The magnitude of the challenge to attain the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in Asia and the Pacific is further out of reach with the COVID-19 pandemic, cost-of-living crisis, geopolitical conflicts, and climate change slowing or reversing many of the region’s hard-won development gains. The need to shift to a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient development pathway is clearer than ever.

The present document, developed in partnership with the United Nations agencies and programmes, discusses Sustainable Development Goals 6 (Clean water and sanitation), 7 (Affordable and clean energy), 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), and 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), which, together with Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), constitute the cluster of Goals under review at the 2023 High-level Political Forum on sustainable development under the theme of “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”.

The document proposes priority areas to strengthen policy coherence in the implementation efforts to build an inclusive and effective path for sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the achievement of the Goals.
I. Introduction

1. The United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/299, adopted in July 2016, established the mechanism for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national, regional, and global level. Furthermore, resolution 75/290 B, adopted in June 2021, decided that the thematic focus of the 2023 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council shall be “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels.”

2. In line with the theme of the 2023 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the Tenth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development will examine the following Goals, in depth.

   • Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
   • Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
   • Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
   • Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
   • Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

3. In collaboration with partner United Nations agencies and programmes and other stakeholders, Goal profiles assessing the status of regional progress on these goals were developed. These profiles are based on data from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) statistical database, as well as data and resources from partner United Nations agencies and programmes.

4. The Goal profiles are provided to support common regional understanding of the status of regional progress, areas where good progress has been achieved, and areas that require specific attention. The profiles also integrate human rights and gender equality considerations and highlight promising innovations, good practices and priority actions aimed at making further progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals under review and to make the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic more sustainable and resilient.

5. These Goal profiles are available on the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development event page on ESCAP website in the document section at www.unescap.org/events/apfsd10.

II. Policy recommendations emanating from the Goal profiles on Sustainable Development Goals 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17

6. This section presents the priorities for action in building an inclusive and effective path for sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, emanating from the
development of the Goal profiles for Sustainable Development Goals 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17.

A. Clean water and sanitation: priority areas for regional action

7. Inclusive multi-stakeholder approaches and a shared vision from local to transboundary levels for water and wastewater management within and across basins can lead to greater governance and cooperation. Applying rights-based approaches and gender-responsive principles and standards, including water accounting and river basin planning and evaluation, can contribute to accountable institutions and better management. Initiatives that encourage and foster women’s leadership and effective participation in these processes are aspects to be considered.

8. Improved policy coherence can better support integrated water management. The reallocation of significant portion of water resources traditionally owned by agriculture to other sectors is already underway in most parts of Asia-Pacific region. Reflection of this shift on water management principles, policies and regulation that guide action, investment and technology towards transparent allocation and reallocation, use, and protection of water resources and infrastructures is dire. Stakeholder engagement, enfranchisement of most vulnerable groups and transparency are critical elements in developing policies that prepare for shifting demographics and livelihood practices.

9. Data collection and sharing can support water accounting, access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services, equitable and efficient allocation of water and improve water quality and groundwater status. Cooperation between academic and research institutions as well as among countries can help model future scenarios. This entails improving capacities of and funding to national statistical offices to support collection of location-, age-, and sex-disaggregated data that informs these efforts.

10. Strengthening national institutions and improving institutional coordination across administrative scales can contribute to enfranchisement of marginalised water users. This encompasses particularly water quality, wastewater and groundwater management, climate change and disasters, and climate finance for national water accounting and allocation.

11. Fostering gender equality and inclusion in the design and implementation of relevant policies and strategies is crucial to promoting transparency of policy processes and regulatory arrangements. This involves the use of inclusive methodologies for consultation and outreach to different stakeholders. Engaging marginalised groups in evaluating impacts of policies and related interventions allows policymakers to assess their efforts in terms of their responsiveness to these groups’ challenges and needs.

