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

Eighth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

Bangkok and online, 23–26 March 2021

**Report of the Eighth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development**

1. The Eighth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), was held online and in person from 23 to 26 March 2021.

2. The Forum was attended by representatives of 49 members and associate members and 5 observers as well as of intergovernmental organizations, United Nations bodies, international organizations, and major groups and other stakeholders.

3. The Forum was attended by representatives of the following members and associate members of ESCAP: Afghanistan; Armenia; Australia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Fiji; France; French Polynesia; Georgia; Hong Kong, China; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Maldives; Marshall Islands; Mongolia; Myanmar; Nauru; Nepal; Netherlands; New Zealand; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Singapore; Sri Lanka; Tajikistan; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Turkey; Turkmenistan; Tuvalu; Uzbekistan; Vanuatu; and Viet Nam. Representatives of Belgium, Germany, Italy, Mexico and Switzerland attended as observers.

4. Under agenda item 1 (a), the Vice-Chair of the Seventh Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, Ms. Rosemarie Edillon, Undersecretary for Policy and Planning of the National Economic and Development Authority of the Philippines, made a statement on behalf of the Bureau on the outcome of the Seventh Forum. A welcome message was delivered by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP. Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand, the President of the Economic and Social Council and the Deputy Secretary-General made interventions. A statement on behalf of civil society organizations was delivered by Ms. Wanun Permpibul of Climate Watch Thailand.

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\* Reissued for technical reasons on 22 April 2021.

5. Under agenda item 1 (b), the Forum elected the following Bureau members:

- (a) Chair: Ms. Mereseini Rakuita Vuniwaqa (Fiji)
- (b) Vice-Chairs: Mr. Asim Iftikhar Ahmad (Pakistan)  
Ms. Huda Ali Shareef (Maldives)

6. Under agenda item 1 (c), the Forum adopted the following agenda:

- 1. Opening of the Forum:
  - (a) Opening statements;
  - (b) Election of officers;
  - (c) Adoption of the agenda.
- 2. Regional perspectives on accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- 3. Linking national, regional and global dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- 4. Other matters.
- 5. Review and adoption of the report of the Forum.
- 6. Closing of the Forum.

7. Under agenda item 2, the Forum's discussion on the theme of the Forum was initiated with a youth dialogue on sustainable and resilient recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Asia and the Pacific, moderated by the Deputy Secretary-General.

8. The Forum reviewed regional progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, supported by a presentation by the ESCAP secretariat on the *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report*.

9. The Forum then met at nine parallel round tables to conduct an interactive multi-stakeholder assessment of the trends, key challenges and priority actions with regard to Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17.

10. Under agenda item 3, the Forum discussed the coordinated approach of the United Nations system to supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the regional level.

11. The Forum took note of the discussions of the nine round tables on Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17, to be addressed at the forthcoming high-level political forum on sustainable development.

12. The Forum considered the experiences of member States participating in voluntary national reviews for the high-level political forum on sustainable development and shared national and other perspectives on challenges, progress and achievements, as well as lessons learned.

13. Under agenda item 4, no other matters were discussed.

14. Under agenda item 5, the Forum adopted the present report on 26 March 2021. It was agreed that deliberations during the hybrid meeting would be summarized in a Chair's summary, which would be made available within a week following the conclusion of the Forum and annexed to the present report. Further, the summaries of the nine round tables organized under agenda item 2 and presented under agenda item 3 would be issued as an addendum to the present report.

