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

Bangkok and online, 27–30 March 2023

Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda

Review of regional progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and opportunities for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the subregional level

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the subregional level

Note by the secretariat

Summary

In preparation for the Tenth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, the five subregions of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific convened their respective forums on the theme “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”.

The present document provides a summary of the deliberations of the subregional forums on achievements and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and developments regarding voluntary national reviews; opportunities and priority actions for accelerating progress on the Sustainable Development Goals in focus (i.e. Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation), Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy), Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) and Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities)); and strengthening partnerships and enabling mechanisms for sustainable development.

The participants in the Tenth Forum may wish to take note of the document and discuss the subregional priority actions identified to be further highlighted at the regional and global levels. They may also wish to provide guidance on ways to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the subregional level.
I. Introduction

1. The subregional offices of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) organize multi-stakeholder forums on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals to lay the groundwork for region-wide conversations on sustainable development through the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, one of the regional consultations feeding into the global engagements at the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

2. Since 2017, five subregional forums have been held annually. In 2022, they focused on the theme “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”.

3. The forums fostered an inclusive dialogue on Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation); Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy); Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure); Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities); and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

4. They also drew attention to specific subregional concerns. In the Asia and the Pacific Sustainable Development Goals progress report for 2022, the diverse progress realized in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development across subregions was highlighted.

5. The Pacific small island developing States have experienced significant adverse socioeconomic impacts over the past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the food, fuel and finance crises. These new and emerging crises have increased development challenges in the subregion, while also increasing environmental degradation and economic losses related to climate change emergencies.

6. The subregion of East and North-East Asia includes six member States with a combined population of more than 1.8 billion people. The advances achieved by the subregion in socioeconomic development have come at the cost of environmental sustainability.

7. The subregion of North and Central Asia comprises nine member States, with seven being landlocked. New global and regional challenges have reversed the progress made in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and affected all population groups.

8. The subregion of South and South-West Asia comprises 10 member States and 2.09 billion people. The subregion faces some of the most daunting challenges related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including climate-induced disasters and fiscal and population pressures. It is lagging behind in progress towards all 17 Goals.

9. The subregion of South-East Asia comprises 11 member States. Its progress towards sustainable development may be in peril, as the subregion is one of the most vulnerable to the impact of climate change.

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II. Achievements and challenges in the implementation of the
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and
developments on voluntary national reviews

A. Pacific

10. The Pacific small island developing States have made limited progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in 2022, with the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic being uneven across countries. The rising cost of fuel and food, due to the geopolitical crisis, has further aggravated the cost-of-living crisis in these economies, which are often dependent on fuel and food imported from outside the region. Despite some positive signs of progress, the adverse impacts of climate change and natural disasters (e.g. the volcanic eruption and tsunami in Tonga in February 2022) continue to negate earlier development gains.

11. It was noted in the Asia and the Pacific Sustainable Development Goals progress report for 2022 that Pacific countries were lagging behind in meeting targets and that the progress towards some Goals, including Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation) and Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), was being reversed. At the existing pace of progress, the subregion was expected to meet only a few targets by 2030, although that assessment was constrained by the lack of reliable and consistent data across targets. Nonetheless, Governments in the Pacific have incorporated the 2030 Agenda into their national plans and strategies, indicating their strong commitment to making progress towards the 2030 Agenda. Implementation of national development plans and the 2030 Agenda remains a policy priority for the subregion.

12. Moreover, the adoption of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, adopted by Pacific leaders in July 2022, underscored the importance of a shared Pacific development vision that could boost progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

13. The Pacific subregion supports the inclusion of the value of well-being in its development policies going forward, which would allow well-being, including physical and mental well-being, to be integrated into them. For instance, in its national sustainable development agenda, the Cook Islands has incorporated its vision for implementing a strategy focused on well-being for life.

14. All 12 Pacific small island developing States have conducted at least one voluntary national review. Fiji will submit its second in 2023, and Palau is planning to submit a second review in 2024.

15. The preparation of the second review of Fiji is being led by its Ministry of Economy, with ESCAP and the United Nations Development Programme providing technical assistance and advisory support. Fiji has established three technical working groups. The Ministry held its first sustainable development forum in November 2022 and intends to continue engaging with non-State actors throughout the review process. The Ministry, together with the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, has collated data, resulting in a significant improvement in the data gaps identified in the 2019 review.

16. Tuvalu is the only country in the Pacific to have conducted a review in 2022. Technical support was provided mainly by ESCAP and the United Nations Development Programme and supplemented by other United Nations agencies and subregional organizations. In its review, Tuvalu reported progress
on both the 2030 Agenda and *Te Kete*, its national strategy for sustainable development for 2021–2030. In addition to limited resources, Tuvalu faced logistical challenges in engaging stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic, owing to border restrictions, poor Internet connections and poor levels or lack of connectivity in the outer islands.

17. Pacific island States and communities expressed support for an inclusive review process with non-State actors, including persons with disabilities. The process provided an opportunity to enhance capacity-building for civil society and other stakeholders. The voluntary national reviews needed to be evidence-based, and a request was made for subregional support and guidelines to address data challenges. It was acknowledged that a second review was a great opportunity to improve on the first review process, especially with regard to multi-stakeholder engagement.

### B. East and North-East Asia

18. Progress in implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the subregion of East and North-East Asia was hindered significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, it managed to remain on track in achieving progress towards some of the Goals. However, as highlighted in the Asia and the Pacific Sustainable Development Goals progress report for 2022, the subregion also experienced a regression with regard to several Goals. Progress towards Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) was bolstered by a robust manufacturing base and advanced infrastructure, as the subregion is home to top-performing countries on connectivity. In addition, the subregion has made progress towards Goal 1 (No poverty).

