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

Note by the secretariat

Summary

In preparation for the Eleventh Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, the five subregional offices of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific convened their respective forums, in the final quarter of 2023, on the theme “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions in Asia and the Pacific”. The forums were attended by government representatives, as well as representatives of academia, civil society, the youth sector, the private sector and think tanks.

The focus of the subregional forums was on the challenges and opportunities facing the region in achieving Sustainable Development Goals 1 (No poverty), 2 (Zero hunger), 13 (Climate action), 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The forums also served as an opportunity to share experiences and offer subregional perspectives. In addition, related events were organized to discuss the voluntary national reviews.

The present document contains a summary of the discussions from the subregional forums. It also includes the key recommendations made by participants in the forums to accelerate action, which include strengthening policy coherence, utilizing digital technology and innovation, ensuring inclusive decision-making and enhancing multi-stakeholder collaboration.

The participants in the Eleventh Forum may wish to take note of the document and provide guidance on ways to accelerate action to advance the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
I. Introduction

1. More than three years have passed since the onset of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. During that time, the Asia-Pacific region has witnessed a widening of existing inequalities. The impact of the pandemic on the region, together with the effects of climate change and geopolitical tensions, have greatly affected the lives and livelihoods of people and their communities. However, even before the pandemic, the region was not on track to achieve any of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

2. Despite the challenges, the crisis has created an opportunity to put sustainability back at the centre of national development trajectories, mainly through efforts to build back better and more robustly from the pandemic. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is recognized that all stakeholders have critical roles in ensuring that work towards the Goals receives adequate support and financing and is subject to accountability. Above all, the 2030 Agenda contains a call for meaningful engagement aimed at translating the global agenda into national efforts.

3. The present document is aimed at informing participants at the Eleventh Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development about subregional perspectives on the theme “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions in Asia and the Pacific”. The document is structured by subregion. Each section provides a brief introduction, followed by information on progress, national achievements and challenges regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

II. National achievements and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and developments regarding the voluntary national reviews

A. Pacific

4. The Pacific subregion comprises 14 members (including 12 small island developing States) and 7 associate members.

5. The subregion is not on track to achieve any of the 17 Goals by 2030. Some progress has been made towards Goals 1 (No poverty), 2 (Zero hunger), 3 (Good health and well-being), 4 (Quality education), 5 (Gender equality), 7 (Affordable and clean energy), 8 (Decent work and economic growth), 15 (Life on land) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Some targets for Goal 1 are also on track. By contrast, there has been stagnation in progress towards Goals 6 (Clean water and sanitation), 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), 12 (Responsible consumption and production), 13 (Climate action) and 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions). However, the limited availability of data and aggregated assessment of action taken towards the achievement of the Goals masks the real progress made and the challenges experienced by the Pacific small island developing States.

6. Countries in the Pacific subregion have highlighted the importance of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in line with their national development policies and priorities. The subregion is exploring and implementing several actions to bridge current sustainable development gaps, including the participation of citizens in budget consultations, collaborative leadership and
effective civic engagement. The following were also identified as important: the oceans-climate-health nexus; sustainable development financing, including climate finance for a just transition in line with Goal 7; digital transformation; gender- and disability-inclusive social development; and evidence-based policymaking, including using the regional guidelines.

7. Papua New Guinea has integrated the 2030 Agenda into its development goals; however, being the largest Pacific small island developing State, it has experienced government coordination challenges at the local and national levels. The long-term development plan of Kiribati is aimed at transforming the country into a wealthier, healthier and peaceful nation. The Federated States of Micronesia was the first State to sign the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (also known as the High Seas Treaty). It is working towards establishing several marine protected areas. Samoa is building capacity in data gathering and establishing effective monitoring systems to support the process for its development. Vanuatu is working with statisticians and the central statistics office to improve data collection, data analysis and the sharing of information. Tuvalu has developed a comprehensive long-term adaptation plan to elevate the country’s land territory and ensure a sustainable habitat for its people well into the next century and beyond.

8. The Pacific small island developing States have not yet fully recovered from the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, with uneven recovery in some countries and economic sectors. For example, the recovery of the tourism industry in Fiji was quick, whereas in most other countries, it has taken longer. The subregion continues to struggle with global supply-side shocks and higher food and fuel prices, with a mounting debt burden. The rise in the cost of living has an impact on lives and livelihoods given the dependency on imports. Frequent weather events, such as cyclones and floods in Fiji and Vanuatu, have exacerbated the level of socioeconomic hardship and food and economic insecurity for communities.

9. All of the subregion’s members have conducted at least one voluntary national review. Fiji conducted its second review in 2023. In 2024, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are scheduled to submit their second reviews, and Samoa its third. Members have expressed their commitment to preparing their reviews in an inclusive and participatory manner, with an increased focus on consultations with multiple stakeholders.

10. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has supported countries in the Pacific in their efforts to localize the Goals. The voluntary local review of Suva is the first to be undertaken in the Pacific, and other cities in the subregion have also expressed an interest.

B. East and North-East Asia

11. East and North-East Asia is made up of six member States, accounting for more than half of the total land area in the Asia-Pacific region and is home to more than 1.8 billion people.

