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Item 5 of the provisional agenda**

Regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the form and function of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and its follow-up and review process

The form and function of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

Note by the secretariat***

Summary

The present document is intended to support discussions at the 2016 session of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development on the future form, function and modalities of the Forum after 2016, pursuant to the agreements of the second session of the Forum.

It outlines proposals on the future form, function and modalities for the Forum, including its role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Participants are invited to review the proposals and provide their views.

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** E/ESCAP/FSD(3)/L.1.

*** The present document was submitted late owing to the need to incorporate additional inputs from various contributors.

I. Introduction

1. The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development responds to the call for regional commissions to contribute to the work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, including through annual regional meetings, with the involvement of other relevant regional entities, major groups and other relevant stakeholders, as appropriate.¹
2. The sessions of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development held in 2014 and 2015 were organized as intergovernmental forums for the sharing of views of Governments, civil society, the private sector and the international community. Both sessions enhanced the quality of the substantive debate at the high-level political forum by contributing regional perspectives. Both sessions created opportunities for stakeholders to have an impact on regional dialogue and on global-level discussions at the high-level political forum.
3. Participants in the 2014 and 2015 sessions of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development deliberated on the form, function and modalities of the Forum in supporting the development agenda beyond 2015, with procedural aspects and agreements captured in a report, and participants' views captured in the annexed Chair's summary, and brought to the attention of the Commission in 2014 and 2015, respectively. The 2015 session of the Forum, held in Bangkok on 21 and 22 May 2015, agreed that the form, function and modalities of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development after 2016 should be decided at its third session through an intergovernmental, consultative process.
4. In response, the present document presents proposals on the form, function and modalities of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. It builds on proposals presented at the second session of the Forum,² recommendations made by the Forum at its first and second sessions, recommendations made by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Committee on Environment and Development at its fourth session, suggestions emanating from the Expert Consultation on Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific held in Bangkok on 9 and 10 November 2015, and consultations with members of the ESCAP Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives.
5. The proposed form, function and modalities aim to provide clarity on the scope and coverage of the Forum, identify the roles and responsibilities of member States, and it is recommended, *inter alia*, that the Forum be established as an intergovernmental platform within the conference structure of the Commission.
6. With a view towards reaching an agreement on the future organization of the Forum, member States and stakeholders are invited to review the document and provide comments on these proposals.

¹ General Assembly resolution 67/290, para. 13.

² See E/ESCAP/FSD(2)/2; available from [www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/ESCAP/FSD\(2\)/2&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/ESCAP/FSD(2)/2&Lang=E).

II. Proposals for the function of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

A. Overall functions of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

7. The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development was held in 2014 and 2015 as a regional preparatory meeting for the high-level political forum, in response to General Assembly resolution 67/290 on the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum.³ Reflecting this function and as communicated at previous sessions of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, the function of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development should closely align with that of the high-level political forum, while effectively supporting, as a regional platform, national governments' efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

8. In General Assembly resolution 67/290, Member States decided that the high-level political forum, consistent with its universal intergovernmental character, should provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development, follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments, enhance the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner at all levels and have a focused, dynamic and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges.⁴

9. While emphasizing the leadership of national Governments, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development further acknowledges the importance of the regional and subregional dimensions, regional economic integration and interconnectivity in sustainable development and states that regional and subregional frameworks can facilitate the effective translation of sustainable development policies into concrete action at the national level.⁵

10. The 2030 Agenda also identifies roles for regional actors and actions at the regional level in several areas, including on: follow-up and review of the progress on the Sustainable Development Goals,⁶ with regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the subnational, national, regional and global levels;⁷ defining regional level indicators;⁸ contributing information collected at the regional level to the annual progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals;⁹ as partners to Governments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;¹⁰ providing better coordination and better focussed support regarding the means of implementation;¹¹ and also contributing to the achievement of many of the individual goals.

³ General Assembly resolution 67/290, para. 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 2.

⁵ General Assembly resolution 70/1, para. 21.

⁶ *Ibid.*, paras. 73 and 74 (a).

⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 77.

⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 75.

⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 83.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, para. 65.