19. However, inefficiency in resource use remains a challenge. High-income economies have bolstered consolidated output growth, but a decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation persists. The subregion is moving in the wrong direction with regard to the indicators on Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production). Most acute is the subregion’s poor performance on Goal 13 (Climate action), as greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise. With the subregion accounting for over 30 per cent of global emissions, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea announced their commitment to addressing climate change, including efforts to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 in Japan and the Republic of Korea and by 2060 in China.

20. Achievements with regard to institutional support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda are embedded in national processes, which have been strengthened in recent years. The Global Development Initiative, announced by China at the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly, is envisaged to be a facilitator in achieving the 2030 Agenda more quickly. Japan has developed a set of policies to address social issues through cooperation between the Government and the private sector. The initiative is built on the country’s Sustainable Development Goal guiding principles and action plan. The Framework Act on Sustainable Development of 2022 of the Republic of Korea is focused on new governance, systematic implementation and mandatory public hearings. Mongolia, following its first voluntary national review in 2019, undertook broad institutional reform in its sustainable development policy planning framework, which was formed at the parliamentary, national government and sectoral levels.

21. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to further improve processes to ensure consistent, inclusive and meaningful engagements with civil society and other stakeholders. Civic groups collectively called for Governments to develop a stakeholder engagement plan during review preparations and build
multi-stakeholder engagement mechanisms with diverse participation, including marginalized social groups.

22. All States in East and North-East Asia have conducted at least one voluntary national review. Most recently, the countries that presented a review at the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2021 include China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and Japan. Mongolia will present its second review in 2023.

23. The Ministry of Economy and Development of Mongolia has been mandated to coordinate the preparation of the country’s second review, while also heading the intersectoral working group with representatives of line ministries, the private sector, academia and civil society. Building on the lessons from the first review, the Ministry aims to incorporate a more comprehensive and evidence-based analysis, and it also plans to take newly enforced policies into consideration, including the country’s New Recovery Policy. In addition, active multi-stakeholder engagement will be an area of focus. ESCAP, through its offer of country-level support and in coordination with the United Nations country team in Mongolia, is providing technical and advisory assistance in several areas, including through the development of the review road map and stakeholder engagement plan as well as on data and statistics.

C. North and Central Asia

24. In the Asia and the Pacific Sustainable Development Goals progress report for 2022, it was indicated that North and Central Asia was not on track to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The subregion recorded some progress towards achieving several Goals, including Goal 3 (Good health and well-being), Goal 4 (Quality education) and Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure). However, reversals in the progress achieved were seen with regard to Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production), Goal 13 (Climate action) and Goal 14 (Life below water). Rising inequalities were of particular concern.

25. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the subregion’s progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda has been jeopardized. The pandemic has resulted in the loss of lives and has also intensified social exclusion. Inequalities in access to information and communications technologies have been hindering access to education, social services and health care, making older persons and persons with disabilities particularly vulnerable. Furthermore, progress in the subregion has been further hampered by volatile energy prices, rising inflation, a reduction in remittance incomes and disruptions to shipping and transport due to the geopolitical crisis and to sanctions introduced in early 2022.

26. The voluntary national reviews have been providing countries in the subregion with an opportunity to engage with different stakeholders to seek their inputs for the countries’ plans for sustainable development. The reviews have facilitated the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, among various stakeholders, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

27. The secretariat organized the North and Central Asia workshop on the preparation of voluntary national reviews, which was held on 5 October 2022. It was a key side event held in conjunction with the Sixth North and Central Asia Multi-stakeholder Forum on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.
28. All of the countries in the subregion have completed and presented at least one voluntary national review. Kazakhstan presented its second review in July 2022. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are preparing their second reviews, which are to be presented in 2023. As a result of the review process, parliamentarians are increasingly involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in North and Central Asia.

29. The ESCAP twinning programme has been strengthening the impact of the review process. Through participation in the 2020 twinning programme, Georgia and Uzbekistan gained momentum in their reforms to accelerate progress. A new twinning partnership is set to be undertaken with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

30. Countries in the subregion are planning to increase the focus on stakeholder engagement in their second reviews. Tajikistan is keen to encourage greater engagement of its parliament and of vulnerable groups in its second review. Uzbekistan has engaged with members of civil society, the media and its parliament during the country’s first review. In its second review, it plans to scale up its efforts to involve young people and representatives of the private sector, academia and the media.

### D. South and South-West Asia

31. The decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals has been severely tested by the compounding effect of numerous crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and intensifying climate-induced disasters, which have greatly affected the countries and people of South and South-West Asia. The subregion has fallen behind target levels of all 17 Goals, as indicated in the Asia and the Pacific Sustainable Development Goal progress report for 2022. The fastest and most notable progress made thus far has been with regard to Goal 1 (No poverty), Goal 3 (Good health and well-being) and Goal 15 (Life on land). However, post-pandemic economic shocks, which have been further aggravated by rising oil prices and consequent general inflation, have led to a reversal of the gains achieved with regard to Goals 1 and 3.

32. The subregion has also made moderate progress towards some of the other Goals, in particular Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy), driven by good performance in improved access to electricity, and Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), as a result of the penetration of mobile networks, although reliability and quality of access remain persistent issues.

33. The pace of progress has been extremely slow and insufficient with regard to most other Goals. In addition, progress achieved in the subregion is being reversed with regard to Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production) and Goal 13 (Climate action).