12. More finance especially for water, sanitation and hygiene, wastewater management and disaster risk reduction, and support for regional collaboration is required. This includes regulation to funnel investments into clean production and prevention of pollution and disaster, and more public financing for water, sanitation and hygiene services for marginalised populations who may not benefit equally from the economic prosperity and overall improvements in basic services.

13. Integrated approaches that address the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems, integrated water resources management, nature-based solutions and citizen action for river restoration are vital. This can
enhance the linkages between water and disaster risk-reduction, climate adaptation and mitigation, energy and health, as well as prioritise improving water quality by regulating polluters, enforcing and incentivising compliance, and investing in water treatment and infrastructure.

14. Agricultural production with consideration of climate change adaptation and water supply limitations is key. Water storage for varied water availability (while taking care of river and ecosystem health) can be increased by diversifying crops and greater application of water use efficiency measures that address misconceptions surrounding water savings. The potential for re-use of domestic wastewater and treated effluent in agriculture can be maximised.

B. Affordable and clean energy: priority areas for regional action

15. Countries could join and support the Global Methane Pledge to accelerate Goal 7. Participating countries joining the Global Methane Pledge launched at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties 26 in Glasgow, agreed to take voluntary actions to contribute to a collective effort to reduce global methane emissions at least 30 percent from 2020 levels by 2030, which could eliminate over 0.2°C warming by 2050. 121 countries and the European Union have joined the pledge as of October 2022, with only 22 from the Asia-Pacific region (most of which are small island developing States). The energy sector is closely linked to the success of this pledge, through potential methane emission reduction or methane utilization measures such as:

- Recovery of coal mine methane and its sales to natural gas pipeline systems or use for power generation, in boilers, coal drying, as a heat source for mine ventilation air, vehicle fuel production and manufacturing
- Measures to reduce venting and flaring during production of oil and natural gas
- Reducing organic waste generation and the increased recycling and energy recovery of organic waste
- Market development and expansion of the use of methane-based fuels for various energy end users

16. Countries could support the implementation of the Global Roadmap for Accelerated Goal 7 Action in Support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. This calls for action to close gaps in energy access; rapidly transition to decarbonized energy systems; mobilize adequate and predictable finance; leave no one behind on the path to a net zero future; and harness innovation, technology, and data.

17. Countries could consider standardizing off-grid electricity supply technologies and business models; electric cooking options in parallel with electrification; establishing standards for cooking appliances aligned with the World Health Organization (WHO) indoor air quality targets and the electrification of end-use consumption through the use of energy from renewable sources as ways to accelerate the energy transition and decarbonization, resulting in increased efficiency, reduced costs, and an immediate reduction of air pollution in cities.

18. The significant growth in transport demand in Asia and the Pacific, which is strongly correlated to economic development and population growth,
has outpaced the speed at which technological advancements could improve fuel and vehicle efficiencies. Without more ambitious policy interventions, transport demand and energy use in the region will continue to increase. The gradual phase out of internal combustion engine and the use of advanced vehicle technologies and alternative fuels in the transport sector will help increase overall energy efficiency of the transport sector. ESCAP has launched an “Asia Pacific Initiative on Electric Mobility” in August 2022 to address these transitions and aims to support ESCAP member States by providing expertise, technological know-how and the financial means to transition to net zero carbon transport.

19. Such a transition needs to be rights-based, respecting human rights including Indigenous Peoples’ rights and equity in the access to energy services including through targeted investments to community led and managed small scale renewable energy projects. The Right Energy Partnership with Indigenous Peoples is an indigenous–led, multi-stakeholder partnership with the goal of increasing renewable energy systems that respect human rights and leveraging the leadership of indigenous communities to develop solutions. The Partnership aims to: (a) ensure that renewable energy projects are fully aligned with the respect and protection of human rights, and (b) by 2030 provide at least 50 million indigenous peoples access to renewable energy that is developed and managed in ways that are consistent with their self-determined needs and development aspirations.

