing.

### **C. South-East Asian perspectives on the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”**

17. South-East Asia is a subregion with widening inequalities. The SEA Forum provided participants the opportunity to identify vulnerable groups across the subregion and discussing a range of solutions to address prevailing systemic barriers. These include effective enforcement of laws and policies,

policy coherence, capacity building at local level, investment in education, social protection, leave no one behind assessments, improvement of data on vulnerable populations, gender budgeting and civil society organization (CSOs).

18. Participants, pointed to the need to talk about rights from three perspectives – rights, remedy (justice) and advancing/promotion, and to recognize the importance of freedom of association, among others – the latter was in danger in some countries and affecting workers’ rights. Participants also discussed the need to ensure a direct voice for communities, where community members were able to directly participate in determining their own futures. This should be differentiated from participation via representation or intermediary bodies.

19. With respect to achieving SDG 4 on time, teacher quality, the need for civic education and gender differences (with boys often outperformed by girls in attendance and achievement) are particularly important.

20. The need to recognize private sector as also including the small businesses and social enterprises, and the importance of engaging private sector in discussions on human rights and education is key. Social accountability is an important concept for a thorough discussion on the theme. In relation to this, corruption has also been raised as a critical issue along with the impact on delivery and the role of parliaments in addressing human rights and corruption issues. Development, human rights and democracy are seen as being intrinsically interlinked and requiring political will. One participant at the SEA Forum pointed to the need to avoid a trend of “SDG washing” (analogous to green washing) while another stressed the need for a just transition to the Sustainable Development Goals with respect to taxation measures.

#### **D. Conclusions**

21. South-East Asia has the potential to move ahead faster in implementation of the 2030 Agenda and do better than it did during the MDG era. This is because the subregion has already established better operational and institutional foundations for implementation at the national level. These are reinforced by the subregional foundations for implementing the ASEAN Vision 2025 and supported at the global level through UN mechanisms. However, the subregion needs to pick up the pace to restrain the loss of land areas covered by natural forests and needs to urgently look into reducing material footprint and domestic material consumption. As suggested during the conclusion of the SEA Forum, some next steps to pursue would be the strengthening of the follow-up and review process in the subregion (and indeed in the overall Asia-Pacific region), deepening knowledge and understanding, and developing momentum for action to support the theme and cluster of goals under review in 2019.<sup>7</sup>

### **III. East and North-East Asia**

22. The East and North-East Asia (ENEA) subregion, comprising China (including Hong Kong, China; and Macau, China), the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation, covers an area of almost 28 million km<sup>2</sup>, accounting for more than half the total land area of the ESCAP region. With the most populous country in the world, China, of 1.4 billion people, the population of the ENEA

<sup>7</sup> Sustainable Development Goals 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17.

subregion alone is about 1.7 billion or 40 per cent of the total population of the ESCAP region, and almost a quarter of the global population.<sup>8</sup>

23. Despite significant achievements in terms of socio-economic development, the subregion face various challenges in light of empowerment of people, inclusiveness and equality, regardless of the economic status of the country. For instance, inequality is increasing, behind the higher education rate, inequality in access to quality education remain as an issue across the subregion. Empowering vulnerable population remain challenge across the subregion in employment, environmental issues, etc. Multi-stakeholder Forum participants also raised the concern about insufficient civil space which can be a major impediment to ensuring inclusiveness and equality.

24. The ENEA subregion as a group is the strongest economic subregion in Asia and the Pacific. Four countries in the subregion are among the world's 12 largest economies,<sup>9</sup> including the second (China) and the third largest (Japan) economies. For the past few decades, the subregion has been one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing parts of the world with a dramatic progress in economic and social development and advancing technological innovations. While the subregion is wealthier than other subregions, there is a large disparity in terms of income within countries in the subregion. Behind its advances in terms of socioeconomic development, key challenges for the subregion are increasing its resource efficiency and decarbonizing its energy system and economy together with a rapid change in demographic structure, posing serious concern on how the society and the economy cope with the change.

#### **A. Subregional progress on implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals under review in 2019**

25. While the North-East Asian countries are advanced in education-related indicators, as seen in such figures as secondary school enrolment rate and gender parity index, various challenges remain associated with Goal 4, particularly in relation to the quality of education. Thus, issues highlighted include inequality of access to quality education (e.g., by income, geographic location, gender disparity, etc.), and challenges in evaluating the quality of education. Regarding Goal 8, the substantial economic growth experienced in North-East Asian countries have not been translated into increasing decent jobs. Vulnerable employment rate remains high, and inequalities in the labour market (e.g., women, youth in disadvantage) persist. However, decent work is not only about employment. "Decent work" embraces various dimensions - work that is productive and meaningful, that pays enough to support families and does not compromise health, etc., and it requires inclusiveness and empowerment of people at the workplace.

26. For SDG 10, it was noticed that inequalities are related to all goals and empowerment/inclusivity/equality and remain as a major challenge in both within and between countries. For instance, within a country, poverty and inequality reinforce a vicious cycle among the working population as well, especially those in vulnerable employment (due to discrimination based on ethnic or social minority, etc.). Gender pay gap also persists in countries like Republic of Korea and Japan; development of IT potentially could have

<sup>8</sup> ESCAP statistical database accessed 8 January 2019; ENEA share was 39.1% (36% excluding Russia) in ESCAP region, 23.2% (excluding Russia 21.4%) of total population in 2018.

<sup>9</sup> World Bank GDP ranking 2017 (as of September 2018). Available from <https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/dataset/gdp-ranking>.

negative impact on equality if it intensifies the concentration of wealth and alienates human (employment). Discussion around Goal 13 stressed how environmental impacts hit the vulnerable population harder. For instance, irresponsible mining operation can affect herders and the poor who are reliant on subsistence. Climate issues need to be mainstreamed in national plans, policies and laws. Example of China's comprehensive Five-year plan that reflects climate change and Japan's climate adaptation law are given as examples during the discussion.

27. SDG 16 is enabler and links to all the Sustainable Development Goals. In North-East Asia, challenges are lack of intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms on issues related to SDG 16; shrinking civic space or little space for independent civil society organizations through at varying degree. Participants in the subregional forum also pointed out that rule of law does not necessarily guarantee 'Peaceful societies' when it coincides with various inequalities, fear of the neighbours, stereotypes, xenophobia, racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, etc.