34. All of the countries in the subregion have presented at least one voluntary national review. Several States have already presented their second review, including Türkiye in 2019; Bangladesh, India and Nepal in 2020; and Afghanistan and Bhutan in 2021. In addition, Maldives will present its second review in 2023.

35. All of the countries in the subregion also reported substantial progress achieved in mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda into their respective national development plans. However, they noted the need for more concerted efforts to improve implementation mechanisms, especially in terms of
interdepartmental coordination and the adoption of a whole-of-government approach.

36. Widening financing gaps and shrinking fiscal space comprise a critical challenge faced in implementation. A slowdown in economic growth poses hurdles for Governments with regard to the generation of both tax and non-tax revenue. At the same time, increased public spending for recovery measures and debt burden is putting pressure on the expenditure side. The global recessionary trend is also having a negative impact on private investments and external fund inflows, including through foreign direct investment and remittances.

37. South and South-West Asia is the least integrated subregion due to political and infrastructural barriers. Widening domestic funding gaps threaten to exacerbate public debt vulnerabilities. Other common challenges include data gaps, in particular in environmental indicators, that are constraining evidence-based policy planning.

38. The rise in adverse impacts of climate change, evident in the increased intensity of natural disasters and water stress, is of grave concern for the subregion. Furthermore, with 390 million people living in multidimensional poverty and worsening inequalities across gender and vulnerable population groups, poverty alleviation and inclusion remain priorities across the Goals. While countries in the subregion are investing in various initiatives, technical assistance is needed, both to build statistical capacity and to improve disaster risk reduction mechanisms, social development, inclusive and equitable economic diversification and trade policy formulation.

E. South-East Asia

39. In the Asia and the Pacific Sustainable Development Goal progress report for 2022, it is noted that South-East Asia is not on track to achieve all 17 Goals by 2030. Progress in the subregion continues to be mixed. On some of the Goals, headway has been made in scattered pockets around the subregion; however, there has been a reversal of the progress made towards other Goals.

40. The voluntary national review has been an effective policy intervention to support the 2030 Agenda. All South-East Asian countries have presented their reviews. Indonesia has conducted three reviews, while Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Singapore, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam will present their second reviews in 2023.

41. A dedicated voluntary national review session was organized during the Sixth South-East Asia Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals to share lessons learned and exchange ideas and innovations for utilizing the review process to accelerate progress. Countries conducting their second reviews have a better understanding of the process and will be drawing from their previous experience. They hope to address two challenges – by strengthening stakeholder engagement and improving data collection – with a view to providing better reporting and leveraging the review to accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

42. In Brunei Darussalam, the private sector plays a proactive role in the country’s participation in the review process. Bank Islam Brunei Darussalam, the nation’s largest bank, pledged funds to support the country’s commitment to sustainability and is instrumental in ensuring private sector awareness and support through funding; corporate sustainability; and environmental, social
and governance initiatives. The country also recognized the importance of involving relevant parties in data collection. The availability of sufficient data will help ensure that the country’s next review will be evidence-based.

43. In Cambodia, efforts are under way to involve civil society organizations in the review process by coordinating and collecting their input. Data collection is managed by the statistics and planning departments under one ministry. The lack of data in some areas can be remedied by providing additional financial support and involving more actors in conducting surveys and collecting data.

44. In Timor-Leste, the Government supports and funds civic groups assisting ministries in the review process, including through outreach to rural areas and the provision of information to agencies. For Timor-Leste, it is important to ensure that responsibility for the review is shared among all stakeholders. A representative of Timor-Leste also highlighted the need to strengthen the capacity to monitor and evaluate data.

45. In Viet Nam, a network of non-governmental organizations and civic groups provides the Government with information on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. With respect to data, the challenge for Viet Nam is the variance in the data collected.

46. With a view to assisting countries, Malaysia shared its review experience. It highlighted the importance of trust between the Government and stakeholders to ensure commitment and active participation in the process. In Thailand, the private sector pledged its support to investments related to the 2030 Agenda and was further challenged to contribute to efforts to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and net-zero emissions by 2065.

47. Civic groups in the subregion emphasized the need to strengthen data disaggregation (e.g. by city, gender, ethnicity and disability). Civic groups also highlighted that the Goals were anchored in human rights and that addressing human rights concerns could lead to the realization of the Goals.

III. Sustainable Development Goals in focus: opportunities and priority actions for accelerating progress

A. Pacific

48. Approximately half of the population in the Pacific lives without access to basic drinking water facilities, while more than two thirds of the population lacks access to basic sanitation. The risk of exposure to natural hazards in the Pacific is high, which has a significant influence on water security.

49. While most households in the Pacific have access to clean cooking fuel and electricity, low-income households face challenges to accessibility due to high costs. There remain significant gaps in electricity and/or fossil fuel access in some Melanesian countries, with access ranging from 59 per cent to 67 per cent. Pacific member States have been developing road maps for Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy) to help address the ongoing energy challenges. However, the frequency of natural disasters and the geographical remoteness of the subregion, together with challenges posed by the pandemic and by access to finance, are hampering efforts to optimize renewable energy potential.
50. Challenges experienced by fast-growing cities in the Pacific, including the inequalities and vulnerabilities faced by marginalized groups in urban centres and gaps in health infrastructure and services, were exacerbated by COVID-19. Uncertainty arising from the lack of employment opportunities and food insecurity also contributed to rising social uncertainty and rural-urban polarization.

51. At the Sixth Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, held in Suva on 6 and 7 December 2022, action in the following areas was recommended.

