

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

Tenth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

Bangkok and online, 27–30 March 2023

Summary of round-table discussions**Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The present document contains a summary of the various views arising from the five round tables held during the Tenth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development to review regional progress in and opportunities for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation), Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy), Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The views summarized herein do not represent a negotiated outcome.

I. Round table on Sustainable Development Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation)

1. The discussion on Sustainable Development Goal 6 was informed by the relevant Goal profile¹ and focused on the following action areas for Asia and the Pacific:

(a) **Improve data on water resources.** More must be done to enhance the collection and sharing of data for the sustainable management of water, including through periodic water resources accounting. Data derived from such accounting should underpin the decisions made to manage water resources sustainably, thereby allowing for the efficient allocation of water for multiple uses and improved access to safe water and sanitation;

(b) **Use integrated approaches for transboundary water management.** Employing integrated approaches that prioritize the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems, promote nature-based solutions and foster citizen action for river restoration can enhance linkages between water-related issues. Such approaches can also foster transboundary water management by promoting dialogue on multiple issues through the exchange of various perspectives;

¹ Available from www.unescap.org/kp/2023/sdg-6-clean-water-and-sanitation.

(c) **Strengthen national institutions and coordination for better governance.** Institutional coordination on water quality, wastewater and groundwater management, climate change and disaster management, climate financing and national water accounting and allocation, are key to making progress on Goal 6;

(d) **Support gender equality and social inclusion.** The engagement of a wide range of stakeholders in the design and implementation of policies is necessary. In particular, the needs of marginalized groups, such as women, persons with disabilities and those facing social exclusion, who are often disproportionately affected by water-related issues, should be adequately reflected. Adopting an inclusive approach to policy development can further promote transparency and accountability in water governance;

(e) **Increase financing.** While many countries in the Asia-Pacific region have implemented new and robust water policies and mandates, in many contexts appropriate financial commitments are not in place, inhibiting the ability to fully implement new water policies and mandates. Increased funding to support effective water management is thus needed;

(f) **Invest in capacity development.** It is crucial to improve national capacities to monitor, evaluate, allocate and prioritize water use and to conduct water accounting exercises. Such improvements could enable Governments to prioritize the use of water resources by competing sectors and in transboundary contexts. Governments also need to acquire or strengthen the technical capacity to respond to new and emerging challenges associated with climate change and disasters;

(g) **Prioritize access to water as a human right.** The impacts of climate change; the unsustainable management and use of natural resources; air, land and water pollution; the unsound management of chemicals and waste; and the resulting loss of biodiversity and the decline in services provided by ecosystems have negative direct and indirect consequences for the enjoyment of all fundamental human rights. National policies and initiatives can be taken to uphold and ensure access to water as a human right;

(h) **Acknowledge the interconnected impacts of climate change and disasters.** While population growth is a key driver of water scarcity and degrading water quality, climate change is expected to continue to exacerbate those challenges. While climate-induced hazards result in devastating loss of human life and threaten livelihoods, climate change also brings additional challenges to the sustainability of freshwater resources, such as rising sea levels combined with overextraction of groundwater leading to the salinization of coastal aquifers.

II. Round table on Sustainable Development Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy)

2. The discussion on Sustainable Development Goal 7 was informed by the relevant Goal profile² and focused on the following action areas for Asia and the Pacific:

(a) **Encourage participation in the Global Methane Pledge to accelerate the achievement of Goal 7.** The countries adhering to the Global Methane Pledge, which was launched at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, have agreed to take voluntary actions to contribute to a

² Available from www.unescap.org/kp/2023/sdg-7-affordable-and-clean-energy.

collective effort to reduce global methane emissions by at least 30 per cent by 2030 from 2020 levels. Reductions in the energy sector are closely linked to the success of the Pledge;

(b) **Encourage the implementation of the global road map for accelerated Goal 7 action in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change.** Stemming from the high-level dialogue on energy held in 2021, the road map contains a call for action to close the energy access gap, 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. Mobilizing public-private partnerships and resources is essential to achieving those targets;

(c) **Encourage countries to consider the findings in the policy brief of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific entitled “Slow advancements in sustainable energy: taking stock of SDG 7 progress in Asia and the Pacific”.** The findings suggest that there is a need to standardize off-grid electricity supply technologies and business models, consider electric cooking options in parallel with electrification, establish standards for cooking appliances aligned with the indoor air quality targets of the World Health Organization and electrify end-use consumption by using energy from renewable sources. Adopting these recommendations will accelerate the energy transition and decarbonization and result in increased efficiency, savings and immediate air pollution reductions in cities;