## **B. National achievements and challenges with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)**

28. All the countries in the subregion have submitted or are planning to submit their Voluntary National Review by 2020. China (2016), Japan (2017), Republic of Korea (2016) have already submitted its first VNR, while Mongolia (2019), Democratic People's Republic of Korea (2020) and Russian Federation (2020) are planning to do so in coming years.<sup>10</sup> The progress and approaches in implementing the 2030 Agenda vary across countries in the subregion. Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in individual countries described below reflects presentation at the Forum as well as available information through government sources, etc.

29. China emphasized its commitment and importance of Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting the integration of SDGs into its 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, other mid and long-term development strategies, as well as Belt and Road Initiative. The National Plan on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,<sup>11</sup> issued in September 2016, maps China's action plans referring to the individual SDG targets. China's Progress Report on implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development released in 2017 featured progress in implementing SDG both domestic and international fronts. For instance, access to safe drinking water is provided to almost all rural population and urban sewage treatment rate reached over 90 per cent (Goal 6) energy supply capability increased and access to electricity is provided to the almost entire population (Goal 7). The government policy to control the aggregate consumption volume and intensity of energy and water consumption led to reduction of resource intensity and emission per unit of GDP (Goal 12).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Voluntary National Reviews Database, available from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>.

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1405596.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1405596.shtml).

<sup>12</sup> Information is drawn from "China's Progress Report on Implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/specials/China%27sProgressReport2\(CN\).pdf](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/specials/China%27sProgressReport2(CN).pdf) and presentation by Center for International Knowledge on Development, China, available from [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26674Zhou\\_EGM\\_presentation\\_0123.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26674Zhou_EGM_presentation_0123.pdf).

30. In Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the 5-year Strategy of National Economic Development (2016-2020) was set forth in 2016 at the 7th Congress of the Workers' Party in 2016. The main objective was to lay a firm foundation for sustainable national economic development by: re-energizing the overall national economy and ensuring a balanced economy of all sectors. The Strategy focus goes beyond the economy, embracing areas addressed in the Sustainable Development Goals such as clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, sustainable cities and communities. Democratic People's Republic of Korea has already achieved some of the SDG targets, such as education (the universal 12-year compulsory and free education system and study-while-working system), healthcare (the entire people enjoy free healthcare service), dwelling houses (provided by the state free of charge) and employment. On the other hand, main tasks in implementing the Strategy includes solving the energy problem, improving people's living standards by boosting agricultural and light industrial production, as well as strengthening key economic sectors (energy and metallurgical industries, rail transportation sector) and basic industries (machine-building, chemical and building-material industries and construction). In 2018, Democratic People's Republic of Korea indicated its plan to submit its Voluntary National Review in 2019 or 2020.<sup>13</sup>

31. In Japan, "SDGs Promotion Headquarters", established in 2016 and led by the Prime Minister, developed "SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles". It issued Sustainable Development Goals Action Plan 2018, requesting all ministers to work towards implementation of the Plan. The SDG Action Plan 2019<sup>14</sup> also highlights key areas that Japan will contribute. For instance; quality infrastructure, disaster risk reduction, marine plastic debris and climate change/energy for building resilient and environmental-friendly nation; empowerment of women, health and education for human resource development. The Action Plans are based on the Government's direction to develop Japan's own "SDG model" characterized by three key aspects, i.e., promotion of society 5.0<sup>15</sup> and productivity revolution; SDG-driven revitalization of the regions; and empowerment of future generations and women. Thus, as part of the efforts to disseminate the best practices in both public and private sector, the Government launched Japan SDGs Award and SDG web-platform.

32. In the Republic of Korea, the government and civil society organizations (CSOs) as well as other stakeholders jointly formulated SDG targets and indicators reflecting specific conditions and priorities of the country. The process has been a bottom-up and multi-stakeholder approach involving more than 90 civil societies, 190 experts and 23 ministries and agencies as regular members of the consultations and led to the adoption of the K-SDGs by the Cabinet in December 2018. While the 17 Goals are aligned with the internationally agreed goals, K-SDGs defined five strategies such as inclusive society and peace building between two Koreas, and 122 targets that remove 28 international targets irrelevant to the country, integrating 33 targets and include 14 additional targets such as responding to chronic disease, tackling the low birth rate, developing alternative materials to plastic,

<sup>13</sup> Information is drawn from the presentation by the DPRK official at the Subregional SDG Forum in 2017 ([https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26674Zhou\\_EGM\\_presentation\\_0123.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26674Zhou_EGM_presentation_0123.pdf)) as well as presentation by UNRC DPRK on "Sustainable economic development in DPRK" on behalf of the Government of DPRK.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/sdgs/> (Japanese site).

<sup>15</sup> [http://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/english/society5\\_0/index.html](http://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/english/society5_0/index.html) (footnote by the secretariat).

expanding public health services, supporting the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C, promoting peace and prosperity between two Koreas, etc.

33. Mongolia developed Sustainable Development Vision (SDV-2030) and Three Pillars Development Policy (TPDP), with own set of goals and indicators. TPDP serves as the key guideline for government investment decisions. TPDP for 2018-2020 consists of; multi-pillar economic development policy; fair, equitable, accountable and sustainable governance policy and; people-centred social policy. Sustainable Development Vision, approved by the Mongolian Parliament in 2016 to incorporate SDGs into its national policy, has four pillars, namely society, economy, governance and environment, with 44 objectives and 20 indicators. The law on development policy and planning adopted in 2016 clarifies the national policy and institutional framework, defining its link to long, medium and short-term policy documents (e.g., state policy, visions, action plans, guidelines, and budgets). While being consistent with SDGs, they are heavily focused on economic aspects and have less attention to such issues as gender, inequality climate change. The Government faces the challenge of aligning public expenditures with these visions and SDGs in the midst of limited fiscal space, whereas a large proportion of government spending is directed to debt repayment and servicing.