11. The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development is recognized by member States and stakeholders as a key aspect of the regional response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The fourth session of the ESCAP Committee on Environment and Development held in November 2015¹² expressed support for the current format of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. The Committee also recognized the Forum as an appropriate and effective regional platform, including for follow-up and review regarding the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific,¹³ and emphasized the need to strengthen regional cooperation mechanisms to support implementation.¹⁴ The Committee also noted the proposal of member States that ESCAP take the lead on follow-up and review at the regional level,¹⁵ with specific activities suggested in that regard.¹⁶ Experts, including from civil society, have also expressed support for the Forum as a regional platform for the 2030 Agenda and made related proposals.¹⁷

12. Taking this into account, it is proposed that the Forum's main functions in supporting national Governments in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development shall serve as a platform for:

(a) Follow-up and review of progress of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals at the regional level;

(b) Experience and information-sharing on processes related to sustainable development, with particular focus on best practices regarding the means of implementation;

(c) Supporting countries with special needs, including through enhancing their capacity for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(d) Identifying emerging issues in the context of sustainable development and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

B. Follow-up and review functions

13. The follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will be the main modality for tracking progress and for defining responses to the findings of assessments of progress.

¹² E/ESCAP/CED(4)/2.

¹³ Ibid., para. 20.

¹⁴ Ibid., para. 18.

¹⁵ Ibid., para. 19.

¹⁶ Paragraph 2 of the report of the Committee on Environment and Development at its fourth session states that: "The Committee recognizes the role of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in conducting regional surveys on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which could be presented at the corresponding sectoral committees in ESCAP, with a view to introducing them at the future session of the Commission, and for further consideration by the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Such surveys could be based on national presentations and voluntary reports by individual countries or by groups of countries within the same subregional grouping."

¹⁷ Expert Consultation on Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok on 9 and 10 November 2015.

14. Decisions regarding the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will be taken at the global level, with negotiations on the draft resolution on follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development anticipated to take place during the month of May 2016.¹⁸

15. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages the regional commissions to support member States in identifying the most suitable regional forum in which to engage in follow-up and review.¹⁹ Regional commissions in other regions are currently facilitating consideration of this issue by their member States.

16. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development makes several provisions for follow-up and review at the regional and subregional levels. Specific reference is made to regional level action²⁰ on peer learning, including through voluntary reviews, sharing of best practices and discussion on shared targets. The cooperation of regional and subregional commissions is welcomed and it is stated that inclusive regional processes will draw on national-level reviews and contribute to follow-up and review at the global level, including at the high-level political forum.²¹

17. The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development as a regional, intergovernmental forum has also been recognized by Governments and stakeholders as a key platform for regional follow-up and review. The Committee on Environment and Development at its fourth session noted the proposal of several delegations for ESCAP to take the lead in the follow-up and review processes at the regional level regarding the 2030 Agenda. The Committee recognized the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development as an appropriate and effective regional platform, including for follow-up and review regarding the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific.²²

18. There is also strong support from member States for the use of existing mechanisms in ESCAP for follow-up and review and support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Committee on Environment and Development recognized the Commission's role in conducting regional surveys on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which could be presented at the corresponding sectoral committees of ESCAP, with a view to introducing them at the future session of the Commission, and for further consideration by the high-level political forum on sustainable development. The Committee further agreed that such surveys could be based on national presentations and voluntary reports by individual countries or by groups of countries within the same subregional grouping.²³

¹⁸ Road map by the co-facilitators, Denmark and Belize, for the informal consultations on the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the global level.

¹⁹ General Assembly resolution 70/1, para. 81.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, paras. 80 and 81.

²¹ *Ibid.*, para. 80.

²² E/ESCAP/CED(4)/2, paras. 19 and 20.

²³ *Ibid.*, para 2.