(d) **Continue to take measures to reduce carbon intensity.** In order to be implemented in an effective and well-coordinated manner, such measures need to be taken in particular in those sectors responsible for the highest levels of emissions and be integrated with other supportive measures;

(e) **Encourage a sustainable, rights-based, affordable and just energy transition that respects human rights and equal access to energy services, focusing on the needs of people and groups in vulnerable and conflict-affected situations.** More investments need to be made in small-scale renewable energy projects led by and directly benefiting communities. Furthermore, more consultations need to be held on the reporting of progress made in implementing Goal 7, including with women, youth and local and Indigenous communities, to respect human and workers’ rights and to minimize the environmental and social costs associated with large hydropower projects;

(f) **Close the clean cooking gap through policy interventions, planning, technology innovation, financing and partnerships.** Making progress in the clean cooking sector requires targeted policy support to build the necessary enabling environment and additional capacity-building to develop appropriate, well-functioning institutions and networks. Structuring innovative financing schemes can unlock larger streams of capital from the private sector, while the adoption of sustainable cooling systems, including through national cooling action plans, can accelerate efforts to reduce energy-related emissions.

III. Round table on Sustainable Development Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure)

3. The discussion on Sustainable Development Goal 9 was informed by the relevant Goal profile³ and focused on the following action areas for Asia and the Pacific:

(a) **Promote decent jobs and green industry in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.** Additional resources are needed to drive systemic changes and innovation based on a strategic and evidence-based approach. It is important for countries to place women and young persons with disabilities at the core of industrial development, accelerate technology upgrading, boost productivity across sectors, invest adequately in working conditions and skills upgrading and strengthen labour unions and workers' rights to ensure fundamental rights. As countries shift from a resource-based to a knowledge-based approach to development, it is all the more critical for them to promote women's participation in digitalization and address new risks, such as cyberviolence. Countries also need to address the interlinked aspects of innovation and industry in order to meet Goal 9 targets. More investments need to be made in research and development in industrial technologies to enhance production, drive innovation, increase productivity, support small and medium-sized enterprises and reduce waste and pollution. Fair access to resources, skills promotion opportunities and targeted policy support for vulnerable populations is crucial. In order to increase sustainability, accelerated action is needed to decouple economic growth from emissions and to strengthen interlinkages within Goal 9;

(b) **Foster innovation and digitalization for sustainable development.** Better access to digital technologies, gender-responsive infrastructure and scientific research and development for marginalized groups is needed as a means of supporting inclusive community development. Better working environments for women and girls employed in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, enhanced benefits from artificial intelligence and safe, rights-based cybersecurity systems are critical. Public-private partnerships and the protection of intellectual property rights can drive innovation and digitalization. Addressing systemic challenges, promoting policy coherence, strengthening regional cooperation and facilitating digital inclusion and science, technology, engineering and mathematics education, for example, can further support progress on Goal 9. The issue of bridging the access divide requires more attention, particularly in the areas of digital literacy, inclusivity and affordability. However, it is also crucial to prioritize data privacy and protection. In addition, as technology develops, measures need to be taken to prevent cyberviolence;

(c) **Develop resilient infrastructure.** Infrastructure should be built in a way that makes it sustainable and resilient. Research should be conducted during the preparatory phase and consideration should be given to the interdependence and interconnectedness of infrastructure. Labour rights, human rights, gender equality and environmental aspects should be protected, along with the inclusion of Indigenous and local people. Funding gaps and financing for just transitions need to be addressed. Mechanisms and policies for stakeholder ownership and early warning systems are of vital importance. Appropriate plans need to be centred on sustainable development in the aftermath of crises and communication between individuals and government at all levels and stakeholder groups can be improved through the use of

³ Available from www.unescap.org/kp/2023/sdg-9-industry-innovation-and-infrastructure.

advanced communication technologies. Targeted support and quality infrastructure can promote the growth and innovation potential of small and medium-sized enterprises. Sustainable and inclusive approaches need to be embedded into infrastructure projects and enabling access to key services needs to be prioritized.