34. Russian Federation also moves towards Sustainable Development Goals, although it may explore its own approach in implementing SDGs. For instance, one of the key areas is promotion of green economy, including reduction of waste, environmental education, reduction of pollution. That objective is compatible with Sustainable Development Goals. Promotion of energy efficient technologies, ensuring social justice, are some other key areas. The Executive Order on National Goals and Strategic Objectives of the Russian Federation through to 2024, signed by the President in May 2018, sets the national development targets. It aims "... to achieve breakthroughs in science and technology and socioeconomic development in the Russian Federation, increase the country's population, improve the living standards and conditions of the citizens, and create an environment and opportunities for all to fulfil their potential".<sup>16</sup>

### **C. East and Northeast Asian perspectives on the theme 'Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality'**

35. The subregional SDG Forum in 2018 reviewed the goals under in depths reviews in 2019 with respect to the overall theme, "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality", to elicit subregional perspective and challenges.

36. Inclusiveness and empowerment: There were some commonalities across the goals in groups that need to be empowered, i.e., women, people with disability, low-income population, rural population, indigenous people and youth. Some of the groups identified are associated with goal specific challenges. For instance, in connection with Goal 4, girls, people with disability, low-income family, rural population, ethnic minority, etc. are identified as groups that need to be empowered and included to gain access to (quality) education. There are children with disabilities who are denied access to education. Centralization of opportunities and resources in cities are widening the gap between city and rural areas. In relation to goal 8, the groups that need empowerment and inclusion also includes migrant workers, child

<sup>16</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57425>.

labourers, younger generation particularly those who lack education. The concern was also raised about the possible replacement of workers by robots along with the advancement of technology. Poor people reliant on subsistence on herding and migration and coastal and small island communities are also identified as the group needed to be empowered in connection with the challenges associated with Goal 13.

37. Barriers and systemic issues: Many of the barriers to the empowerment, inclusiveness and equality are related to transparency and accountability; participation to voice their concern; participation in decision-making process, human rights; engagement of specific sectors (business); institutional coordination across sectors, institutions, ministries, and with business communities; appropriate allocation of resources including financing; policymaking shortcomings; information/data access for evaluation and awareness.

38. Policies and initiatives: The working groups identified policies to promote accountability, ownership, policymaking framework, enabling environment, and others. Policy framework needs to ensure, among others; open and inclusive policymaking process; evaluation and feedback from stakeholders; monitoring of the empowerment of vulnerable groups. It also needs to strengthen the link between central and local governments and mainstream SDGs and strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanism (e.g., climate change). Another important policy aspect is creation of an enabling environment – for instance, job creation, appropriate incentives, supporting capacity (education and training) of the vulnerable group; legislative support; technology. For example, legislative change in financial transactions which allows access of migrant workers to financial services in the Republic of Korea. Mongolia's policy to provide the technology for weather forecast and solar energy can help increase income of rural population.

39. Promoting action on “empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”: Protection of rights, some participants stressed, must be ensured together with the responsibility and accountability associated with it. There was also concern regarding the need to protect civic space. While civic space was considered essential for the protection of rights, none of the countries in North-East Asia was considered completely free. For enhancing resources and capacities, social infrastructure, public transport, access to the internet are some of the enabling tools to empower people as they benefit the general public and support poor population to access to education and decent jobs. Education should also be viewed as a tool for empowerment. Two specific aspects were highlighted – education to strengthen understanding interdisciplinary issues, as well as civic education to promote understanding of the rights of people. It was also highlighted that while transparency in the government is essential, need for visibility and transparency also applies to private sector. Institutional shortcomings in the areas of integration and policy coherence was also emphasized as needing to be addressed in order to advance on the theme.

40. The participants from civil societies in China, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation jointly made a statement on the North-East Asian Subregional Multi-stakeholder Forum on Sustainable Development Goals, recognizing the importance of the Forum. Noting the common challenges and achievements in the subregion, the statement urged ESCAP and governments of North-East Asia to expand the scope of the subregional forum (hosting civil society forum a day before the subregional forum, establishing the reference groups); to ensure inclusive participation (government participation, diverse stakeholders); to strengthen subregional /

regional / global linkages on the follow-up and review process, with concrete outcome from the forum that identifies subregional perspectives and priorities. Subsequent to the Forum, the statement was further circulated to CSOs and endorsed by national CSOs networks for SDGs together with their member organizations.<sup>17</sup>

#### **D. Conclusions**

41. The Forum benefited from the effective trilateral cooperation among ESCAP secretariat, Government of Mongolia and UN Mongolia. It showcased the ongoing partnership between the Government of Mongolia and the UN country team at national level and its link to subregional / regional channel through the Regional Commission. Despite the variation in socio-economic and environmental status, countries in the North-East Asia share similar challenges when it comes to inequality, empowerment and inclusion.

42. There are various good experiences and practices in Sustainable Development Goals implementation which was shared in the theme-based (group) discussion. It would be beneficial to follow-up and collect further information, to facilitate sharing experiences in the region. The special session co-organized by the Government of Mongolia and UN Mongolia provided a good opportunity for exchange of views from various stakeholders on initiatives and challenges on Mongolia's SDG implementation. It served as a precursor to the Voluntary National Review of Mongolia while it allowed the participants from other North-East Asian countries to witness the open discussion among policymakers and civil society participants in Mongolia. The civil society participants strongly supported multi-stakeholder engagement at subregional level and requested further outreach in the next Forum.

#### **IV. South and South-West Asia**

43. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is particularly relevant for the member States of South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) as it accounts for a large share of the region's total population and an even greater share of its youth population. Despite sustained high-levels of economic growth in recent decades, South Asia lags on many social, economic and environmental development indicators. South Asia still accounts for 36 per cent of the world's poor and unacceptably high rates of undernourishment, child stunting, child wasting and child mortality among the regions of the world. Share of vulnerable employment in the subregion is relatively high at roughly 72 per cent and existence of barriers to women entering the workforce results in low rates of female labour force participation (27.6 per cent) preventing the subregion from achieving its economic growth potential. Despite progress, the subregion suffers from wide development gaps, especially in social indicators of education and health and significant energy and infrastructure deficits.