19. Taking the above into account, it is proposed that:

(a) The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development be established as an intergovernmental platform for regional follow-up and review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. In this regard, specific agenda items to address follow-up and review on a continuing basis should support consistent and effective efforts. These agenda items should also allow for regional contributions to any Sustainable Development Goals progress report, regional reviews, thematic reviews, in-depth reviews and reviews of Goal 17, which may be agreed to by the high-level political forum;²⁴

(b) In order to facilitate follow-up and review of all 17 goals of the Agenda, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development should also provide a platform for this activity that, with the coordination of ESCAP, should receive substantive contributions from other United Nations system bodies at the regional level,²⁵ other regional and subregional organizations, as well as stakeholders;

(c) Given the heavy burden and logistical and analytical challenges of considering a large number of national voluntary reviews at the global level at the high-level political forum, as is the current arrangement, member States are encouraged to consider how to fully engage the regional platform to undertake voluntary reviews at the regional level and/or produce regional syntheses, as appropriate. Dialogue on the reasons for the progress, or lack of progress observed, from the perspectives of different stakeholders can also take place at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, with a view to making recommendations on regional follow-up and support required. Dialogue should also provide support for national-level action, including through sharing of best practices and national and subregional-level initiatives, as appropriate;

²⁴ Four areas are proposed for the high-level political forum in the report of the Secretary-General on critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level (A/70/684). If these areas are confirmed in the final resolution on follow-up and review, regional contributions and/or similar activities at Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development sessions could be envisaged in each. The areas are: (a) review of overall progress, with review of the Sustainable Development Goals progress report, national reviews and regional reviews; (b) a thematic review following the specific high-level political forum theme of that year and in-depth reviews of a subset of Sustainable Development Goals; (c) review of Goal 17 and other inputs related to the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda; and (d) a concluding segment. Regional follow-up and review processes at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development should reflect the high-level political forum schedule, principles, modalities and approaches as far as possible.

²⁵ Assessments of progress should engage the wider United Nations system and subregional organizations, either through reporting on the assessments conducted jointly or individually, and depending on the schedule of assessments established through the high-level political forum. They should also draw on national-level reviews. Where regional or subregional targets are established, these can also be reported on, noting that the 2030 Agenda identifies the possibility of establishing both national and regionally relevant targets and that the Pacific subregion has taken steps in this direction. Quantitative assessments should be supplemented by qualitative perspectives of stakeholders.

(d) Reporting on the implementation of the proposed regional road map for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific will be an important aspect of the follow-up and review function of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. Reporting should focus on impacts and recommendations for regional follow-up.

20. These proposals are consistent with those contained in the report of the Secretary-General on critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level,²⁶ which explores how to put in place a coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review system at the global level, commenting also on the implications for action at the regional level. While the report has not yet been considered by the General Assembly, it provides some indication of the possible scope of regional follow-up and review for illustrative purposes only. The report states that the main benefits of regional review activities must be felt at the level of the region and countries. Regional reviews will allow for the discussion of overall trends, gaps and lessons in the region; reflect on issues specific to the region by involving all relevant stakeholders, whether relating to the means of implementation, thematic reviews or other priority issues; and boost regional cooperation and coherence for follow-up and review. Regional commissions can provide common methodologies, structured analysis and background materials, and ensure that regional reviews take into consideration the results and mandates of thematic or sector-specific intergovernmental bodies for which they act as technical secretariat at the regional level.

21. The report notes that organizations contributing to the high-level political forum's work on follow-up and review should identify relevant targets among the Sustainable Development Goal framework of goals and targets, ensure that all actors are involved, including the most vulnerable, and ensure that the agenda for and methods of work can support the requests from the high-level political forum, including establishing a standing agenda item on follow-up and review. The report also states that the follow-up and review process should be seen as a cycle through which States continuously review national implementation of the 2030 Agenda, learn and mobilize support and advice through regular reporting at the regional and global levels, and update their implementation strategies. It also states that all reviews should be anchored in solid data and evidence and be rigorous. The participatory nature and need for coordination across the United Nations system is stressed. The report also addresses the timing of the high-level political forum and its reviews. The forum will meet every four years under the auspices of the General Assembly. The report of the Secretary-General notes that this means that all 17 Sustainable Development Goals should be reviewed in the forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council within a period of four years.

C. Other functions of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

22. In addition to serving as an inclusive, intergovernmental platform for follow-up and review, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development may receive reports on progress regarding the means of implementation from relevant regional and subregional forums, and provide guidance as appropriate.

²⁶ A/70/684.

23. The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development can engage all stakeholders in identifying emerging issues to be addressed at the regional level or by member States, to support the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and reflecting the mandate of the high-level political forum.