1. **Increase in investment in clean water and sanitation**

52. Progress in Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation) is of particular concern, given that it is key to building resilience in the Pacific. In that connection, it is necessary to strengthen institutional frameworks and the enabling environment for water and sanitation services with increased targeted investments, in order to reach the most disadvantaged in rural communities. Participants of the Forum called upon Governments to leverage the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent to address water and sanitation needs.

2. **Exploration of sustainable energy transition**

53. With respect to Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy), although the Pacific continues to rely heavily on fossil fuels, increased investment is needed to improve access to clean cooking fuel and electricity. Support was expressed for the exploration of sustainable energy transition opportunities, financing and technology to raise the scale of investment in the Pacific, including in geothermal, green hydrogen and ocean energy. It was necessary to develop good practices, lend support for enabling policy and regulatory mechanisms, and develop decarbonization strategies for the transport sector.

3. **Strengthening of local governance and urban management**

54. With regard to Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), local governance and urban management remained critical priorities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Pacific subregion priorities included the strengthening of the enabling mechanisms for local government systems, in particular those related to administration; and engagement with communities and other stakeholders. It was recognized that local governments needed support to mobilize domestic resources for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the subnational level and targeted capacity-building assistance on urban management.

4. **Development of financial inclusion strategies and tailored technology-led services**

55. When considering Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), it was acknowledged that the geography of the Pacific necessitated an increased focus on the accessibility, affordability and reliability of transport and communications. Advancement in information and communications technology was also crucial for improved market access and enhanced trade. Efforts were under way in some Pacific countries to utilize online platforms for government services. The pandemic also made it necessary for many in the private sector, including microenterprises, to better utilize online platforms.
5. Improvements to the availability of data and statistics and regional guidelines

There was a call for the improved availability of reliable and consistent data and statistics. In order to undertake evidence-based and data-driven decision-making, investment in regional data and statistical capacity was a top priority. Regional support and guidelines to improve data availability were also needed, together with the sharing of good practices and lessons learned.

6. Climate action and ambition

Climate change is regarded as an existential threat in the Pacific, with Pacific leaders having declared a climate emergency. As a result, all Goals need to be viewed and analysed through a climate-change lens. It is necessary to ensure the integration of the disaster, climate and health nexus; the strengthening of ocean and climate policy synergies; the promotion of climate-smart and digital trade policy measures; and the enabling of sustainable energy transitions for small island developing States to enhance national action and regional ambition in the Pacific.

B. East and North-East Asia

In line with Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation), the majority of countries in East and North-East Asia enjoy good coverage of safely managed drinking water services. However, more work is needed on universal access to safely managed sanitation services. In the subregion, the proportion of wastewater that get treated varies from 10 per cent to 99 per cent. With regard to Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy), there has been a dramatic increase in the deployment of renewable energy, which is a welcome development, considering the large share of global emissions that are generated in the subregion.

In general, the subregion achieved good progress in developing quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including with regard to regional and transborder infrastructure, which pertains to Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure). The subregion is well positioned to use, adopt, adapt and develop frontier technologies. With regard to Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), East and North-East Asia is already primarily urban, with only limited additional urbanization occurring between 2012 to 2021. The only exception was China, where urbanization increased from 52 per cent to 62 per cent of the population.

During the Sixth North-East Asia Multi-stakeholder Forum on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, held in Ulaanbaatar on 7 and 8 September 2022, the following discussions and priority actions were highlighted related to the Goals in focus.

1. Accelerators for sustainable water management and sanitation

While many countries in the subregion have made good progress towards Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation), challenges remain for Mongolia. As Mongolia is a landlocked country, a greater effort is required in improving drinking water quality, increasing accessibility, addressing urban-rural inequalities in access to water and sanitation, and providing transparent water quality information. As a result, there are opportunities for collective action on accelerators of progress in water management and sanitation, including on governance, financing, capacity development, data and information, and innovation.
2. **Increased share of renewables in the total energy mix**

62. Representatives of countries in the subregion expressed their commitments to energy transition, including increasing the share of renewables in the total energy mix. This is supportive of the carbon neutrality goals and the climate ambitions of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. Mongolia indicated its intention to increase the share of renewable energy to 30 per cent in 2030 and has embarked on several renewable energy projects under its New Recovery Policy. ESCAP is also supporting Mongolia in developing its roadmap for Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy). To further amplify individual country efforts on energy transition, countries in the subregion should further deepen their ongoing engagements and collective consideration to develop a road map for a green power corridor in North-East Asia that links connectivity to sustainability objectives.

3. **Corridor development for resilient and sustainable connectivity**

63. With the presence of frontier economies in the subregion leading infrastructure and technological development, there are opportunities for partnerships, capacity-building and knowledge transfer to address urban-rural infrastructure disparities with the aim of achieving inclusive, resilient and sustainable infrastructure. In terms of transborder infrastructure, transport and economic corridor development could be utilized, with better platforms for policy coordination across sectors, and within and across Governments.

4. **Transformative role of cities in sustainable development**

64. Cities and communities are cross-cutting across all Goals. As a result, it is now critical to leverage the transformative role of cities in building longer-term resilience. Harnessing the “twin transitions” of cities on digitalization and the shift to net-zero emissions is particularly important for the subregion. Opportunities are created by localizing strategies for Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) through the use of integrated planning and management. In addition, establishing cooperation between cities is essential and creates new opportunities for engagement and synergy for regional governments. The voluntary local review is a starting point to ensure the inclusive and participatory engagement of local communities.

5. **Food security**

65. The issue of food security came into focus with food prices at record highs globally as a result of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and macroeconomic factors. Various policy options were suggested to combat the rise in food prices, including introducing timely administrative and fiscal measures, increasing domestic food availability and broadening macroeconomic policies. The global food crisis has made it necessary for Governments to consider how they can reallocate their existing public budgets to make healthy diets more affordable and sustainable, in order to leave no one behind.