44. Given South Asia's weight in world population and its share in global poverty, the world will not be able to achieve Sustainable Development Goals without South Asia achieving them. South Asia—which accounts for 25 per cent of the world population but only for 5 per cent of the world GDP—needs to tackle persistent developmental challenges and structural constraints to unleash its enormous growth potential to become an engine of global growth and the home of the world's largest middle class. South Asia stands to gain

<sup>17</sup> The statement is available on <https://www.unescap.org/events/north-east-asian-multistakeholder-forum-sustainable-development-goals>.

much from the transformational opportunity provided by the 2030 Agenda to adopt inclusive and sustainable development pathways as an opportunity to end poverty and other deprivations.

45. The second South Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was organized in New Delhi from 4-5 October 2018 to review progress made towards achieving the goals in the subregion and assess subregional perspectives on the theme of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2019, 'Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality'.

**A. Subregional progress on implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals under review in 2019**

46. Central themes, common messages and other key perspectives were discussed on the cluster of goals under review at the HLPF in 2019, in this Forum. It was noted that the SDGs selected for HLPF 2019 – goals related to education (Goal 4), employment (Goal 8), equality (Goal 10), climate action (Goal 13), peace and justice (Goal 16) – cannot be treated in isolation from rest of the Sustainable Development Goals, and therefore while focusing on the selected goals it is important to consider their interfaces with other facets of sustainable development. The HLPF agenda in the future must adopt a more holistic approach to the Sustainable Development Goals, rather than focusing on their subsets or specific goals without recognizing their interlinkages. Overall there is a need to formulate policies at the regional level, in particular, to combat climate change and its related effects and a need to integrate it in the overall process in a global regime that will provide sufficient financial and technical support for mitigation and adaptation efforts in the developing countries.

47. Focus Group discussions on selected goals have also reported certain common policy themes, such as paucity of data for a disaggregated analysis into the cause and nature of barriers hindering each of the goals. Statistical capacity must be improved to enable regular monitoring of progress at the sub-national, national, subregional and regional levels. Lack of effective governance was another common theme which emerged while analyzing issues related to the selected goals. In terms of addressing governance issues, collective efforts at the regional level is required, by way of pooling resources and sharing knowledge, and also by way of creating regional institutions.

48. However, regional cooperation is found to be weak in South Asia due to political sensitivities. The interrelationships between SDGs provide new opportunities for fostering intergovernmental cooperation in the subregion to address common policy challenges. SDGs provide basis for forging a regional alliance for addressing lack of effective governance, motivating all stakeholders to come together irrespective of nationality. Given historical experience, alternative platforms for cooperation at various levels should be facilitated in addition to existing regional platforms such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and BIMSTEC.

**B. National achievements and challenges with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)**

49. Member States reported their Voluntary National Review (VNR) status where in Afghanistan, India, Maldives presented their VNRs in 2017, Bhutan, Sri Lanka presented in 2018 and Pakistan is in preparation to make its presentation in 2019. Member States highlighted the lessons learnt from their

VNR preparation, discussed their SDG implementation plans, strategic policies and the ways of implementation.

50. All member States in South Asia have already established institutional mechanisms across multiple agencies to align, contextualize and coordinate the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. Member States reported to have undertaken resource and data gap analysis for implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal), devised alignment and integration frameworks of the SDGs with national policies, plans and strategies (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India) and estimating financial costs/budget needs for achieving the SDGs (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal). Member States have established separate cabinets for SDGs (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), worked on the mapping of SDGs to their plan documents (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal), launched web-based SDG tracker that the public can monitor (Bangladesh), worked on data tracker dashboard up to the district level (India, Pakistan), and worked on narrowing down the indicators based on relevance and their encompassing nature (India).

51. Among others, one of the most significant achievements in South Asia's march towards the 2030 Agenda is that the SDGs are no longer seen as an international agenda but have been strongly owned by the member States in the region. Sustainable Development Goals overlap the entire development agenda of the South Asian member States, in synchronization with the aspirations and collective commitment of the Governments in the region for development of their people. For example, a remarkable convergence of vision in Government of India underlying the priorities for the Sustainable Development Goals evident from the Indian Prime Minister's clarion call of Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas ("Participation of All, Development for All") clearly highlights India's collective commitment to the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind.

52. South Asian member States face numerous challenges in implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Common challenges centered on weak stakeholder engagement, especially with the private sector and the vulnerable sections of the society; lack of data availability and disaggregation; differences in relevance of same set of indicators for each country; absence of robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms; paucity of technical and professional capacities; technology and financing constraints, among effective means of implementation for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Country specific challenges and emerging issues were also mentioned such as conflict, resource challenges and insecurity for Afghanistan, climate change vulnerabilities for Bangladesh, water shortages in urban areas, disaster risks and economic vulnerabilities for Bhutan, LDC graduation status for Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. Maldives expressed its challenge in the form of vulnerability emanating from external and internal shocks; dispersed population and high transaction/project costs. Sri Lanka observed that a lack of awareness on SDGs and absence of local indicators to help localise the SDGs. India and Pakistan pointed that the challenge they face relate to the federal, subnational and local level structures which is vast and diverse.

53. It was highlighted that there is an important need for transforming the data into an effective policy framework, developing stronger institutional arrangements, national and subnational capacity-building, community feedback loops, horizontal and vertical policy coherence, collaboration and cooperation across borders, sharing and learning from experiences of peers and developing sustained multi-stakeholder partnerships to mobilize resources for

investing in SDGs. Given the ambitious nature of the 2030 Agenda, it was reiterated that participation of various stakeholders is critical, synergies and coherence need to be drawn between efforts towards the implementation process and new and pioneering innovations and technologies have to be harnessed, for instance, drone technology to monitor ocean activity in Maldives. It was emphasized that for achieving the SDGs in South Asia, a development strategy must be in place backed by accountability, transparency and good governance along with real time monitoring and outcome-based performance evaluation.

54. The meeting recommended that it is necessary to move from nationalization to localization by mapping the SDGs to subnational and grassroots levels, form stronger partnerships, enable knowledge and technology transfer, build capacities and ensure financial support by donors and partners for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in South Asia. It was emphasized that implementation is very important to change the situation, governments must take the lead, but the achievement heavily depends on the contribution of all stakeholders: private sector, civil societies, individuals, and harnessing effective global and regional partnerships is crucial in achieving SDGs. Timely and effective implementation of policies is key to achieving the SDGs. Policies that promote regional cooperation are critical to achieving the goals in the region and India has shown its commitment, through initiatives like taking leadership role in the International Solar Alliance, recognizes the importance of cooperation for achieving sustainable development and prosperity for its people.