20. Cross-cutting approaches to transform the clean cooking markets at the regional level, and advance progress across multiple dimensions — e.g., policy, technology, innovation, finance, and partnerships — are critical. Advancing the clean cooking sector will rely on targeted policy support to build the necessary enabling environment to develop the sector. At the same time, there is a need to support institutions and networks (e.g., government, civil society, local businesses, industry associations, and entrepreneurs) with technical assistance that is directed to capacity building, and structure of innovative finance that unlocks larger streams of private sector capital into the sector. Finally, urgent action is required to convene global and regional actors around the topic and identify entry-points for coordinated and enhanced action on clean cooking.

C. Industry, innovation, and infrastructure: priority areas for regional action

21. Whilst there has been some progress in infrastructure development in support of industry, innovation and connectivity, the need for sustainable and resilient infrastructure development is growing faster than the progress being made. The number of natural hazards impacting on the communities has grown rapidly in the last decade, with Asia and the Pacific being by far the most affected region. While funding support to infrastructure is still urgently needed in the region, it is critical that sustainable, resilient and inclusive approaches are embedded into its development to achieve long-term development outcomes, including through access to key services, such as digital or transport connectivity. Integrated and agile approaches around infrastructure, youth, gender and firm development are key for increased adoption and sustainability.

22. Through three main focus areas (infrastructure, industry and innovation), digitalization is a key enabler and disruptor of Goal 9. In addition to effectively harnessing the power of digitalization, countries in the region also need to mitigate its negative potential effects, such as leaving behind those who are not digitally connected.
23. In addition, industrial policies can be aligned to support the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and build back better. This means taking into account the megatrends which are likely to shape the future of industrialization and ensuring resilience to potential shocks. These policies can promote a green, inclusive and resilient recovery. They can also enhance the region’s transition towards higher-productivity, innovation-focused industries that could provide enhanced growth opportunities and higher economic resilience. This also includes shifting consumer behaviour through demand-side instruments and providing incentives to improve firms’ resource and energy efficiency and promote green innovation.

24. Industrial policies need to further consider the actors that have been more vulnerable during the pandemic. These policies can help small and medium-sized enterprises by facilitating the uptake of new technologies and promoting market diversification. Enhancing safety net provisions will support employability especially for female, youth, low-skilled and informal workers. They could aim to promote diversification, accelerate progress towards structural transformation and strengthen resilience against future risks. This includes building awareness and fostering knowledge creation and exchange about new and existing risks. Applying clear statistical evidence and implementing under a coherent framework in activities and intent can be conducive toward achieving long-term goals.

25. This requires producing disaggregated data to better track the inclusiveness of industrial development, the integration of small and medium-sized enterprises in value chains and the role of women and youth in industry and research and development. Increasing domestic and international resources as well as political commitment to strengthen national statistical offices and enhance statistical capacity are critical.

D. Sustainable cities and communities: priority areas for regional action

26. An ecosystems-based approach to address the impacts of climate change and disasters in urban areas can enhance resilience by restoring and rehabilitating urban ecosystems, for example, by reducing urban heat island effects and increasing the buffer capabilities for flooding and reducing pollution. Equally important, this can become an instrument of economic development through job creation and redistributive justice. It can also provide cities with significant co-benefits such as food and water security and greater cohesion and empowerment at the community level. To respond to multiple converging hazards facing Asia-Pacific cities, urban planners could invest more in comprehensive risk assessments by identifying and stratifying vulnerable populations—including their varying needs and capacities—to take targeted and anticipatory actions that are gender-responsive and inclusive, notably for persons with disabilities, elderly populations and children. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the urgent need to merge disaster risk reduction strategies into health preparedness systems. Lastly, city governments will need to boost resilience through targeted, forward-looking and impact-based fiscal spending that also accounts for health-related hazards, where the costs could be sourced collaboratively through public-private partnerships.