C. **North and Central Asia**

66. During the Sixth North and Central Asia Multi-stakeholder Forum on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 6 and 7 October 2022, the following areas of discussion and priority actions were highlighted in relation to the Goals in focus.
1. Integrated water management

67. With regard to Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation), it was noted that the major challenges in the subregion included ensuring water quality, sustainability and water-use efficiency; strengthening governance and cooperation; ensuring adequate financing for water; and focusing on gender equality, disability and social inclusion in water management. In terms of cooperation, one of the subregion’s top priorities related to integrated water management for the Aral Sea. Lack of data to measure the progress of Goal 6 continued to be a challenge. The data gap for wastewater management, water quality tracking and water monitoring persisted. In addition, it was necessary to share data for improving integrated water resource management with stakeholders. The subregion also needed to adopt integrated approaches to water management and to strengthen policy coherence, capacity-building and its focus on data and innovation.

2. Energy transition plans

68. With regard to Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy), countries in the subregion have different endowments of energy resources. An area of commonality among them is that energy intensity remains high, especially given the large distances required for energy transportation and existing gaps in energy infrastructure. Electricity production is still dominated by hydrocarbon resources, despite the availability of high-quality renewable energy resources. While countries in the subregion are supportive of renewable energy development, they continue to rely on fossil fuels and do not yet have plans to phase out their use. Such plans should be promptly developed, discussed and adopted as part of national development policies.

3. Trade, transport and digital connectivity

69. With regard to Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), the subregion needs to facilitate innovation, increase economic resilience, diversify economic structure, provide inclusive access to emerging technologies and promote regional cooperation. The subregion has achieved steady progress in terms of the expansion of network coverage, the introduction of digital solutions, the development of government digital strategies, increased access to information and communication technologies, and the introduction of digital infrastructure programmes to improve connectivity. While there is a high level of heterogeneity across countries in the subregion, the potential exists to harmonize national frameworks and policies and to support regional approaches towards the digitalization of economies, including issues on cybersecurity. In particular, the subregion has been affected by global supply-chain disruptions and restrictions to movement. There is a great need to reinforce cross-country transit arrangements; tackle existing infrastructure bottlenecks; enhance resilience to market volatility; and accelerate digital solutions across trade and transport sectors. Countries have expressed renewed interest in undertaking reforms to diversify and expand transport networks, in particular through the introduction of smart roads and digital solutions.

4. Multiple dimensions of urban management

70. The subregion has been making limited progress in implementing Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities). It was noted that cities needed to align spatial planning with population growth and the changing demographics in urban areas, while also considering other socioeconomic and environmental issues. Cities were well positioned to lead pandemic recovery efforts; contribute to climate strategies and energy transition; and assist in reducing
risks and vulnerabilities. It was also noted that cities had to focus more on the multiple dimensions of urban development in order to ensure well-planned compact development, provide affordable housing, build climate resilience, improve energy efficiency, enhance transport accessibility and decrease urban poverty. While countries in the subregion were actively adopting national disaster risk reduction strategies, urgent actions were required to help reduce deaths and reverse the economic losses caused by disasters. Moreover, the use of “smart city” transformations created various opportunities for sustainable urban development.

D. South and South-West Asia

71. It was noted that the South and South-West Asia subregion was lagging behind, having stagnated on Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation). While progress was noted on some of the targets of Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy) and Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), overall progress in both Goals was less than adequate. Progressing in the subregion on Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) was being reversed. However, there were wide intercountry variations in terms of progress achieved on various targets under the Goals, as revealed by the corresponding indicators.

72. During the Sixth South and South-West Asia Multi-stakeholder Forum on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, held in Islamabad from 5 to 7 December 2022, the following areas of discussion and priority actions were highlighted in relation to the Goals in focus.

1. Water stress

73. With regard to Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation), the main concern was the increase in water stress caused by the depletion of freshwater resources in all countries in the subregion, a situation that was aggravated by the growing population, rising pollution in groundwater tables and the lack of adequate measures for water harvesting. Though there was an increase in the share of the urban population with access to an improved water supply, the issues of uninterrupted water supply and water quality were persistent challenges in both urban and rural areas. Despite abundant freshwater sources and a high level of per capita water availability, the lack of access to clean water was indicative of inadequacies in water resource management and infrastructure. Large-scale floods had contaminated groundwater tables. In addition, infrastructural gaps and an inadequate reach of public services had also been noted in terms of sanitation and solid waste disposal. While municipal and industrial waste management was improving, huge capacity additions were required to scale up the treatment and recycling of waste.

2. Declining share of renewable energy

74. With regard to Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy), it was noted that access to electricity had increased to nearly 95 per cent coverage, which was above the global average. However, the stability, quality and overall reliability of the electricity supply was in need of substantial improvement. One major concern was the decreasing share of renewable sources in total energy consumption, which fell from 37 per cent to 26 per cent during the 2000–2018 period, despite an increase in investments in renewable energy generation. In addition, there was a need to reverse the proportionately higher growth in fossil fuel dependency and the corresponding growth in energy-related carbon emissions. Access to clean cooking fuel was low in the subregion, which accounted for about 31.2 per cent of the global population without access. Policy reform and investment to improve energy efficiency
were urgently needed, as was higher end-user dependency on electricity generated from clean sources and traded through a subregional grid infrastructure.