IV. Round table on Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities)

4. The discussion on Sustainable Development Goal 11 was informed by the relevant Goal profile⁴ and focused on the following action areas for Asia and the Pacific:

(a) **Prioritize city-level climate action and disaster risk management through anticipatory actions.** Applying innovative local approaches to addressing climate change by focusing on anticipatory actions and rapid capacity assessments for local governments supports stronger risk-informed urban development. Significant efforts have been made to develop urban climate and disaster management plans and policies. However, for these to be effective, three key action areas need to be pursued. Firstly, disaggregated data that accurately reflect the multidimensional climate vulnerabilities of local communities in both urban and rural areas need to be collected and shared widely. Secondly, decisive leadership at all levels is fundamental for ensuring that the voices and needs of everyone is accounted for in local climate action plans and that such plans are implemented in partnership with affected communities. Thirdly, cross-sectoral collaborations, including private-public partnerships, need to be developed to overcome silos, bridge funding issues and identify best practices to improve the effectiveness of local climate actions and disaster management policies;

(b) **Address gaps between communities and decision makers by strengthening inclusive cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination across different levels of governance.** Inclusive approaches require dedicated resources to be institutionalized and a diverse range of community voices, including those of women, youth, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, to be heard throughout the processes of urban development. Local governments and urban development professionals should be supported, trained and educated to leverage the wealth of data and information that communities can provide. This will increase the transparency and inclusivity of decision-making and governance processes;

(c) **Make urban digital transformation and data-driven decision-making people-centred.** Harmonized data platforms at the local level that simultaneously build data literacy and capacities and increase public awareness and accessibility are crucial for leveraging the potential of technologies for the future of cities. Smart communities, defined by their local context, should be the foundation of smart cities. The engagement of a broad range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, academic institutions and the most vulnerable groups in urban areas, can provide local governments with a greater understanding of local needs and support inclusive decision-making processes;

⁴ Available from www.unescap.org/kp/2023/sdg-11-sustainable-cities-and-communities.

(d) **Ensure inclusive and integrated approaches to urban and territorial planning.** Participative people-centred processes engaging a broad range of stakeholders must be considered in urban development projects, plans, strategies and capital investments. Infrastructure needs for urban basic service delivery must be linked to an evidence-based approach that responds to the needs of communities and the rights of all, including the most vulnerable. A multisectoral and inclusive approach will also benefit linkages across urban and rural environments, ensuring that no one and no place is left behind in the rapid process of urbanization.

V. Round table on Sustainable Development Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)

5. The discussion on Sustainable Development Goal 17 was informed by the relevant Goal profile⁵ and focused on the following action areas for Asia and the Pacific:

(a) **Accelerate efforts to expand the fiscal space, improve the mobilization of public resources and enhance debt sustainability.** Governments can pursue tax policy reforms, including the establishment of a carbon tax, and the digitalization of tax administrations to improve efficiency and compliance. Meanwhile, Governments need to mitigate the risks associated with large public debts by improving public debt management and relying more on domestic resource mobilization. While public-private partnerships can provide additional resources for public investment, they need to be managed carefully to ensure that they are efficient and cost-effective. It is important to substantially increase access to concessional finance, address illicit financial flows and ensure that government spending and funding are directed at sustainable development, including climate adaptation;

(b) **Scale up access to sustainable financing and develop the necessary frameworks.** While sustainable finance instruments are becoming more widely used and can contribute to financing the Goals, several issues need to be addressed to improve the way they function. These include preventing greenwashing, promoting accountability and good governance through strengthened regulatory frameworks and establishing green taxonomies to provide clear guidance to market participants about the degree to which financial products contribute to sustainable development. These measures are essential to build investor trust and enhance market demand for sustainable finance instruments;

(c) **Actively seek to accelerate the digitalization and adoption of customs and trade processes.** Accelerating the digitalization and adoption of customs and trade processes can be done by leveraging the tools and solutions already 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 a move would streamline trade procedures to reduce costs, increase exports – especially for least developed countries – and make trade more inclusive;

(d) **Accelerate regional cooperation and integration efforts.** Greater regional integration, at both the bilateral and plurilateral levels, would ensure cost competitiveness with countries that already have established trade agreements. Leveraging existing regional economic partnerships and communities such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the South

⁵ Available from www.unescap.org/kp/2023/sdg-17-partnerships-goals.

Asian Association for Regional Cooperation could enable progress on trade for sustainable development;

(e) **Enhance South-South cooperation.** This includes strengthening mechanisms for sharing experiences among State and non-State actors in building back better. Strengthening existing networks, best practice communities and platforms for sharing information among different stakeholders is crucial in promoting South-South and triangular cooperation. Consensus-building with local governments and civil society organizations is especially necessary. Cooperation mechanisms should further ensure that people and the planet are at the centre of development planning and strategies;

(f) **Increase capacity at the national level to tackle data gaps on all the Goals, so as to facilitate reporting on progress in their implementation.** Training modules that are more inclusive and address the needs of marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples, need to be developed. It is important to review whether the indicators are well designed to measure progress, considering the availability of data in each country. The need for inclusive measures of progress that take into account environmental sustainability and well-being was highlighted, in line with the concept of going beyond gross domestic product. The role of private sector entities in integrating the Goals into their business strategies is also vital for enabling transformative change.