12. In general, progress towards achieving the 17 Goals has been slow and has not reached the midpoint established in 2015. Good progress has been made towards several Goals. The subregion has gained ground on Goal 3 and has, to date, made greater progress than expected in achieving mortality-related indicators. Countries in the subregion have also made progress towards
Goal 10 (Reduced inequalities). Progress on Goal 11 is being supported by the adoption and implementation of disaster risk reduction strategies, both at the national and local levels. However, the subregion continues to face acute challenges with regard to environment-related Goals. The persisting challenge of resource use inefficiency is reflected in the subregion’s regression in progress made towards the achievement of sustainable consumption and production across all available indicators, except for renewable energy capacity where progress has been made. Most severe is the subregion’s poor performance on Goal 13, with the subregion accounting for over 30 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

13. Against this backdrop, countries reaffirmed their commitments to accelerating much-needed progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda, reinforcing the political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly (Sustainable Development Goals Summit) in 2023. China stressed the importance of upholding true multilateralism, forging a global partnership and creating a stable environment for shared development, including through the Global Development Initiative. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea indicated that sustainable development, including the elimination of inequality and poverty, was a common item on national agendas. Japan highlighted the significance of returning to the starting point of the 2030 Agenda with the promise to leave no one behind. Mongolia emphasized that its new recovery policy had the potential to accelerate progress towards sustainable development and had the full commitment of both the public and private sectors. The Republic of Korea underscored the establishment of 17 national goals for the assessment of the country’s progress. It also highlighted that official development assistance has been doubled with the aim of achieving the Goals.

14. All countries in the subregion have conducted at least one voluntary national review. China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and Japan presented their reviews in 2021, while Mongolia presented its second review in 2023.

15. Representatives from civil society and the youth sector expressed appreciation for the civic space provided during the subregional forum. Events led by multiple stakeholders and organized by the North-East Asia subregional group of the Asia-Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism included an event on issues of food accessibility for the poor in North-East Asia in a period of climate risk, as well as a North-East Asia multi-stakeholder forum on the Sustainable Development Goals and a youth forum. Representatives of civil society stated that although countries in the subregion were increasingly positioning themselves as key actors in global development, there was still fragmentation among stakeholders, including with regard to opportunities for civil society to engage in decision-making spaces. The youth sector reiterated its call to promote youth activism in the subregion and to integrate young people’s perspectives in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

C. North and Central Asia

16. In North and Central Asia, progress in the achievement of the Goals has been severely tested by the compounding effect of numerous crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical uncertainties and the rise in the cost of food and energy. As 2022 was the midpoint in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in an ideal scenario, progress in the implementation in the subregion
as at the end of 2022 should have exceeded 50 per cent. According to data for 2022 contained in the Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway, the average progress reported by countries in the subregion was only 13.2 per cent, which means the subregion was not on track to achieve any of the 17 Goals by 2030. Good progress (35 per cent) has been made towards Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), while the subregion continues to regress (-49 per cent from the starting point in 2015) on Goal 13.

17. Countries in the subregion reported average progress (19 per cent) made towards Goal 1, despite the challenge posed by multiple crises. Rising food prices and disruptions to supplies of agricultural products continued to undermine food security throughout the subregion, especially for vulnerable groups, including the poor, and for those living in remote communities.

18. The rise in the number and intensity of climate change-related natural disasters has led, among other things, to water stress, which was of grave concern for the subregion. All countries had made progress in the implementation of policies and national strategies to help meet international climate commitments. The importance of improved access to robust carbon emission data for evidence-based decision-making was noted, as it would help to accelerate the clean energy transition and the use of renewables.

19. An increasing divergence in social and economic outcomes within and across countries in the subregion was noted, with disproportionate impacts affecting the most vulnerable groups. Lack of access to information and digital technologies represented a key barrier to obtaining appropriate education, social services and health care. Women, in particular those from rural communities or employed in the informal sector, faced additional challenges. In Kazakhstan, quotas for seats in parliament were allocated to women, persons with disabilities and young people, with a view to enabling their civic participation.

20. Voluntary national reviews serve as a crucial opportunity to engage with different stakeholders and seek their inputs to help guide national sustainable development plans. All countries in the subregion have implemented at least one voluntary national review. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan submitted their second reviews in July 2023. Armenia and Georgia will present their third reviews, and Azerbaijan its fourth, in 2024.

21. A workshop on the preparation of next-generation voluntary national reviews was held in conjunction with the Seventh North and Central Asia Multi-stakeholder Forum on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The workshop facilitated the sharing of experiences, including on stakeholder engagement, data disaggregation and harmonization, and the adoption of a whole-of-society approach to the reviews. Voluntary local reviews were recommended to support voluntary national reviews with relevant and updated data at the local level.

D. South and South-West Asia

22. South and South-West Asia is currently not on track to achieve any of the 17 Goals and has regressed on Goals 13 and 14 (Life below water).

23. With the exception of Afghanistan, member States of the subregion reported progress in the implementation of the Goals and shared good practices. Bangladesh has adopted a whole-of-society approach. It has also prepared a financial strategy, a monitoring and evaluation framework and national action plan for the implementation of the Goals. Bhutan has taken a long-term...
approach by focusing on sustainability and resilience, and it has developed flagship programmes to address cross-cutting issues of national concern. India has developed a model for localizing the Goals that consists of creating institutional ownership; driving collaborative competition among its states; building capacities at various subnational levels; and adopting a whole-of-society approach. The Islamic Republic of Iran has established a single window for the delivery of welfare services, provided a food basket for its population through subsidies and strengthened research institutes that carry out research and provide policy advice on natural disasters. Maldives has established a public ferry network to improve access to services; created programmes to provide support for skills development, income generation and businesses; and commenced its online schooling system. Nepal has aligned the Goals with its smooth transition strategy for graduation from the category of least developed countries. It has also developed tools on Goal implementation for parliamentarians and government officials at the subnational levels. Pakistan has revitalized its civil registration and vital statistics programme at the national level, launched a student ambassadors programme to promote the Goals and developed a dashboard to address data gaps at various ministries. Sri Lanka has developed policies on income redistribution and social protection to address poverty and inequality. It has also invested in data collection and multi-stakeholder collaboration to track the progress of Goal implementation. Türkiye has established specialized commissions and working groups consisting of representatives from the public and private sectors, civil society and academia to support Goal implementation.