3. **Industrialization, infrastructure development and innovation**

75. It was noted that industrialization, infrastructure development and innovation were pivotal for structural transformation and economic growth, which lead to job creation. Progress towards industrialization was moderate. However, some countries were at risk of premature deindustrialization, while also experiencing a decline in foreign trade and foreign direct investment. Major bottlenecks and barriers for sustainable industrialization included a lack of access to affordable capital financing; underdeveloped infrastructure; unreliable power supply; shortages of raw materials and skilled labour; and incoherent policies on trade, industry and investment. Women and informal workers were often excluded from available schemes and opportunities due to social barriers, discrimination, insufficient skills and lack of information about the opportunities available. Digital transformation, which was driving the fourth industrial revolution, could offer immense opportunities for industrialization, but the transformation needed to be inclusive. Other policy priorities for the subregion included: the streamlining of domestic policies for digitalization; regional cooperation for expanding intraregional trade, transport, information and communications technology and energy connectivity; the building of regional value chains; and cooperation for science, technology and innovation capabilities.

4. **Rapid and unplanned urbanization**

76. Rapid and unplanned urbanization that exposed urban infrastructure to undue pressure was the overarching issue. Urban population was expected to increase by about 35 per cent by 2030, potentially worsening gaps in the infrastructure for urban water, sanitation and housing. The percentage of slum dwellers among urban residents and the rate of morbidity due to air pollution in the subregion were among the highest in the world. The subregion needed to address sustainable urbanization through infrastructure development, in particular focusing on: affordable housing; inclusive, clean and safe public transport systems; better solid waste management; renewable energy harvesting; green urban landscaping; and the disaster resilience of urban infrastructure.

E. **South-East Asia**

77. During the Sixth South-East Asia Multi-stakeholder Forum on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, held in Bangkok on 7 and 8 November 2022, the following areas of discussion and priority actions were highlighted in relation to the Goals in focus.

1. **Coherent water-related policies and initiatives**

78. It was noted that the focus of Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation) was the importance of clean water and sanitation in sustainable development; water was fundamental to achieving the 2030 Agenda. The key challenges of Goal 6 included ensuring access to clean water during floods and droughts caused by extreme climate events; and managing the multiple uses of water resources. In addition to efforts at the national level, existing regional and subregional policies and initiatives could provide complementary support for efforts aimed at post-pandemic recovery and at achieving the 2030 Agenda. However, there were gaps between the intended impacts of such policies and
initiatives and their actual effectiveness. Therefore, promoting greater coherence of policies and initiatives among agencies that focused on water and water usage would help ensure their effective implementation.

2. Investment and research and development on energy

79. With regard to Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy), it was noted that the energy sector accounted for about three quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions. Switching to methods of clean energy generation, such as solar, wind and hydropower, and improving energy efficiency were vital to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. In order to ensure future energy security and prevent economically destabilizing price spikes, it remained critically important to continue to invest in energy policies, in particular in sustainable energy projects. In addition to realizing the potential of advanced low-carbon energy sources to contain decarbonization costs, it was necessary to invest early in research and development. Fostering regional cooperation could help to build forward better and beyond. Governments needed to adopt policies that supported the expansion of local industries to take advantage of the significant value chain created. In order to enable investments in technology-based manufacturing capabilities at a competitive scale, Governments needed to develop coherent policies, thereby enabling the increased penetration of clean energy in the mix of total energy generation through improved regional connections.

3. Sustainable transport systems

80. With regard to Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), countries recognized the transport sector as one of the key drivers to accelerate implementation. The role of freight transport policies and strategies in achieving the 2030 Agenda was highlighted, emphasizing best practices and approaches, including on guiding principles on the transition to sustainable freight. Several challenges to freight sustainability in the subregion included: rapidly rising trade volumes; the dominant position of road transport despite its ageing fleet; the high level of carbon emissions, including in urban areas; the significant cost of logistics and the fragmentation of the logistics industry; and the increase in the number of road accidents and governance issues. Opportunities for transitioning to a more sustainable freight system were emphasized, including a greater use of transport modes that were more environmentally friendly, such as rail and waterborne transport; digitalization; electric mobility; and new initiatives on sustainable freight coordination platforms.

4. Urban transport infrastructure

81. With regard to Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), it was observed that approximately 342 million people, equivalent to half of the subregion’s population, currently lived in urban areas, and that number was expected to increase by 70 million by 2025. Economic growth was not only occurring at a rapid pace in mega-cities (e.g. Jakarta, Manila and Bangkok); increasingly, it was also occurring in cities with populations of between 500,000 and 5 million. Urbanization was a crucial driver of economic growth, with 80 per cent of the subregion’s gross domestic product (GDP) coming from cities. Underlying causes included the benefits of large cities that resulted from economies of scale and the higher wages that people typically received when transitioning from an agrarian to an urban society. In the short term, cities needed to provide adequate and sustainable urban infrastructure to meet the increasing pace of urbanization. In meeting infrastructure demands, smart
urbanization applications could potentially allow cities to leapfrog technology and facilitate the optimal use of existing infrastructure.

IV. Strengthening partnerships and enabling mechanisms for sustainable development

A. Pacific

82. Partnerships with the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders remained an integral contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It was noted that many Pacific Governments had developed mechanisms of engagement with these non-State actors, including during the voluntary national review process. However, engagement needed to be encouraged more frequently on a range of policies and legislation that had an impact on people, especially vulnerable groups.

83. It was highlighted that civil society organizations had good working relationships with Governments and were involved in committees and working groups. In some cases, they were even included in government delegations for international conferences (e.g. sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). Civic and community-based groups in the Pacific could play a role by contributing their traditional knowledge, as a complement to scientific knowledge, in areas such as food security, agricultural transformation and coping with natural disasters. It was highlighted that Governments and development partners should consider civic groups as an integral part of the development ecosystem and include them in their decision-making processes.