### **C. South Asian perspectives on the theme ‘Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality’**

55. The elements of empowerment and the importance of an inclusive approach to promote equality of outcomes for relevant SDGs were noted during the Forum. The four key elements of an empowerment and inclusiveness approach to policy making, covered rights and justice, norms and practices, participation and voice, and resources and capabilities. A framework towards empowerment and inclusiveness needs to address human rights, access to justice, quality of institutions, participation in all aspects, voice for communities and groups, strengthening capacity, access to critical resources, and improved education and health.

56. The importance of establishing linkages between different dimensions of empowerment, achieving inclusive societies, and gender and social equity was emphasized. In the discussion on rights and justice, there are elements of empowerment and entitlement that have to be considered. There is a value of empowering women through education and legal inclusiveness, positive discrimination is justified if people are unequally placed in the population. Mapping and localizing the most vulnerable groups should be considered in order to redefine norms and practices.

57. In the context of resources and capabilities, SDGs cannot be left to the state actors alone, all four pillars of democracy – judiciary, legislature, media, civil society- and diverse stakeholders, including also the private sector, must be engaged in the implementation of the SDGs. Recognition of hitherto excluded population groups, respecting identities, cultures and practices, representation, restitution and reclamation form the 5R approach to promoting inclusion and equality. However, solutions towards inclusiveness and equality should be taken not only at national level but also at the international level given the interrelatedness of the goals which have spill over effects. Civil

society groups such as Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) and WTNA (Wada Na Todo Abhiyan) are doing valuable work in influencing the global discourse on poverty and inequality in respect of South Asia.

58. The session identified the need for research and collaboration on forward looking analyses to map key vulnerabilities and intersection of these vulnerabilities, having disaggregated data- indicators and statistics- to capture vulnerabilities, identifying champions of development for SDG implementation, sharing of learning experiences, transfer of skills, technical expertise and forming effective partnerships to address vulnerabilities across borders.

59. Barriers and systemic issues consistent across the working groups centred around quality of institutions, weak monitoring and lack of disaggregated data, paucity of resources, poor infrastructure, lack of effective implementation and coordination mechanisms, lack of effective targeting of public policies and persistent deeply entrenched social and institutional structures which perpetuate discrimination based on gender, caste, and other social identities. The common barriers that emerged across the working groups ranged from social barriers - lack of identification of minority communities and discrimination of vulnerable groups; geographic barriers – access to basic services, quality of infrastructure, access to education, labour markets and social justice; economic barriers – distribution of wealth, targeting of beneficiaries and public financing; political barriers – lack of political will and capacities, absence of cross-border cooperation and lack of participatory community-led approaches.

60. The working group on SDG 4 identified that major issues are delays in transfers of resources to schools, lack of harmonization of methodologies and definitions for data on education indicators, low quality of education reflected in poor learning outcomes and employability. Among the barriers for the achievement of SDG 8, the group identified systemic issues in the general growth patterns followed by South Asian member States with low share of manufacturing in the subregion's GDP, reflecting weak industrial base which has prevented growth in alternate occupations for workers displaced from agriculture and fast-growing services sectors of the subregion that has failed to generate adequate employment opportunities due to low labor-output ratio and high skill requirements. Increasing automation is a major threat to livelihoods and current policy responses to offset the downsides of technological progress are grossly inadequate. The working group on SDG 10 highlighted that structural difficulties for vulnerable groups due to dependence on indirect taxes and the fact that the rich is not taxed enough, socially backward regulations, rural-urban divide and migration related problems are the main barriers. For the working group on SDG 13, the trade-offs between economic growth and climate change, industrialization and sustainability, rapid urbanization, changing land use patterns, lack of capacity of local partners to respond to climate related risks, lack of regional approaches and synchronization of policies were some of the systemic issues. For the working group on SDG 16, barriers and systemic issues related to lack of reliable civil registration and vital statistics, reliable data and reporting on crimes and homicides, discrimination in the labour market in terms of job opportunities and job security, lack of access to a fair and equitable justice, no legal/birthright identity, lack of representation of the minority communities, and lack of freedom of expression.

61. A range of policy interventions and solutions were discussed across the working groups, including the following- ensuring access and equity at all levels of society; inclusion of vulnerable groups through universal schemes for

health, education, labour markets, financial inclusion, etc.; job creation through better market linkages, industry-oriented skilling and vocational training; investments in employment intensive manufacturing, ICT and other sectors; strengthening evidence based policymaking; capacity-building of stakeholders including human resource development; forming partnerships and engagement with stakeholders through collaboratives such as network of universities, labour associations, etc. In terms of structural transformation, industry promoting measures must be accompanied by sectoral diversification, procedural reforms for better ease of doing business, greater usage of labour augmenting technologies and better monitoring of labour standards in the informal sector to ensure decent employment opportunities for diverse skill-sets, and for overall resilience of the subregional economies. On climate change actions, there is a need for multilateral and unilateral practices, solutions and mechanisms with linkages between states and countries, but solutions for climate change cannot be driven only at national level, the situation in South Asia requires cross-border solutions and collaboration. Member States need to be more proactive in integration implementing the policies not only national level but also at subregional level. Industry, community led approaches and public-private partnerships are crucial for climate action to mobilise resources. There should be a greater emphasis on leadership, ownership, awareness, knowledge and financing along with greater people's participation and political consensus. For achieving peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16), potential solutions could come from the compulsory inclusion of a 'disability plan' within each country's VNR, the creation of a constitutional ban on 'origin', a strengthening of the democratic process. To help solve problems such as corruption, fraud and tax evasion, regional cooperation should be strengthened, monitoring should take place more into the private sector, and a more decentralized system at the grassroot level should be adopted.