15. On 22 March, side events were held on the following topics: "Multi-stakeholder partnerships – antidote to COVID-19 and booster to Sustainable Development Goal action"; "Standing up to the challenge – response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Asia and the Pacific"; "Use of data for action – addressing the indirect impact of COVID-19 on the delivery and use of health services in the Asia-Pacific region for a sustainable and resilient recovery"; "The Creators2030 Sustainable Development Goals arts, youth, food and culture emissary world tour"; "The role of child-sensitive social protection in the sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19"; "Building back better for girls"; "Accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals monitoring and implementation actions using Goal 16+"; "Youth-led action research on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on marginalized youth in nine countries in Asia and the Pacific"; "Appropriate technology choice for alternative development of Asian countries - towards a sustainable post-pandemic society"; "Indigenous peoples' resilience and recovery from COVID-19"; "Company action on climate – driving decarbonization through target-setting"; "Volunteering as a transformative strategy for the decade of action"; "Building back more equally – how a human rights city framework could pave the way"; "Our vision of a sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic – grassroots women and local government leaders speak out"; "Enabling a sustainable recovery with greater access to information and justice and public participation in environmental decision-making"; "Air pollution in South-East Asia: black carbon – the dark side of human activity"; "People's scorecard on Sustainable Development Goal progress in Asia (2016–2020)"; and "Disinformation, misinformation and hate speech". On 23 March, the Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Goal Partnership, between ESCAP, the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), released the publication entitled *Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Leaving No Country Behind*. Side events were held on the following topics: "Informed citizens, societies and governments for sustainable and resilient recovery"; "Financial technology and digital solutions – advancing women's entrepreneurship in the face of COVID-19"; "Impact of COVID-19 on youth in South Asia and resilience strategies"; "Transformative models to build back better – Thailand's approach to a resilient, inclusive and sustainable COVID-19 recovery"; "Resilient recovery of graduating countries in Asia-Pacific – a multidimensional risk lens"; "Carbon neutrality – the future of Asia and the Pacific"; "The rights path to recovery – how countries place human rights at the centre in responding and building back better"; "Solidarity and system change – antidotes to the COVID-19 crisis"; "Climate action and advocacy in the time of COVID-19"; "Best practices in national Sustainable Development Goal policy and planning – examples from Pacific Rim countries"; "Leaking cities in South-East Asia – marine plastic pollution"; "Water dialogues for results: Bonn 2021 – accelerating cross-sectoral Sustainable Development Goal 6 implementation"; "Civil society on the frontlines – how can SDG 17 support an enabling environment for the recovery and resilience of civil society organizations?"; and "The COVID-19 pandemic in Asia and the

Pacific – the role of faith actors in a sustainable and resilient recovery”. On 24 March, side events were held on the following topics: “Financing sustainable development – the challenge”; “Reviewing the engagement of civil society organizations in the voluntary national review process (2015–2020) in the post-COVID-19 era”; “An Asia-Pacific green deal?”; “Rights, resilience and sustainability – how companies can build forward stronger in the Asia-Pacific region”; “Transboundary rivers and resilient recovery opportunities in South Asia”; “E-learning – integrated action on biodiversity/ecosystems, health and climate”; “Discussing the recovery strategy on food and livelihood security of the most marginalized groups (the faces of inequality) in Asia during COVID-19 and beyond”; “COVID-19 and mobility for persons who are blind”; and “Inter-faith partnership for the Sustainable Development Goals: organizing and mobilization of youth”. On 25 March, the Asia-Pacific Knowledge Management Hub was launched. Side events were held on the following topics: “Increasing renewables in energy mix in Viet Nam – the role and barriers of wind energy”; “A disability-inclusive response to socioeconomic impacts on persons with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region post-COVID-19”; “The role of environmental human rights defenders in supporting and enhancing a sustainable COVID-19 recovery”; “Localizing Sustainable Development Goals – All Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on the Goals as a model”; “Invisibility in COVID-19 times, midterm and mid-crisis – are we getting everyone in the picture through civil registration?”; “Green or grim picture – environmental responsibility as a tool to achieve Goals 8 and 17”; “Social entrepreneurship Sustainable Development Goal Platforms – towards building back more fairly in Asia and the Pacific”; and “Zero-waste solutions towards a regenerative Asia-Pacific region”. On 26 March, a high-level panel was held on the theme “Joining hands for the Asia-Pacific region’s COVID-19 recovery: pathways for building back better together”. Additional side events were held on the following topics: “Regional responses for sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic”; “Rights-based conservation – supporting indigenous leadership in biodiversity conservation for achieving just and equitable localized environmental solutions”; and “Moving away from COVID-19 – transitional recovery of the informal sector in India”.

16. The following preparatory and associated events were held: the Preparatory Youth Forum for the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, co-convened by the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Youth LEAD of Thailand, Y-PEER Asia-Pacific Centre of Thailand, and Right Here Right Now; the Asia-Pacific People’s Forum on Sustainable Development, organized by the Asia-Pacific Regional Civil Society Organization Engagement Mechanism; a webinar for the Asia-Pacific region parliaments entitled “Building a better future where nobody is left behind: how can parliaments ensure that COVID-19 recovery strategies are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals?”, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and ESCAP; a training workshop on integrated national financing frameworks and budgeting for the 2030 Agenda, entitled “Financing sustainable and inclusive recovery”, organized by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, ESCAP, UNDP and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat; and a preparatory workshop for voluntary national review countries from the Asia-Pacific region, organized by ESCAP and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

17. The Forum concluded that, following its adoption, the present report including its annex should be brought to the attention of the Commission, at its seventy-seventh session, and to the global dialogues on sustainable development, including, in particular, the upcoming high-level political forum on sustainable development, which would be held in New York from 6 to 15 July 2021. It also concluded that an addendum to the present report, containing the summaries of the round tables, should be submitted to the high-level political forum on sustainable development for informational purposes.