84. Private sector agencies and institutions continued to face the prolonged negative impact of the pandemic. The slower pace of recovery in the Pacific also prompted the outflow of labour mobility to developed countries, causing a shortage in the skills needed in the post-pandemic recovery phase. To that end, the private sector could benefit from the deployment of technology and innovative practices, especially for microenterprises. The private sector emphasized greater enforcement of accountability and transparency to ensure fairness in market access, with Governments monitoring and reinforcing adherence to labour rules and human rights.

85. It was noted that tailored and coordinated development partner support at the national level was critical in strengthening institutions to better manage shocks and crises. In addition, new opportunities for inclusive and resilient growth, and strategies for mobilizing new and additional resources remained important.

86. There was recognition among Pacific small island developing States that, although resource gaps had to be addressed by individual Governments, support from development partners and development banks through regional cooperation mechanisms was essential.

87. Development partners were actively supporting the Pacific subregion in many policy areas related to the 2030 Agenda. While participants at the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change had expressed appreciation for the establishment of a loss and damage fund, it was noted that the fund should be made fit for purpose by contextualizing the needs of national stakeholders. At the same time, the urgent need to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels remained the only way of keeping people safe from the
devastating effects of climate change, including climate-induced natural disasters.

88. Country representatives and representatives of the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific stressed the importance of sharing of knowledge, lessons learned and good practices. Development partners could strengthen the sharing of opportunities in delivering projects with effective development impacts.

89. Challenges in data availability remained a concern for evidence-based policymaking. Data collection should be aimed at strengthening existing Pacific frameworks and initiatives. In addition, in order to reflect the situation in the Pacific more adequately, collective efforts were needed to advocate for an increase in the use of data and indicators that were relevant to the Pacific and to have them accepted at the global level. Genuine partnerships for data and statistics would enhance the opportunities to explore and support development potential in the subregion.

B. East and North-East Asia

90. In their joint statement, civic groups noted that the multi-stakeholder engagement mechanism was a key means of supporting civic engagement for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the subregion. It was recognized that civic participation and civil society partnerships in that implementation had been reflected in legal or institutional frameworks across countries in the subregion. However, no integrated follow-up system existed and there were no consistent consultations, which weakened the multi-stakeholder engagement mechanism. The youth sector also expressed its concern that it was not being fully recognized as an independent constituent in the stakeholder engagement process.

91. Challenges identified included the lack of direct dialogue between civic groups and government units in charge of implementation; changes in government leadership that resulted in the shrinking of civic spaces; weak engagement linkages between national and local levels as well as between sectors; and the limited technical and financial resources available to civic groups. In order to address those challenges, civic groups recommended providing more open space for marginalized social groups; providing adequate financial and human resources to ensure diverse participation during stakeholder engagements throughout the policymaking process; and conducting participatory and inclusive reviews of national progress on implementation using local indicators.

92. It was noted that development cooperation was an important mechanism to accelerate progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The subregion was home to countries that had emerged as key providers of development assistance. In addition to traditional donors, some providers were countries that had previously been recipients of foreign assistance but had become donors in the past few decades.

93. The development cooperation landscape was changing. Development cooperation needed to find the balance of supporting longer-term development needs while also responding to immediate demands and crisis impacts. In addition, the costs of addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in greater financial constraints in many countries, including donor countries.
94. There was a need to encourage more inclusive participation of all actors and seek new approaches for collaborations. In addition, with development partners facing funding constraints, the focus was on the quality of development assistance rather than quantity.

C. North and Central Asia

95. It was noted that regional partnerships and initiatives were of paramount importance in advancing implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It was particularly important for landlocked developing countries, given their dependence on neighbouring countries and transit corridors, to receive goods and services. Multi-stakeholder partnerships, including engagement with young people and representatives of academia, the private sector and civic groups, had to be reinforced.

96. It was observed that academia supported the transfer of knowledge and technology and acted as a bridge between the public sector and decision makers, thereby encouraging an inclusive dialogue through the mobilization of young people, women and other vulnerable groups. In addition, the public and private sectors could engage young people, providing an enabling environment to develop practical research skills. The private sector also played a key role in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the region.

97. There was strong consensus from businesses that energy transition, green infrastructure and innovation were top priorities. These priorities were the keys to connecting businesses, including micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, with financing opportunities aimed at key sectors for sustainable development.

98. Regional cooperation and partnerships were key components for low-carbon energy development in the subregion. Related initiatives undertaken included analysing and disseminating international experience among the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States and ensuring the availability and harmonization of energy-related statistical data.

99. The advancement of integrated water management, partnerships and cooperation were essential, including for issues related to the Aral Sea. There were already institutions in place to help facilitate cooperation (e.g. the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea and the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia). Different stakeholders needed to work as partners to ensure water availability and sustainable management. It was also necessary to strengthen multi-stakeholder approaches, build a shared vision for transboundary water management and enhance policy coherence.

100. North and Central Asia had demonstrated immense potential in partnerships for sustainable development and was well-placed for innovative green projects aimed at utilizing and expanding on existing infrastructure. International financial institutions were important partners who could help to finance projects and contribute to greater economic resilience, job creation, green transformation and economic diversification.

101. It was noted that public sector funds alone would not be enough to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Increased engagement and collaboration between the private sector, academia, civic groups and other stakeholders were essential to design, finance and manage projects, as well as to disseminate knowledge and share best practices. Innovative solutions were vital in ensuring that sustainability had a central role in the most pressing issues facing society and
in reimagining supply chains, transportation and consumption for sustainable development.