24. Progress towards implementation of the Goals, already slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, continues to be hampered by global geopolitical conflicts and their impact on inflation, food security and energy. Another major challenge is the increased frequency and severity of natural disasters, in particular those caused by climate change, which has had adverse impacts on agriculture, the displacement of local communities and economic downturns. Other challenges include: resource gaps and insufficient development financing, including as a result of slow progress in domestic revenue collection and the suboptimal prioritization and use of available domestic resources; weak data-collection systems and the limited availability of disaggregated data to measure progress towards the Goals; lack of political ownership; poor coordination among ministries and tiers of government; disparate administrative capacities at different levels of government; limited engagement of non-governmental stakeholders in the implementation of the Goals; the digital divide and ensuing inequalities in educational opportunities and income; and population ageing and its burden on health systems.

25. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Türkiye have presented their second voluntary national reviews. Nepal is submitting its third review in 2024.

E. South-East Asia

26. South-East Asia is not on track to achieve any of the 17 Goals by 2030. Furthermore, the subregion experienced a regression with regard to Goals 12, 13 and 14. However, good progress has been made towards Goals 7, 9, 10 and 15.

27. With the exception of Myanmar, member States expressed a dedicated commitment to collaboration and strategic planning, with a view to navigating the challenges ahead and progressing further in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The consistent themes of multilateralism, the fostering of stakeholder
platforms for partnerships and the prioritization of South-South and triangular cooperation were underscored as crucial approaches for the subregion’s collective implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Philippines has implemented evidence-based policies and played a pivotal role in getting a declaration on ending all forms of malnutrition adopted by leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2017. In order to ensure food security and nutrition, Cambodia is leveraging digital technologies. The Malaysian Investment Development Authority promotes investments that contribute to social and economic progress and technology transfer. By attracting investments aligned with the 2030 Agenda, the Authority plays a role in advancing the commitment of Malaysia to the broader global agenda, fostering inclusive and environmentally responsible economic growth.

28. Progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda, already hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic, faces further challenges due to global geopolitical conflicts affecting inflation, food security and energy. Furthermore, recognizing the challenges stemming from cascading crises, especially the escalating impact of climate change in the region, participants in the subregional forum acknowledged the multitude of global threats hindering the effective implementation of the Goals. Significant obstacles were highlighted in translating the Goals into actionable initiatives. While community endeavours in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, digital inclusion and circular economies were commended for their transformative potential, discussions underscored the formidable hurdles faced in efforts to achieve more inclusive and environmentally sustainable growth.

29. Representatives of Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Timor-Leste discussed their experiences with multiple voluntary national reviews, highlighting the evolving role of the process in revealing synergies among the Goals and emphasizing the importance of policy coherence. They underscored the need for coordinated development approaches, the need for awareness-raising at the local level and the value of learning from peers.

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

A. Pacific


1. Increase job opportunities, social protection systems and basic public services

31. With respect to Goal 1, while extreme and absolute poverty by international standards is relatively low in the Pacific, an estimated one in four Pacific islanders are likely to be living below their respective national poverty line. Governments need to focus on a number of issues, including improving quality education; increasing minimum wages; improving health services; investing in social protection systems and affordable housing; scaling up access to sustainable transport; and investing in climate adaptation.
2. Improve agricultural development and technological support for a resilient supply chain

32. With respect to Goal 2, food insecurity and lack of nutrition requires attention. Policies implemented by Governments include the availability of grants to incentivize farmers to increase the efficiency and profitability of local food production; the provision of seeds and advice on climate-resilient crops; the provision of support for hydroponic gardens in household and schoolyard gardens; and efforts aimed at raising consumer awareness of healthy food. It was recognized that these initiatives required an enabling environment, which included farm access roads, agricultural machinery, technological support and market development.

3. Support ambitious climate action to keep the 1.5°C goal alive

33. With respect to Goal 13, climate change remains an existential threat in the Pacific. Pacific leaders are committed to implementing the Paris Agreement and the Port Vila Call for a Just Transition to a Fossil Fuel-Free Pacific, while endorsing climate-related regional initiatives, including the Framework for Energy Security and Resilience in the Pacific 2021–2030, which could be mutually reinforced through closer linkages with the outcomes of the Third Asian and Pacific Energy Forum. The subregion also strives to amplify collective Pacific voices in global forums, such as through the Pacific Political Climate Champions at the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Accessing development finance and leveraging technologies is critical to accelerate decarbonization and adopt just transition frameworks through technical studies and capacity-building support.

4. Strengthen good governance, accountability and collaborative leadership and engagement

34. With respect to Goal 16, peace is central to the implementation of the Goals, and climate change was identified at the forum as a security issue. Fostering good governance requires political will and civil society engagement. The importance of strong and accountable leadership was recognized, as it serves to strengthen institutional capacity and improve monitoring and evaluation to deliver the Goals. All stakeholders urged that collaborative leadership be promoted, especially in national consultations on budget preparations, public service delivery mechanisms and society-wide policy decisions within national institutional and governance structures.