#### **D. Conclusions**

62. Deliberations clearly highlighted the criticality of collaborating across borders and developing a regional framework towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in South Asia. The discussions among various stakeholders suggested that there is much potential of regional cooperation and coordination in implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda among the South Asian member States. Given the massive investment required for achieving the SDGs, harnessing public-private partnerships, greater engagement with the civil society and collaborations with international organizations such as the United Nations and other development partners are needed. Regional/subregional cooperation and coordination can support and complement the effectiveness of national mechanisms for achieving the SDGs in South Asia in a significant manner. The SDGs provide a unique opportunity to develop a regional framework and regional institutional architecture for South Asia.

63. The subregional organizations such as SAARC, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) which are meant to foster regional cooperation, are not delivering to their potential leading to increased frustration, pointing to the need for creating alternative platforms. A sizeable number of regional networks of various stakeholders including think-tanks exist in the subregion, which can be tapped for design and implementation of the new framework.

64. Given the importance of regional cooperation for achieving SDGs a South Asia Network for SDGs (SANS) was proposed. UNESCAP South and South-West Asia Office was requested to facilitate the network and serve as its secretariat in view of its neutral intergovernmental character, multisector expertise, regional outreach and mandate for fostering regional cooperation for development.

65. The deliberations at the Forum also emphasized the role of civil society organizations (CSOs), noting the contributions of CSOs and subregional think-tanks towards framing of the South Asian Development Goals. Participation of CSOs can make regional cooperation more inclusive and representative, and thereby broadening the coverage of regional cooperation to address all aspects of sustainable development. The need for UNESCAP to engage various stakeholders, including the government and civil society and also the private sector, to cut across boundaries and foster healthy dialogue and open consultations for sustainable and inclusive development was reiterated.

66. The way forward needs to draw attention to important research issues such as raising critical resources and sustained financing for the SDGs, applicability and relevance of indicators to targets and impact assessment and strategies for localization of priorities. Providing such regional and subregional platforms and dialogues, including through the South Asia SDG Forum, is a key mandate of UNESCAP and South Asia needs to continue with this dialogue in order to explore what mechanisms could be used and what are the key elements to achieve the SDGs.

## V. Pacific

67. The Pacific, a diverse region of 19 island countries and territories,<sup>18</sup> has long been recognised by the international community as a special case for development,<sup>19</sup> given its geographic isolation, remoteness from export markets, diseconomies of scale in production and exchange of goods and services, high vulnerability to external market shocks and increasing susceptibility to natural disasters and climate change. A key aspect of implementation has been ensuring that the special case for SIDS, in recognition of their unique challenges and vulnerabilities is consistently addressed across the various global sustainable development frameworks. The Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development (the Roadmap) was launched in 2017 to guide regional responses for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals within the context of national plans and priorities, the S.A.M.O.A Pathway and the Framework for Pacific Regionalism.

68. This chapter is based on discussions at the Pacific Preparatory Meeting for the 6th APFSD held in Nadi on 24-25 September 2018, and background analysis prepared by ESCAP, including Pacific preparations for the SAMOA Pathway Mid-Term Review (undertaken with DESA and UNOHRLLS).

<sup>18</sup> The 12 Pacific island countries with a presence in the United Nations (Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) are full members of ESCAP along with the following countries and territories as associate members: American Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Niue and the Northern Mariana Islands.

<sup>19</sup> First recognized in the Rio Declaration of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development.

**A. Subregional progress on implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in relation to the SDGs under review in 2019**

69. This section reports on progress against the focus goals of the 2019 APFSD and HLPF.

70. Discussion around SDG 4 focused on the fundamental links between educational attainment, poverty and inequality, and its overarching basis for achieving sustainable development, education in the Pacific warrants attention to address shared challenges to equity in access and quality. While universal primary education has generally been met across the Pacific, gender disparities persist within education systems. Further, many young people still leave school without basic literacy and numeracy skills or the necessary foundational skills to lead prosperous and fulfilling lives. With successful efforts on achieving access to primary education, a consequence has been increasing numbers of young people competing for limited pre and post primary education opportunities, increasing the demand for better quality educational outcomes. Access remains a challenge for children in outer islands and remote areas, children in families with low incomes, children with disabilities as well as gender gaps in secondary education. Quality challenges include low levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy, teaching quality (and teacher training), low relevance of curricula and lack of linkages between education and the labour market. Safe learning environments, facilities to match population growth and school fee expenses (beyond basic education) need to be addressed. Science Technology and Innovation is becoming increasingly critical for adaptation as social and environmental pressures mount in the Pacific.

71. While data to estimate the rates at which people fall into and escape from poverty over time does not yet exist in the Pacific, it is evident that many people may be vulnerable to falling into hardship given the rate of inequality (and specifically the relatively low consumption shares of the second and even third quintiles across countries). Geographic isolation, distance from markets, small private sectors, limited skills development and entrepreneurship, high costs of doing business, and poor connectivity continue to challenge all Pacific countries and hinder the achievement of SDG 8. Unsuitable financial models and risk averse policies further compound the challenges. Low export base, overreliance on Official development assistance (ODA), high cost of remittances and cultural obligations are additional issues. Cultural practice is sometimes a barrier to the engagement of youth and women in business. Economic growth is vulnerable to external shocks and the frequency of natural disasters in the subregion.

72. Many countries have minimum wage policies in place, and strengthened policies on maternity leave (e.g. Fiji, Marshall Islands). Palau's National Health Insurance Scheme is available to all citizens. Regional labour mobility schemes are avenues for addressing un- and under-employment, as well as facilitating flows of remittances. Samoa with the UN has embarked on a youth employment initiative to build skills in the private sector.

73. Participants also discussed SDG 10 and stressed how inequality and exclusion are rising in the Pacific, with rates of absolute inequality striking in a number of countries. In a similar pattern across Pacific island countries, the top 20 per cent of the population consumes 6 to 12 times as much as the bottom 20 per cent, with the bottom 20 per cent accounting for very little of total consumption (from less than 5 per cent in Papua New Guinea to about 7 per cent in Vanuatu). The urbanisation of poverty, gender inequalities and

social exclusion are some of the persistent drivers of vulnerability and insecurity in the subregion. Men more likely have greater command over resources relative to women. There is an increasing tendency towards the urbanisation of poverty (e.g. in Fiji urban inequality is substantially higher than rural inequality, and in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu urban and rural inequality are now similar), although in some countries (e.g. Kiribati, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu) inequality remains higher in rural areas. While data to estimate the rates at which people fall into and escape from poverty over time does not yet exist in the Pacific, it is evident that many people may be vulnerable to falling into hardship given the rate of inequality (and specifically the relatively low consumption shares of the second and even third quintiles across countries).