## Annex

### **Chair's summary of discussions at the Eighth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development**

1. The Eighth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development was held on the theme “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Asia and the Pacific”. During the Forum, member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), intergovernmental bodies, United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, and major groups and other stakeholders discussed regional perspectives on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

#### **I. Sustainable and resilient recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic in Asia and the Pacific**

2. The discussions were informed by a youth dialogue on the theme of the Forum, engaging young leaders from the five Asia-Pacific subregions and moderated by the Deputy Secretary-General.

3. The Forum noted that the COVID-19 pandemic was a developmental, environmental, human rights and security concern. It called attention to the pandemic's devastating socioeconomic impacts across the region and the resulting diminished prospects for achieving the 2030 Agenda. It noted that the disruptions caused by COVID-19 had revealed regional, national and subnational inequalities and vulnerabilities that had long exposed member States and their societies to economic and other shocks. Several important sectors had been severely impacted, including the tourism and hospitality industries.

4. Delegations shared their governments' responses to the disruptions of the coronavirus pandemic and measures to stimulate recovery, which included stimulus packages; programmes to improve living standards based on a “people first” approach and people-centred development; green recovery strategies to address both Sustainable Development Goal 13 (Climate action) and COVID-19; support for health and education sectors; various provisions for delayed loan payments, tax breaks and incentives for reskilling workers; income support; free vaccines for the most vulnerable; emergency cash payments; low-interest working capital loans; household electricity subsidies; and health-related budget increases. The Forum noted that partnering and engaging with civil society, the private sector, local communities and other stakeholders played an important role in inclusive recovery efforts.

5. Delegations pointed to the role of international solidarity in the COVID-19 response including through cooperation at the regional level and between subregions. The global community was called upon to recognize COVID-19 vaccines as a global public good. One delegation pointed to coordination, partnerships and the sharing of experiences and good practices as key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In that regard, the Forum noted with appreciation the contributions of multilateral banks and the support provided by several member States for medical supplies, vaccines and other interventions to support health security, economic recovery and stability. The Forum also noted the financial contributions made to support the response of the United Nations system, including the joint emergency response initiatives by the United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme, World Food Programme, World Health

Organization and other United Nations agencies as well as the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and its Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19. One delegation identified a role for the United Nations in providing recommendations and a plan of action for safely opening borders and promoting travel and trade. Another called for member States and partners to increase collaboration and partnership in priority areas, taking into consideration the high-level midterm review of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway.

6. The Forum emphasized that despite the challenges of the pandemic, commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and implementation efforts had continued and advanced. Some delegations reported on past and upcoming contributions to global follow-up and review at the high-level political forum on sustainable development. One delegation expressed appreciation to ESCAP for its support with regard to the nationalization of the Sustainable Development Goals, the strengthening of statistical capacity and the provision of opportunities for peer learning. Another expressed appreciation to the secretariat for its support with regard to the development of national road maps on Sustainable Development Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy). The Forum also noted with appreciation the financial support for advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in economies in transition, Pacific small island developing States and countries in South-East Asia.

7. Echoing the government delegations in citing extreme challenges, the representatives from major groups and other stakeholders urged member States to anchor recovery efforts in development justice, including redistributive justice, economic justice, social and gender justice and environmental justice and accountability to their peoples. High poverty and hunger rates, rising inequality and a triple crisis in the areas of climate, biodiversity and pollution were emphasized. It was asserted that human rights standards had been compromised in some aspects of the COVID-19 response. Strengthening the agency of people had a positive impact on COVID-19 response efforts, but more attention needed to be focused on the vulnerabilities that particularly affected marginalized and excluded groups (e.g. older people, people with disabilities and those living with HIV), essential workers, farmers and fisherfolk, and on discrimination due to systemic issues. Indigenous peoples; urban poor; women; people subject to marginalization and exclusion due to sexual orientation and gender identity; youth; people with disabilities; small and medium-sized enterprises; and those discriminated against on the basis of work and descent were all impacted.