5. Build effective and sustainable partnerships for advancing regional sustainable development opportunities

35. With respect to Goal 17, it was recalled that, in the political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly in September 2023, Heads of State and Government and high representatives called for investment in a number of transition areas, including food systems; energy access and affordability; digital connectivity; education; jobs and social protection; and climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. The key benefits of this transformation are the reform of the international financing architecture together with the

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1 General Assembly resolution 78/1, para. 38. See also https://unsdg.un.org/resources/six-transitions-investment-pathways-deliver-sdgs.
strengthening of regional partnerships and solidarity for transformational change around the means of implementation.

6. **Enhance the voice of the Pacific small island developing States**

36. The importance of the 2023 Nuku'alofa outcome document in contributing to the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States, to be held in Antigua and Barbuda in May 2024, was recognized. Six key priorities were also recognized. They pertain to: transformative actions to enhance environmental resilience; the revitalization of economies; the forging of a path to empowerment, equity, inclusion, peaceful societies and safe communities; the strengthening of institutional and statistical capacities; the transition from vulnerability to a more resilient future and resilient prosperity; and the means of implementation, with a focus on digital transformation. The publication entitled *Pacific Perspectives 2023: Advocating the Aspirations of Small Island Developing States* provided another opportunity for participants to identify areas of technical support to member States.

B. **East and North-East Asia**

37. The Seventh North-East Asia Multi-stakeholder Forum on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals was held in Beijing from 20 to 22 November 2023. It was hosted by the Centre for International Knowledge on Development, affiliated with the Development Research Centre of the State Council of China.

38. The subregion is delivering, on average, a mixed performance in achieving the Goals in focus. It has progressed towards Goal 1 in terms of the share of the population living below national and international poverty lines. However, it is moving in the wrong direction with regard to disaster-related indicators, most significantly in terms of economic loss from disasters. Taken from the perspective of climate-related disasters, the regression regarding disaster-related indicators highlights the linkages of poverty with climate change. With respect to Goal 2, acute challenges remain as regards moderate or severe food insecurity, as well as food price anomalies. Bearing the brunt of these challenges are the impoverished segments of the population, which underscores the linkage with poverty. The persistent relapse of the subregion with respect to Goal 13 significantly undermines environmental sustainability and results in adverse impacts on poverty and food security. With respect to Goal 16, in order to address data gaps, it is necessary to invest in data capacities and partnerships for Goal 17.

39. The complex interactions among the Goals in focus require a nexus approach to generate more innovative solutions and transformative actions in addressing interlinked challenges. This approach is also aimed at finding optimal solutions to the compounding challenges, which are exacerbated by multiple crises, in the face of shrinking financial resources.

1. **Climate-sensitive efforts to reduce poverty improve food security**

40. With respect to Goals 1, 2 and 13, country efforts to continuously reduce poverty and sustain food security have been undermined in recent years by multiple crises, including those related to climate change. Enhancing social protection systems and programmes remains an important action for sustained poverty reduction. These programmes could strengthen the resilience of vulnerable groups to existing and new risks, including through climate adaptation and mitigation. In addition, climate-related impacts and risks could
be incorporated into food security and food nutrition initiatives, for instance, promoting environmentally sustainable practices.

2. **Ambitious and pro-poor climate actions**

41. With respect to Goals 2 and 13, much-needed action to significantly reverse the trend on climate change requires a focus on key sectors. For the subregion, the energy sector could be a transformative pathway to accelerate climate action. For instance, in order to increase the share of renewable energy in the total energy mix, challenges need to be addressed, including correcting incentive structures, implementing Goal 7 road maps and providing adequate financing. In addition, the provision of support to poor and vulnerable groups could be mainstreamed in climate mitigation and adaptation plans to avoid maladaptive practices.

3. **Resilient and sustainable solutions through technological innovation**

42. The subregion is home to economies leading the technological frontier. With respect to Goals 1, 2, 13 and 16, countries undertake a wide array of practices and initiatives utilizing technology, including well-targeted sectoral interventions on poverty reduction, smart agricultural practices and green technologies to address climate change. Upscaling these initiatives across sectors and countries could further amplify the benefits.

4. **Coherent cross-sectoral and institutional synergies**

43. With respect to Goals 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17, a more coordinated approach, together with coherent and evidence-based policies, would create a strong foundation for understanding policy trade-offs and provide appropriate safety nets. This is especially important given the cross-cutting nature of efforts aimed at poverty reduction, food security and climate action. Participatory and representative engagements could be enhanced through local governments and grass-roots communities, including by increasing the space for local initiatives.

C. **North and Central Asia**

44. The Seventh North and Central Asia Multi-stakeholder Forum on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 1 and 2 November 2023.

1. **Strengthening job creation and social protection**

45. With respect to Goal 1, the priority actions identified in the subregion were human capital development; the adoption of inclusive social protection measures; enhanced coordination between national strategies and budget planning; and the harmonization of existing regulations. Investment in vocational training was increasingly recognized as a cost-effective way of reducing poverty. The disproportionate impact of multiple crises on vulnerable groups can be mitigated through the use of innovative solutions that improve access to public services and reduce remittance costs. The importance of focusing on interlinkages between Goal 1 and other Goals was also noted.

2. **Transformation of sustainable food systems**

46. With respect to Goal 2, the need for the transformation of food systems was recognized in the context of surging food prices due to the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions and climate change. Climate-smart and water-efficient mechanization were suggested to improve food security. In order to
make healthy diets more affordable and sustainable, it was considered essential to increase domestic food availability through the use of agroecology and conservation agriculture and the revision of existing policies and public budgets. It remained critical that the subregion invest in regional food production and distribution infrastructure and implement cross-border paperless trade in order to ensure inclusive access to quality food and mitigate food price increases.