24. Specific agenda items should be identified in consultation with member States to support each of these functions.

III. Proposals for the form of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

25. The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development should continue to be convened annually as an inclusive intergovernmental forum preparatory to the high-level political forum.

26. In the year when the high-level political forum meets under the auspices of the General Assembly at the summit level, which is every four years, the secretariat proposes that the Forum may converge with the Commission session in April/May, and the Commission and Forum will share the same theme.

27. In the years when the high-level political forum meets under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development may be convened as a stand-alone event in March/April.²⁷ Where appropriate and when the timing coincides, it is proposed that the Forum be convened as a back-to-back event in coordination or collaboration with other regional sustainable development forums such as the United Nations Environment Programme Forum of Ministers and Environmental Authorities.

28. The theme of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development should be consistent with that of the high-level political forum.

29. The current format, including the election of the bureau and co-chairs for the session has been well supported by intergovernmental stakeholders. The space for multi-stakeholder side and associated events²⁸ has been well received in the past two sessions of the Forum and these activities should be maintained.

30. The outcome of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development will be in the form of a report that documents procedural aspects and agreements, with an annexed chair's summary,²⁹ highlighting key points related to: (a) evaluation of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals;

²⁷ Holding the Forum in the first quarter of the year allows time to bring the outcomes of the Forum in a formal manner to the attention of the high-level political forum either at the summit or Economic and Social Council level.

²⁸ Side events organized by stakeholders, including civil society organizations, donor agencies and other organizations are not fully reported in the chair's summary. Associated events directly contribute to specific agenda items and may be reported in the chair's summary.

²⁹ The report of the Secretary-General also notes that contributions to the high-level political forum do not need to be in the form of a negotiated outcome. A summary of the discussions might give more flexibility for the forum to address this outcome alongside other inputs and address topics from various perspectives.

- (b) specific recommendations for regional action in follow-up, in order to boost progress on the Goals, and feedback on any reviews that may be presented at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development;
- (c) recommendations for member States regarding best practices; and
- (d) emerging issues.

IV. Proposals for the modalities of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

31. As an intergovernmental platform that is part of the conference structure of ESCAP, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development:

- (a) Shall have its formal report presented by the chair or rapporteur of the Forum to the Commission, with an annexed chair's summary and other outcomes presented to the Commission;
- (b) Could receive inputs from ESCAP committees;
- (c) Shall benefit from the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives of ESCAP as a modality for consulting governments between sessions.

32. As in past years, preparatory meetings of stakeholders should be convened, subject to the availability of funds.

33. There may be intersessional activities and institutional innovations along the following lines, subject to the availability of financing and further review and consultation with member States:

- (a) Subregional meetings should support follow up and review functions of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and identify emerging issues;
- (b) Special rapporteurs for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should provide expert support to the monitoring and review of progress in implementation of the Agenda and defining regional responses;
- (c) Round tables of eminent scientists, policymakers and stakeholders should support reviews of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and developing recommendations for the Forum's consideration.

34. The procedural aspects of the Forum shall be generally guided by the following:

- (a) Proceedings of the Forum shall be guided by the rules of procedure of the Commission as well as the modalities of the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council as long as there is no conflict between them;
- (b) At the beginning of each Forum session, a member of the bureau of the previous session should report on the discussions at the intervening high-level political forum session and the conclusions of the previous Forum session;
- (c) Stakeholder engagement in the Forum shall respect the rules of procedure of ESCAP.

V. Matters for consideration

35. Given the role identified by the General Assembly for regional forums on sustainable development, the support for follow-up and review that can be provided at the regional level, as noted in the report of the Secretary-General, and in consideration of the above proposals, the Forum may therefore wish to agree that:

(a) Subject to the further decision of the Commission, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development should be established as an annual intergovernmental platform of the Commission with the primary objective of regional follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(b) The proposals of the secretariat in relation to the form, function and modalities may be used as guidance for the secretariat's work in organizing the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. Further, the form, function and modalities of the Forum should be guided by decisions taken at the high-level political forum;

(c) The form, function and modalities of the Forum should be reviewed periodically by member States and adjusted as appropriate;

(d) Other ESCAP-led intergovernmental meetings and ESCAP committees should be linked with the follow-up and review processes of the Forum.