27. Systemic, transformative action requires cross-sectoral integration and coordination between jurisdictions within urban and peri-urban regions and between local, subnational and national authorities with informed communities. All local environmental action and programming need to consider human
rights and gender equality elements and build it into governance, collaboration and implementation approaches and mechanisms. This includes using gender-responsive participatory budgeting as a governance tool to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. Social protection can also help build household resilience to economic or climate-related disruptions or life contingencies. With increasing urbanization, further efforts are needed to ensure access and coverage of informal communities in urban settings. Through building reciprocal rural-urban linkages, a range of flows and interactions between urban and rural areas can serve as entry points to develop interventions with reciprocal benefits. These include the two-way movement of people, capital, information, nutrients, ecosystem services and more.

28. Investing in frontier technologies and innovating local exigencies could be combined with enhanced social organization and mobilization adapted to Asia-Pacific’s urban areas, especially slums, where advanced modelling techniques for risk assessments may be difficult to apply. This requires promoting digital transformation and data-driven decision making. Addressing the digital divide will challenge existing power dynamics that drive current inequities and inequalities. In response to the challenges of lockdowns and limited mobility that occurred at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many grassroots women’s organizations invested in learning and using digital tools and technologies, for example to access medical services and sell and barter food. The increased use of digital platforms helped communities stay connected, reaffirm their solidarity, coordinate activities, promote information sharing and learning and engage government. Incorporating gender-responsive and spatially aware insights from data, community-based approaches and scientific expertise into decision-making processes is one of the crucial pathways to quantify progress to achieve sustainable urban development. Many of the insights needed to guide long-range planning and transformational pathways require expertise that often does not sit within local governments. Expert and community guidance is often needed, for instance, to gather, process and interpret the data required for material flow analyses, greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity baselines and resilience assessments, among others. The application of technology in urban transport, coupled with greater energy efficiency and the adoption of electric mobility, will also lead to greater sustainability. Smart transport technologies and innovations, including passenger information systems, automatic toll payment and congestion charging, already exist in many countries in Asia and the Pacific as they shift their traditional transport technologies to systems with greater automation.

29. Planning is a public good which requires strong local leadership and long-term vision to address challenges cities face from continued sprawl. Planning processes, especially for urban and territorial planning, need to be inclusive, sustainable and resilient. They need to incorporate the perspectives of diverse stakeholders to ensure that plans are responsive to the differentiated needs of urban populations. In addition, different scales of planning need to work in tandem. Planning across the urban-rural continuum, which integrates nature-based solutions and disaster reduction strategies, ensures a more balanced growth outcome that increases sustainability and resilience. Territorial planning addresses the gap between national-level development policies and local implementation. The successful application of regional planning tools and methodologies in various contexts provides a framework for decision making across different levels of government. Similarly, transport and spatial planning at the city level need to be better integrated to ensure sustainable low-carbon multi-modal mobility through promising concepts borne out of the pandemic, such as the 15-minute city concept. Integrated land use and transport planning, including mixed land use patterns, is, therefore, key
to sustainable urban mobility through reducing travel demand and distance and shifting to public transport and non-motorized transport modes. The COVID-19 pandemic has enlivened the agenda for better, more inclusive public space planning. The need for public space to incorporate blue and green networks as structuring elements in urban and territorial planning continues to be important. Planning lays the foundation for more equitable, resilient, inclusive and environmentally sustainable urban infrastructure. Urban infrastructure is long-lasting and can, therefore "lock-in" and shape resource needs and service inequities for decades.

E. Partnerships for the goals: priority areas for regional action

30. In the current economic situation, accelerated efforts are required to expand the fiscal space and improve mobilisation of public resources. While it may not be feasible to raise further taxes or expand the tax base, a possible option to increase fiscal space is to enhance the efficiency of tax administration in revenue collection and government expenditure, for example, through adoption of digital technologies that are proven to reduce leakages, increase transparency and clarity, and lower administrative and compliance costs. With the help of digital technologies, governments can target their support towards the poor and vulnerable population groups or prioritised sectors of the economy with a reduced leakage rate.