3. **Accelerating climate action and enabling clean energy development**

47. With respect to Goal 13, the subregion faces an increased vulnerability to climate change, as warmer temperatures and more volatile weather patterns disrupt ecosystems and damage infrastructure. The need for collective and accelerated climate actions in the areas of governance, capacity development, data access and innovative technologies were emphasized. In addition, it was highlighted that the subregion should actively address cross-sector impacts of climate change and interlinkages between Goal 13 and other Goals; promote climate-smart and digital trade policies; accelerate ambitious national climate strategies in alignment with regional and global commitments; and scale up financing from the private sector. Regarding the energy-climate nexus, more efforts were needed to develop renewables and accelerate the shift to clean energy sources through technology-sharing, investments and forward-looking policies. It was noted that significant acceleration towards a clean energy transition required forward-looking planning and the appropriate allocation of financial resources. It was also pointed out that there was a need for more robust and granular data on emission trends, disaggregated by sector and industry, among others.

4. **Promoting good governance, institutional development and digital transformation**

48. With respect to Goal 16, the importance of ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and accountable institutions and decisions that adequately reflected different stakeholder needs and priorities was underscored. International methods for the measurement of illicit financial flows needed to be developed further, and they could be tailored to country-specific contexts and needs. Investment in stakeholder capacity-building was essential for success. Addressing the digital divide was critical to enhancing access to health, educational and social services, in particular to reach the most vulnerable communities and hard-to-reach groups. Statistical capacity-building needed to be enhanced, as the subregion was not able to produce sufficient and measurable statistical information for most indicators related to Goal 16. The importance of a transparent and accountable regulatory environment, data-driven policymaking and the digitalization of public administration was highlighted.

5. **Strengthening monitoring and resource mobilization**

49. With respect to Goal 17, while member States had made good progress towards its achievement, challenges related to the effective implementation of the targets remained. They included inadequate data monitoring; difficult macroeconomic conditions for financing and investing in the Goals; and incoherent policy measures in key areas, including migration and climate change. Climate-smart trade facilitation, in particular through digitalization, presented an opportunity to boost trade while also reducing greenhouse emissions. The development of a sustainable finance ecosystem was highlighted, with a view to aligning private finance with sustainable objectives and expanding financial flows.
D. South and South-West Asia

50. The Seventh South and South-West Asia Multi-stakeholder Forum on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals was held in Kathmandu from 10 to 12 October 2023.

1. Jobs, social protection coverage and financing for poverty eradication

51. With respect to Goal 1, policy coherence and adequate financing for poverty alleviation are critical. Financial instruments such as green bonds, blue bonds and debt swaps represent innovative means for mobilizing resources. With regard to tackling multidimensional poverty, it is essential to better measure the different dimensions of poverty and understand their interlinkages. Governments also need to increase productive job opportunities in the agrarian sectors and facilitate the mobility of surplus labour from agriculture to industry and services. Given the low level of social protection coverage, there is a need to extend coverage throughout the life cycle, including through increased public spending. Social protection systems should also be shock-responsive and disability-inclusive and provide adequate benefits.

2. Climate-resilient agricultural productivity and value chains

52. With respect to Goal 2, it is important to improve agricultural productivity and strengthen the climate resilience of agriculture through the use of adaptive technologies and sustainable farming practices and the promotion of indigenous seed varieties. Strategies to preserve marine ecosystems are urgently required for the sustainability of fisheries. Governments should take measures to correct distortions in agriculture supply chains and allocate more resources for agricultural infrastructure, including cold storage facilities and the mechanization and infusion of agricultural technologies in smallholder farming. Governments also need to sustain support measures, including the provision of subsidies, minimum-price supports and direct procurement for vulnerable and marginalized small-scale producers. Local governments have a coordinating role in extension services, including the provision of common facilities and services at an affordable cost, while farmer-producer organizations and cooperatives are essential for increasing access to larger markets.

3. Disaster-resilient infrastructure and technology

53. With respect to Goal 13, climate change mitigation requires the use of green technology, the scaling up of indigenous technologies and the adaptation of good practices through regional collaboration. Climate change adaptation encompasses the building of disaster-resilient physical and social infrastructure; the adoption of long-term policies on sustainable and inclusive urbanization; the development of technologies and capacities to build early warning systems; community awareness-raising; and proper land-use planning using environmental impact assessments and risk projections. It is also essential to provide increased and simplified access to climate financing, including for civil society organizations and communities affected by climate change, with capacity-building support to enable all stakeholders to tap into such funding.

4. Trust, transparency and accountability

54. With respect to Goal 16, trust, transparency and accountability are the foundations of peace, justice and strong institutions. In addition to resolving ongoing conflicts, their root causes need to be addressed. The capacities of the judiciary must be strengthened to deliver justice in a timely and
non-discriminatory manner. Governments should also consider complementing the formal justice system with informal systems such as community mediation and justice mechanisms. Legal aid for the poor is critical. For institutions to be strong, sustainable and resilient, they must have clear mandates, institutional capacity and adequate infrastructure and financing. It is necessary to strengthen systems in order to prevent the individual abuse of power; ensure the division and balance of power within and between institutions; and utilize digitalization and technology to monitor institutional performance.