74. There is significant variation in terms of government spending on social protection systems among Pacific island countries. Most Pacific countries spend around 1-2 per cent of GDP on social protection, while Federated States of Micronesia and Tuvalu spend 10 per cent and 4 per cent of GDP respectively, and Papua New Guinea spends only 0.1 per cent of GDP. Policy emphasis on social protection linked to formal employment omits informal economic activity and unpaid care provider roles which are of concern for women. Continued discrimination of marginalized groups remains an issue in the Pacific with limited transparency and accountability on issues including allocation of resources for women, children, youth, the elderly and the LGBTQ community. Traditional norms that reinforce inequality continue to exist while the voice and participation of vulnerable groups is limited. More can be done to address the root causes of inequalities in policy.

75. For what concerns SDG 13, climate change represents the single greatest threat to the lives and livelihoods, security, social development and wellbeing of the Pacific. Pacific islanders are already facing the consequences of increasing number and intensity of extreme weather events, incremental sea-level rise, saltwater intrusion and drought. The world's highest rates of sea-level rise are expected in the Pacific, and even under the most optimistic projections this will lead to catastrophic impacts, especially for the region's low-lying atoll nations. Temperatures in the region have been increasing and, if emissions remain at current rates, will likely rise by between 2 and 4.5°C with serious implications for fisheries, tourism, agriculture, biodiversity, food security, fresh water resources, infrastructure and health. Climate finance was one of the five key priorities of Fiji's COP 23 presidency, and concerns remain in the Pacific about the adequacy of the financial resources and support that have been made available, including through the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage to help address the impacts of climate change for the most vulnerable. Internal population displacement due to the impacts of climate change is already a reality; for example, the temporary displacement following natural disasters and permanent community relocation in Fiji Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. International migration options are also being discussed in the region for vulnerable populations living on atolls

76. The need to address climate change and disaster risk reduction (DRR) in a coherent manner is reflected in the 2017 adoption of the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP). The FRDP represents voluntary guidelines that seeks to support coordination and action on Strengthened integrated adaptation and risk reduction to enhance resilience to climate change and disasters; Low-carbon development; and Strengthened disaster preparedness, response and recovery. Noting that the Pacific island sub-region contributes around 0.03% of global emissions, Pacific SIDS

Leaders have shown their commitment to the Paris Agreement with some ambitious Nationally Determined Commitments.

77. The Pacific overall has made limited progress on SDG 16 and in ensuring equal access to justice for all and in the development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions. In some countries, corruption is reported to be a concern. Progress has been made on civil registration. In the Pacific context, peace and justice are broad terms and need to be more inclusive in implementation. Lack of budget transparency, with limited opportunity for public consultation on national budgets are ongoing challenges in a number of countries. Right to Information legislation has been passed in Vanuatu to enable greater access to government records. The Solomon Islands' Social Accountability Coalition is working on anti-corruption and facilitating national budget consultations pre- and post- submissions to Parliament. The Marshall Islands has established a Board of Ethics to guide and ensure fair, transparent practice by government.

## **B. National achievements and challenges with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the VNRs**

78. Progress on implementing the SDG indicator framework has been steady in most Pacific SIDS, with a range of activities taking place at the country level. Such activities include: Data availability assessments of SDGs, Development of new monitoring and evaluation frameworks incorporating SDGs, mainstreaming of SDG indicators in to National Plans and VNR reporting on implementation of SDGs. More work still needs to be undertaken for most Pacific SIDS to finalize the relevant components of the SDG indicator framework and fully merge this work in to existing national development plan indicator frameworks.

79. Voluntary National Reviews have taken place in the Pacific sub-region starting in 2016 with the report presented by Samoa. In 2018 a VNR was prepared by Australia and Kiribati. Finally, in 2019 Fiji, Nauru, Palau, Tonga, Vanuatu and New Zealand are slotted to prepare a report and present it at the HLPF in July. Pacific island countries face continuing challenges of stable and predictable fiscal resources to achieve development priorities. National budgets are subject to several sources of volatility due to large fluctuations in GDP, terms of trade, tax and non-tax revenues, procyclical remittances or the negative impact of disasters. High dependence on foreign aid is also a source of fiscal vulnerability, given the unpredictability of flows and direction of spending. Over the ten years from 2007 through 2016, aid accounted for an average 29.4 per cent of total revenues (including grants).

80. Regional approaches to managing fiscal volatility include the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), which provides nontax revenues of around 38 per cent of current government revenues on average. The Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance Company which provides an immediate pay-out on the occurrence of an insured disaster event that meets specified parametric triggers for participating Pacific island countries is another example. The Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility, which is a partnership between key development partners and multilateral banks, is another example of regional cooperation to pool donor assistance for infrastructure development in Pacific island countries.

### **C. Pacific perspectives on the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”**

81. Under the Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development, the first Pacific Sustainable Development Report was presented to Pacific leaders in 2018 to consolidate reporting against the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, SAMOA Pathway and the Framework for Pacific Regionalism (including the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration). The Pacific regional roadmap places accountability at the national level and encourages governments to use their own national mechanisms, including parliaments, for accountability. Governments are being encouraged to use the same accountability processes and mechanisms for the VNR and for the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation.

82. From the Samoan experience with the VNR, the need for inclusiveness and securing the citizen’s rights to development remains an important lesson, through ongoing socialization, inclusion of NGO and civil society in key planning and advocacy activities and in strengthen monitoring and evaluation.

83. Vulnerabilities and inequality are increasing in the Pacific and are especially pronounced between urban and remote rural communities. The small and limited economic base of Pacific island countries also hinders capacities to increase employment opportunities, particularly for youth and women. There are increasing threats to traditional forms of social protection, although all Pacific island countries have at least some form of social insurance or social protection – higher in Micronesia than Melanesia and Polynesia (lowest). These is limited formal protection for large number of Pacific population working in the informal sector. Among other issues, and trends, there are vulnerabilities related to gender, elderly, youth and persons living with disabilities as well as rising health and environment-related vulnerability.