D. South and South-West Asia

102. It was noted that the subregion needed partnerships and collective regional actions in many areas of sustainable development as it would not achieve the 2030 Agenda at its current pace. Regional cooperation could address common structural constraints and challenges, including the disproportionately high rate of dependency on agriculture and other primary sectors, industrial stagnation, huge infrastructure gaps and inadequate access to public services. Factors such as shared natural resources, riverine systems, agroclimatic zones and consequent common environmental vulnerabilities imply transboundary linkages, making regional cooperation a necessity.

103. Existing macroeconomic conditions of low economic growth and high inflation, which were prevalent among countries in the subregion, posed several challenges in mobilizing adequate financial resources. Raising interest rates to combat inflation had made financing costlier and had resulted in substantial fiscal and debt pressures that had a negative impact on future debt servicing costs. Tax-to-GDP ratios were among the lowest in the subregion, as the scope for expanding the tax base and filling the gaps in the tax systems remained underexploited.

104. Diversifying and deepening financing portfolios through an optimal mix of domestic and external sources was critical for the prudent management of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In the face of growing debt vulnerabilities, it was necessary to realize improved domestic savings, prudent and efficient government spending and the expansion of private capital investments in the composition of domestic financing. Domestic reforms aimed at enabling a transparent, reliable and conducive regulatory environment were also required to attract foreign direct investment. The significance of remittances as an additional funding source was gradually increasing. Countries had to explore potential new and innovative financing instruments, including sovereign and green bonds and a carbon tax, as well as the use of digital technologies to improve tax collection.

105. The subregion overall lagged in science, technology and innovation capacities, due to limited domestic research and development capabilities. It was therefore important to engage in international partnerships for technology acquisition. Countries in the subregion with stronger capacities (e.g. India and Türkiye) could take the lead in capacity-building under institutional collaborations. Industrial cooperation through foreign direct investment flows could also promote the acquisition and absorption of green technologies through joint ventures. Ensuring continued access to the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries was critical to enhance productive capacities of graduating least developing countries.

106. The tracking of indicators continued to be a challenge due to data gaps. It was noted that countries in the subregion should continue to strengthen national statistical capacities and ensure the availability of reliable data. In order to support sustainable development planning and monitoring, it was necessary to increase the amount of disaggregated data at the local level and integrated data systems at the regional level. Regional capacity-building opportunities could be utilized to develop robust data collection systems and make use of new data sources.
107. Partnerships for sustainable and equitable development at the subregional level needed to form a part of efforts to advance regional economic cooperation and integration through enhanced trade in goods and services and cross-border investment flows. The subregion had to adopt a comprehensive approach to trade liberalization, addressing both policy and procedural barriers, including the harmonization of trade procedures and the adoption of paperless trade systems. These reforms had to be accompanied by policies to enable cross-border transport connectivity for building regional production networks and value chains.

E. South-East Asia

108. It was noted that the voluntary national review could be a powerful tool for instigating change in countries. Those changes could be at the institutional level, leading to improved monitoring and alignment with national plans and budgets. Countries in the subregion were utilizing the reviews to realign, refresh and restructure institutional arrangements. The reviews could also lead to greater engagement between Governments, the private sector and civil society in providing data, assessing the effectiveness of government policies and programmes, and promoting evidence-based policies beyond the review process.

109. Achieving sustainable development in the subregion required stakeholder participation and engagement in the design and implementation of sustainable development strategies, policies and projects. In South-East Asia, stakeholder engagement offered the opportunity to further align policy implementation with societal needs and expectations, contributing to long-term sustainability. Stakeholder engagement in policy dialogue helped to identify priority social and environmental issues and improve policymaking and accountability.

110. Cooperation within the subregion should also be pursued to advance common development objectives. Cooperation with South-East Asian cooperation programmes, including the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle, the Greater Mekong subregion, and the Brunei Darussalam–Indonesia–Malaysia–Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area, could play important intermediary platforms for development actions in priority issues including food security, climate actions and sustainable urbanization. The Centre for Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle Subregional Cooperation and the Mekong Institute could help advance sustainable development at the national, subregional and regional levels. At the same time, they could foster and strengthen cooperation ties with countries in the subregion, as well as between the countries themselves.

V. Conclusions

111. Although progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda across Asia-Pacific subregions is diverse and uneven, there is a united call and a solid commitment by stakeholders to make substantial progress in achieving it. The 2030 Agenda remains an important blueprint for member States, helping them to align their national plans on sustainable development.

112. Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires programmatic and integrated approaches with the active engagement of multi-agencies and stakeholders, and the harmonization of collaborative actions among different sectors and stakeholders.
113. The role of stakeholders, in particular the private sector, civic groups and academia, is central to ensuring that collective efforts are inclusive and people-centred and to delivering the intended results. The aim is an inclusive and more networked multilateralism, which is in line with the report of the Secretary-General, entitled “Our Common Agenda”.

114. The priorities, which vary across subregions, require technical assistance and capacity-building. Amid those varying priorities, there are commonalities, which present opportunities to strengthen regional cooperation. Collective actions at the subregional level could be utilized as building blocks to engender cooperation across subregions for a broader, region-wide approach in addressing development challenges.

115. ESCAP, as an inclusive intergovernmental platform, is well positioned to support member States in the Asia-Pacific region in promoting a recovery pathway consistent with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

116. Participants in the Tenth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development may wish to take note of the document and discuss the subregional priority actions identified to be further highlighted at the regional and global levels. They may also wish to provide guidance on ways to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the subregional level.