5. **Broader access to finance, digital connectivity and data**

55. With respect to Goal 17, participants called for an increase in South-South and triangular cooperation and public-private partnerships, as well as the use of global, regional and subregional forums to advocate for increased financing for the Goals. In order to promote trade, opportunities to form new value chains must be explored, and investment in trade facilitation measures are required, in particular the adoption of paperless trade systems. Measures to improve access to finance are key to encourage the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises in trade. A long-term institutional build-up is necessary to bolster the science, technology and innovation capacities of countries while bridging gaps in digital connectivity among population groups. In order to ensure the availability of quality disaggregated data for monitoring progress towards the Goals, it is necessary to integrate data generated by non-State actors; develop coordinated data collection frameworks and mechanisms; capitalize on digital solutions; and enhance capacities in data management and analysis.

E. **South-East Asia**

56. The Seventh South-East Asia Multi-stakeholder Forum on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals was held in Bangkok from 6 to 8 November 2023.

1. **Reducing inequalities through the use of artificial intelligence**

57. With respect to Goal 1, the significance of artificial intelligence across diverse employment sectors is growing, stressing the imperative for a comprehensive education on artificial intelligence to bolster economic resilience. The emergence of new job opportunities in programming and prompt engineering was highlighted, emphasizing the critical need for skill development in these areas to meet the dynamic demands of the job market. The role of artificial intelligence in remote and underserved areas is significant, shedding light on both the potential advantages and challenges associated with implementing technologies in these contexts. The potential of emerging technologies to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the subregion was recognized.

2. **Digital innovations to achieve equitable and sustainable progress towards food security and nutrition**

58. Progress towards Goal 2 is possible, even in difficult circumstances. There are practical instances of innovations spurring progress, including in innovative modelling analyses on barriers faced by the most vulnerable in accessing and consuming healthy and nutritious foods and the use of artificial intelligence to detect illicit marketing, including of breast milk substitutes, in the digital environment. While digital technology in and of itself cannot solve food and nutrition problems or mend dysfunctional food systems, digital
technologies can help transform food systems and assist in the design and delivery of food and nutrition measures.

3. **Promoting sustainable investments**

59. With respect to Goal 13, foreign direct investments (FDI) in sectors and activities that support climate mitigation and adaptation are collectively known as climate FDI. There is an abundance of FDI in member States of ASEAN in, among others, renewable energy power facilities, electric vehicles, climate-resilient infrastructure and water and waste management. Climate FDI projects can also comprise re-investment into existing FDI projects, thereby upgrading them to be more energy-efficient. Countries must recognize the valuable role a whole-of-government approach in promoting, attracting and facilitating more FDI in climate action, ensuring that investment promotion agencies work symbiotically with the relevant line ministries to better target and enable FDI in priority climate action areas.

4. **Synergies related to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration**

60. There are synergies between the implementation of Goal 16 and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Millions of people migrate in the subregion, contributing to economic and social development. Migrants, often women, experience human rights violations. Positive achievements related to migration include the existence of laws to counter trafficking in persons, the criminalization of trafficking in persons and provisions for access to justice and assistance for victims. Under the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, ASEAN member States must take coordinated action to prevent trafficking in persons and to protect and assist victims. The transformative role of digital innovation in improving migration management, supporting fair and ethical recruitment and protecting migrant rights was highlighted.

5. **Energy transition towards net-zero emissions**

61. With respect to Goal 17, partnerships are the bedrock for achieving the ambitious goal of sustainable development. Multi-stakeholder collaborations and innovative approaches are essential to champion climate technology and instigate lasting, sustainable change. Ensuring transparency in reporting net-zero emissions is paramount, helping to safeguard against greenwashing. Sustainable investments are pivotal in addressing socioeconomic impacts and facilitating new job opportunities in the burgeoning green industries. Emphasis should also be on the creation of an ecosystem that nurtures climate technology start-ups. Investments in human capital are needed through upskilling programmes to meet the targets of the transition to net zero.

IV. **Means of implementation: strengthening partnerships and enabling mechanisms for sustainable development**

A. **Pacific**

62. Multi-stakeholder engagement was recognized as critical in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. There is growing acknowledgement of the contribution of civil society organizations and the private sector in enhancing a whole-of-society approach. Partnerships constitute an important aspect of social protection, with civil society organizations providing data and hard evidence from the community and on the ground. Consultations with
non-State actors and reflection of their contribution to development has also become an important element of the voluntary national review process in the Pacific. There are opportunities to improve engagement with non-State actors and harness the potential of the private sector, civil society, academia, young people and development actors to assess progress and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to collaboratively seek solutions.

63. There was recognition among participants at the forum of the importance of aligning national development plans with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and its implementation and monitoring plan and with the Goals and investing more in creating an enabling environment for multi-stakeholder engagement, policy coherence and coordination.

64. With regard to co-creating regional policy solutions for making progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda, the importance of knowledge development and the sharing of knowledge with stakeholders, in close collaboration with the United Nations development system in the Pacific, was also recognized. There was a call to support country efforts aimed at the achievement of the Goals and the preparation of the voluntary national reviews within the broader framework of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and its implementation and monitoring plan.

65. Promoting collaboration and partnerships at the national, regional and international levels for investment in the six transitions was essential for Pacific small island developing States. The inclusion of the private sector is a significant pillar, as it allows efforts to benefit from the sector’s technical expertise, resources and management services to improve investment, financial inclusion, digital literacy and skills, and e-commerce services through partnerships focused on the digitalization of economies.

66. Civil society organizations remain the voices of communities and vulnerable groups in the Pacific. With their active and vibrant engagement, government policies and implementation plans are being mainstreamed and improved. It was underscored that for purposes of inclusiveness and equity, the preparation of voluntary national reviews should incorporate the aspirations of all groups in the community, especially persons with disabilities, and that it could be enhanced by the sharing of good practices and lessons learned.