84. In the Pacific, vulnerability and marginalization are strongly linked to access to resources and governance constraints in relation to voice and participation, and access to substantive and procedural legal rights and access to justice. Some important legislative, policy and budgetary reform initiatives are being implemented in the sub-region to address the needs of persons with disabilities and of women. The need for the Pacific identity to be maintained is a persistent theme in the sub-region recognising the important roles played by geographic, cultural and traditional dimensions in reinforcing marginalization and vulnerability. There is a need for strengthening participation and accountability mechanisms in governance as well as capacities across the board.

## **VI. North and Central Asia**

85. The “North and Central Asian Forum on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals” was organized in Tbilisi, Georgia during 4-5 September 2018

86. The meeting took stock of subregional progress of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; presented national experiences in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and supported capacity building for countries in the subregion ahead of their Voluntary National Review (VNR) presentations in 2019; provided reflections on theme of the HLPF and the APFSD for 2019; provided subregional perspectives and good practices on the cluster of goals under review at the HLPF in 2019.

**A. Subregional progress on implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in relation to the SDGs under review in 2019**

87. Participants in the meeting noted that changes in labour market, with disappearance of permanent jobs, is undermining progress made under SDG 8. Though there has been progress made in terms of primary education SDG 4, there is limited progress made in terms of providing quality education and promoting lifelong learning or meeting the demand of skills of the market. Hence, strengthening the link between SDG 4 on education and SDG 8 on decent jobs is crucial to tackle the youth unemployment in the region.

88. The region is witnessing accelerated population growth and urbanization. The region has made some progress in SDG 16, especially through promoting transparency via e-governance measures. In terms of SDG 13, the subregion is already experiencing increased occurrence of natural hazards and other negative impacts of climate change. Participants called for accelerated climate action at the regional, national and local levels. Experts shared their views on subregional cooperation efforts related to goals under in-depth review at HLPF 2018. The participants emphasized the integrated approach to tackle SDGs is the more efficient strategy. Participants also identified cross-cutting challenges for the implementation of SDGs such as lack of long-term planning and limited coordination among government agencies. One discussant highlighted the role of volunteerism as a cross-cutting means of implementation to accelerate progress towards SDGs.

**B. National achievements and challenges with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)**

89. Countries from the region, who presented their VNRs in the past, shared their experiences and learnings. Countries underscored strong national level coordination in preparation of VNRs. As part of preparing VNRs, countries emphasized the need to align and integrate national plans and policies with SDGs, promote awareness raising efforts, coordination of national statistics and promoting a ‘whole of society’ approach. Governments underscored the usefulness of the UN SG’s guidelines on VNR, UNDP MAPS mission reports and rapid integrated assessment tool provided by UNDP in developing VNRs. Some of the key practical challenges in preparing VNRs are limited time frames, lack of data availability, inter-agency coordination and engagement of diverse stakeholders.

90. In terms of lessons learned from past experiences, countries emphasized need for multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms for preparing VNRs, picking of national SDG indicators, effective time management and the need to organise a strategic coalition of partners who can help with integrating diverse perspectives. National academies of sciences are a good way to engage with the scientific community during the preparation of VNRs.

91. Countries also shared diverse way to engage with stakeholders in the VNR process. In most countries, representatives from different stakeholder groups were part of the working groups and councils step up to coordinate VNRs. In one country, secretary of the national SDG council itself is in fact a representative of CSOs. Countries also shared short-comings from past VNR experiences, for instance, governments shared how they were heavily criticized by stakeholders when a first draft of VNR without much consultation was circulated for comments. Learning from this experience, the Government has designed a new stakeholder engagement architecture to effectively engage with stakeholders in the next VNR.

92. VNRs have led to tangible outcomes in many countries. One of the cited achievements of VNR is that it helped to set a base-line for SDGs indicators in many countries, while one country reported that the VNR process led to the creation of an SDG innovation lab. Countries also reported that the VNR preparation process itself is a productive and learning exercise and has its own intrinsic value.

### **C. North and Central Asian perspectives on the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”**

93. The forum discussed four case studies from within the region that dealt with the HLPF 2018 theme. Selected CSOs presented their work emphasizing the role of multi-stakeholder partnership building, awareness raising on rights among vulnerable groups, helping vulnerable groups access their entitlements, and promoting social enterprise as ways to empower specific vulnerable groups and promote their inclusion.

94. Participants conveyed their perceptions on empowerment, which revolved around - reducing vulnerability, promoting dialogue, guaranteeing good quality life, realizing life objectives, participation of vulnerable people in the whole cycle of implementation and planning of policies, ensuring major rights and freedoms, improving social institutions, guaranteeing equal opportunity, increasing of civil consciousness, self-expression and participation in decision making. The forum discussed the main barriers to empowerment. Some of the cited barriers include lack of infrastructure, accountability, social protection, access to labour market, access to special school and resources for vulnerable groups, financial resources, rapid access to governments, stability in political systems, proper definition of social status, and decentralisation; corruption; conflicts; social and cultural factors such as patriarchy; problem in implementing rule of law; weak judicial institutions; inefficient policies and laws for social development.

95. Participants shared several policies to promote empowerment and inclusion of vulnerable groups. Examples include laws on public organization, proper electoral codes, quota systems, electronic access to government information and programs, gender sensitive policies, affirmative actions for vulnerable groups, green economy policies supporting the most vulnerable, amendments to law dealing with stateless persons, joining convention of rights for persons with disabilities, establishing an ombudsman on rights of vulnerable groups, establishing laws on violence against vulnerable groups, setting up crisis centres and helplines; establishing minimum standards in education, wages, health, insurance, and pensions; inclusive education policies and promoting decentralisation within governments.

### **D. Conclusions**

96. As a way forward in addressing insufficient progress on Sustainable Development Goals, the forum highlighted the need for increased accountability and transparency; enhanced policy actions and regional cooperation including on climate change; and improved stakeholder engagement in regard to economic integration initiatives. To tackle youth unemployment, strengthening the link between SDG 4 on education and SDG 8 on decent jobs was seen as crucial. Volunteerism was also raised as a means to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.