31. While multiple crises are dragging several countries into riskier situations with widened fiscal deficits and higher debt levels, Asia-Pacific countries that are experiencing or showing early signs of debt distress can consider to urgently look for ways to restructure debts and explore options to reduce debt exposure within their own efforts and through regional and global cooperative approaches. The international community needs to extend further support to these developing countries. The Debt Service Suspension Initiatives was short-lived, covering only 73 eligible countries (International Development Association countries and least developed countries) and bilateral official debts. The Common Framework for Debt Treatments has yet to deliver to any country. These initiatives need further improvement, specifically by expanding country coverage to middle-income countries, extending the duration and scope of debt relief, bringing in more creditors and accelerating negotiation and implementation. The international community can further develop a comprehensive debt relief programme that reduces immediate or short-term debt pressure and incentivises long-term solutions. This can be done, for example, by mixing temporary debt suspension with sovereign debt reprofiling and restructuring and building the capacity of developing countries to implement long-term debt sustainability frameworks.

32. This also includes the legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks to scale up access to sustainable finance and develop necessary frameworks and for issuing sustainable financial instruments, including bonds, debt-swaps and guarantees, through technical assistance and capacity-building support from development partners. Since the amount of private finance remains far below the ambition of the 2030 agenda, efforts to improve the mobilisation and alignment of private finance for the Goals are among key priorities. To do so, there is a need to enhance awareness and engagement in key private finance programmes, including the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero, UN Environment Programme Finance Initiative, the Sustainable Stock Exchange Initiative, International Finance Corporation's Sustainable Banking and Finance Network and the Principles for Responsible Investment.
33. In the areas of trade and customs, digitalisation can be accelerated, for instance, by leveraging tools and solutions available across the United Nations system and acceding to the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific. Such acceleration could streamline trade procedures to reduce costs, increase exports by least developed countries - which have among the lowest rates of trade facilitation implementation, significantly inhibiting trade - and make trade more inclusive.

34. At the same time, more regional cooperation and integration efforts can contribute to reducing trade barriers and trade costs, particularly those facing developing and least developed countries. Countries may further wish to examine the prospect of regional integration at bilateral and plurilateral levels to ensure cost competitiveness with countries that already have established trade agreements. Moreover, compliance with due diligence guided by international instruments such as the United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and International Labour Organization (ILO) Multinational Enterprise Declaration need to be considered.

35. South-South cooperation can be enhanced, including through strengthening mechanisms for sharing experiences among state and non-state actors in building back better. Strengthening existing networks, best practice communities, and knowledge platforms among different stakeholders is crucial in promoting South-South and triangular cooperation. Where such networks, communities or platforms do not exist, countries may need to consider creating mechanisms to support the effective and efficient process of building back better. Countries may also consider undertaking analysis and peer learning to ensure sharing of information, experience, skills, and lessons learned. Such practices may include innovations and lessons to accelerate pandemic response and mitigation and strategies and approaches to build back better.

36. Several of the targets of Goal 17 have limited data available to measure progress, including targets 17.2, 17.5, 17.14, 17.15, and 17.16. Member States can engage in relevant capacity-building mechanisms provided by custodian agencies, such as the newly launched Global Community of Practice on Goal 17.14.1 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), to tackle data gaps across all Goals to report on progress. At the national and regional levels, multistakeholder participation including private sector, civil society and trade union organisations in governance systems of Sustainable Development Goals is essential. Further, countries can benefit from regional initiatives for strengthening reporting, including progress assessments with the National Sustainable Development Goal Tracker and data portals.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

37. A number of priority areas are proposed in this document. Many of these include greater cooperation among member States to ensure that action can be taken on a regional basis. These priority areas may serve a basis for discussion between member States and other stakeholders on opportunities to strengthen policy coherence in implementation efforts to achieve a sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and build an inclusive and effective path for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.