67. A call was made to ensure that the regional priorities and positions of Pacific small island developing States were in alignment with national development strategies in the context of the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. With a view to better aligning subregional policy actions, advocacy and knowledge development with the 2030 Agenda, support was expressed for enhanced coordination with the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations coordination team in the Pacific, and Pacific subregional organizations, and for technical support to harness complementarities, synergies and policy coherence with the 2050 Strategy and its implementation and monitoring plan.

B. East and North-East Asia

68. While institutional arrangements for multi-stakeholder engagements exist in several countries in the subregion, including in Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea, there was collective recognition of the importance of a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
69. However, civil society representatives expressed the view that, in terms of inclusivity and the quality of participation experienced by some groups from civil society, stakeholder consultation had not improved and that civic space – a prerequisite condition for partnership – was shrinking. To that end, there was a call to further strengthen the multi-stakeholder mechanism and partnerships in the subregion.

70. It was noted that it is necessary to ensure the engagement and participation of civil society and low-income and vulnerable groups in policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation at the national, local, sectoral and cross-sectoral levels. A mapping of relevant consultation processes in the subregion could also be undertaken to identify synergies to gather stakeholders for more broad-based and transparent engagements.

71. As the Goals are interconnected, it was important to ensure continuity and consistency in engagements across all areas and to expand opportunities for stakeholders to engage in a meaningful way. Providing technical and financial support for independent implementation assessments could help to ensure transparency and a secure space for evaluations.

72. The role of the private sector in accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda needs to be maximized, delivering capacity-building activities and providing financing. Partnerships pertaining to knowledge-sharing and the promotion of scientific and technological cooperation are essential.

C. North and Central Asia

73. Multi-stakeholder partnerships among member States, the private sector, international and regional organizations, civil society, academia, young people and other stakeholders are prerequisites for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Regional cooperation was assessed as critical for landlocked developing countries in the subregion, given their dependence on neighbouring countries and transit corridors to ensure seamless connectivity. It was noted that all countries had developed mechanisms of engagement with non-State actors, including during the voluntary national review process.

74. The current macroeconomic environment posed several challenges in mobilizing adequate financial resources. Raising interest rates as a means of combating inflation contributed to the increased cost of capital and generated fiscal and debt pressures, making it harder to secure financing for sustainable objectives.

75. Trade and investment were emphasized as engines for inclusive growth and sustainable development. Specifically, trade facilitation measures could provide significant economic, social and environmental benefits by lowering trade costs, enhancing inclusive participation in trade and reducing energy consumption. The importance of inclusive, sustainable and development-focused trade policies was also highlighted.

76. The private sector remains critical to the mobilization of the required financing. In addition, targeted initiatives are needed to drive impactful investments at scale towards efforts to fight climate change and achieve the Goals, including special tax regimes, sustainable finance ecosystems and reinvigorated partnerships among financial partners. Furthermore, innovative technology and digital solutions serve as additional instruments to unlock resources for inclusive and resilient growth.
77. The involvement of civil society in integrated planning and response delivery improves collaboration and accountability. Civil society organizations facilitate better targeted solutions, such as social assistance, food security, climate adaptation, monitoring and accountability, and they help to ensure that no one is left behind.

78. With regard to multi-stakeholder engagement, voluntary national reviews have proven powerful instruments for instilling change in countries, contributing to improved monitoring and coherence with national plans and budgets. In addition to enhancing policy alignment, the reviews have contributed to greater engagement between Governments, the private sector and civil society in providing and sharing data, assessing the effectiveness of government policies and programmes and promoting evidence-based policies beyond the review process. South-South and triangular cooperation were highlighted as important platforms for exploring solutions and opportunities for collaboration through peer learning and knowledge-sharing.

79. The lack of adequate data monitoring systems for the effective tracking of progress made in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda continues to pose challenges. Regional capacity-building opportunities could be explored to develop robust data collection systems and utilize new data sources.

80. 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. Increased engagement and collaboration with the private sector, academia, civil society and other stakeholders was essential in delivering inclusive, resilient and sustainable solutions for the subregion to address poverty and food insecurity, champion climate advocacy and promote social equity. Moreover, the active involvement of international partners, including international financing institutions, donors and regional organizations, should be pursued to attract additional investment in sustainable economic, environmental and social development and in the promotion of international development programmes.

D. South and South-West Asia

81. Participants at the forum expressed that a whole-of-society approach was important and central to accelerating the implementation of the Goals. The State has the leading role in the formulation and implementation of policies for sustainable development and in the creation of an enabling environment and inclusive institutional mechanisms for multi-stakeholder engagement and coordination. The private sector, civil society, academia and think tanks, and the media are essential partners in creating solutions to accelerate the implementation of the Goals.

82. The private sector, with its financial resources, is crucial in narrowing funding gaps for the implementation of the Goals, including through corporate social responsibility projects and public-private partnerships. Businesses should be engaged to conduct their business responsibly and ensure that local communities and marginalized populations are not negatively affected by their economic activities, including by conducting environmental impact assessments. As the private sector is at the forefront of research and development, its technologies could also be leveraged for use in implementation.

83. Civil society organizations represent the voices of marginalized groups and those furthest behind, both in participatory decision-making processes and in providing feedback on the design and implementation of policies concerning
these populations. It was stressed that local communities, including Indigenous populations, play an indispensable role in contributing grass-roots knowledge and expertise for the effective implementation at the local level.

84. Academia and think tanks are critical to the generation of evidence for use in improved policymaking and service delivery and in the development of new technologies for the implementation of the Goals. For example, the development of advanced remote-sensing methodologies for use in obtaining geological data on hazards is an important contribution to the strengthening of disaster resilience.

85. There is immense potential for the media, including non-traditional media, to effectively disseminate important policy information and timely hazard warnings to the public, especially local communities and marginalized populations, with a view to facilitating their access to basic services and emergency support. Media reporting on good practices and lessons learned in the implementation of the Goals will also enable institutions to improve their performance and better adapt solutions for sustainable development.

86. Examples of multi-stakeholder collaboration include the following: the inclusion of data generated by non-State actors in the monitoring of the implementation of the Goals; joint efforts to open new markets for agricultural produce during the COVID-19 pandemic using the Internet; the delivery of social services at community centres during the COVID-19 pandemic; and the conducting of research on, and the application of new solar panel and battery technologies for, the mitigation of climate change.

87. Regional and subregional cooperation is critical for catalysing multi-stakeholder partnerships and cross-country collaborations. Participants expressed their appreciation to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for its pivotal role in the shaping of common agendas, the building of networks and informal ties and the sharing of country experiences in a subregion characterized by complex relations between member States. The use of country-to-country and institution-to-institution twinning programmes are an effective means of sharing information and lessons learned and of enabling knowledge transfer among peers.

E. South-East Asia

88. There is value in adopting a comprehensive societal approach to expedite the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The multifaceted involvement of government entities, private sector players, academia and civil society organizations intertwines various initiatives across diverse dimensions of sustainable development, creating a cohesive tapestry of efforts. The forum also featured youth representatives, whose views are important for sustainable development and who are key agents for social change, economic growth and technological innovation.

89. Governments assume a paramount role in steering the course of sustainable development. The establishment of regional coordination bodies enable the exchange of vital information. Collective initiatives addressing shared challenges underscore the commitment to the 2030 Agenda. The implementation of evidence-based policies further solidifies government leadership.

90. Public-private partnerships are key as the private sector channels its resources towards transformative pathways. Investments in critical areas, including food systems, energy access, digital connectivity, education, jobs,
social protection and climate change initiatives, showcase a commitment to sustainable practices.

91. Civil society organizations emerged as influential advocates for inclusive and sustainable development in the subregion. Their role extends across various domains, supporting the integration of philosophies that promote sustainability and actively participating in decision-making processes.

92. Academia is contributing to the region’s progress by establishing research and development centres that are becoming a crucible for transformative ideas. Educational initiatives are being used to advocate for the understanding and adoption of sustainable practices, influencing societal perspectives. The involvement of academia enhances decision-making processes, ensuring a thoughtful and informed approach.

93. Multi-stakeholder collaboration emerges as a cornerstone in the subregion’s sustainable development initiatives. It is a dynamic interplay of efforts involving all stakeholders. Collaborative initiatives, including the establishment of regional coordination bodies and the undertaking of public-private partnerships and research and development endeavours, showcase a unified commitment to addressing shared challenges. These collaborations serve as catalysts, fostering inclusivity and contributing synergistically to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the region. The interconnected efforts underscore the collective responsibility and collaborative spirit required to navigate the subregion’s complex terrain of sustainable development.

94. The significance of regional and subregional cooperation was underscored as essential for fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships and cross-country collaborations. Participants commended the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for its pivotal role in shaping common agendas, building networks and informal ties and facilitating the sharing of country experiences in a subregion marked by intricate relations among member States.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

95. The journey towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda is intricate, as evidenced across the various subregions, emphasizing the complexity of this global endeavour. Despite the progress made, challenges and resource gaps persist. Nevertheless, a solid commitment to achieving the Goals will drive progress. The midpoint assessment underscores the urgent need for intensified and meaningful efforts, especially given numerous global crises.

96. Governments should prioritize investments in education, health, technology and social protection systems to eradicate poverty. The call for good governance, accountability and collaborative leadership should guide institutional reforms. Fostering sustainable partnerships and enhancing the voices of nations and the people must remain central to the sustainable development journey.

97. In order to achieve these objectives, it is recommended that efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda incorporate the following:

    (a) **Strengthened policy coherence.** Subregional stakeholders should further strengthen national development policies in line with the broader objectives of the Goals, with a view to improving synergies and effectiveness across sectoral policies;
(b) **Private sector engagement.** Subregional stakeholders should further leverage public-private partnerships to mobilize financing for the Goals domestically, regionally and internationally;

(c) **Inclusive decision-making and follow-through.** Efforts should be directed towards inclusive decision-making and implementation processes that continuously involve civil society, local communities and marginalized populations;

(d) **Enhanced multi-stakeholder collaboration.** Subregional stakeholders should continue to foster multi-stakeholder collaborations, emphasizing regional cooperation organizations and bodies and effective partnerships to harness regional cooperation for accelerating progress towards the Goals;

(e) **Data monitoring, assessment, capacity-building and technical support.** In order to address challenges in tracking progress, subregional stakeholders should invest in tailored and coordinated development partner support for robust data collection systems, capacity-building and technical support;

(f) **Digital technology and innovation.** Subregional stakeholders should prioritize capacity-building in digital technologies and harnessing innovation to address critical domains;

(g) **Regional coordination and knowledge-sharing.** Platforms for regional coordination and knowledge-sharing should be strengthened to facilitate the sharing of information, lessons learned, good practices and knowledge, and to also facilitate the joint creation of solutions, including through South-South and triangular cooperation.