## **II. Review of regional progress on the Sustainable Development Goals**

8. Member States were provided with an update on the progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific. In its presentation, the secretariat highlighted significant progress on some Sustainable Development Goals and targets but also slow progress, and in some cases regression, on others.

9. The Forum emphasized the resolve of member States to ensure that no one was left behind and to build back better to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, sustainability and resilience. It urged solidarity, stronger regional cooperation and deeper revitalized global partnerships. Delegates pointed to the need for investment in efforts to strengthen national health systems, harness innovation and intensify multi-stakeholder partnerships as well as in climate action. Delegations also highlighted their commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 and accelerating climate action, including

through the issuance of green bonds for climate finance. The pledges made by more than 300 local governments to become zero-carbon cities by 2050 were highlighted. Strategies referenced in that regard included the sufficiency economy philosophy and a bio-circular-green economy model. Air pollution mitigation and disaster risk reduction were other areas of focus for member States. The Forum recognized that the pandemic had accelerated digitalization, enabled the continuity of public services and business operations, and provided opportunities to enhance the efficiency of government institutions. Digitalization would play an important role in building resilience and the digital economy. Closing the digital divide was a priority but required considerable investment. Steps taken to overcome regression on Sustainable Development Goals as a result of the pandemic and accelerate implementation efforts were also hampered by challenges including natural and climate-induced disasters, ongoing sanctions, food insecurity and economic contraction. Small island developing States noted that many development challenges were interconnected, but especially so in the context of climate change, which remained the greatest threat to those countries in particular and necessitated better access to climate finance and adaptive capacity-building. The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent was an important reference in that regard.

10. The Forum also pointed to the need to strengthen, widen and move towards universal social protection systems to enhance the resilience of Asia-Pacific societies. It recognized the role of infrastructure and connectivity in enhancing industry and innovation. Delegates also emphasized trade facilitation, better transport linkages and supply chain optimization as well as triangular cooperation. Other priority areas cited included data collection, policy coherence and accountability. There was a call for the continued sharing of best practices, knowledge and technical expertise through capacity-building to enhance data collection and analysis and to address data gaps. One delegation noted that systems thinking had been applied to analyse interlinkages between the Sustainable Development Goals and national development plans and expressed appreciation for the support provided in that regard.

11. Major groups and other stakeholders highlighted that local governments required more resources to support investment in the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals at the subnational level. There were calls for a green deal for Asia and the Pacific to address regional and global sustainability challenges and adopt a triple bottom line approach; for a new social contract to ensure economic recovery and resilience and promote the rights of all workers, equality and inclusion; proposals for transformational community and social entrepreneurship and for nature-based solutions for reducing hunger; ensuring inclusion and a voice for people with disabilities; gender-responsive social protection for vulnerable women; and recognition of the plight and mistreatment of indigenous peoples. Attention was called to the issue of protecting migrant workers against abuse and trafficking.

12. One representative of an international organization noted that 2020 had been one of the warmest years on record and informed the participants of the organization's initiatives to support action on Sustainable Development Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation) and mitigate climate risk. The Forum was warned that incomplete and uneven recovery and other factors, including a decline in labour force participation of women and loss of education opportunities, would leave long-lasting scars on economies. While mounting debt would need to be addressed, greener and sustainable recovery strategies could provide a boost to the economy.

### **III. United Nations acting as one to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

13. The Forum considered the work of the United Nations system to strengthen collaboration and coordination on support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific. In that regard, opening remarks were made by the Deputy Secretary-General and presentations were given by the Co-Vice-Chairs of the United Nations regional collaborative platform in Asia and the Pacific. Examples of system-wide results of the collective work of the United Nations development system at the regional level, including the issue-based coalitions, were highlighted. The Asia-Pacific Knowledge Management Hub was also launched.<sup>1</sup>

14. The Forum expressed appreciation to the United Nations development system for its actions to assess and support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda despite the disruptions caused by COVID-19. The Forum noted the efforts of the United Nations development system to provide capacity-building and resources for the development of solutions towards a socioeconomic recovery from COVID-19. It was also emphasized that regional and global cooperation was imperative to improve air quality.

15. Several delegations called for strong coordination and collaboration at the country level between governments and the United Nations development system. One delegation expressed the hope that the issue-based coalitions would expand and continue to advance regional cooperation in addressing air pollution in Asia and the Pacific. The technical assistance for the formulation of voluntary national review reports and data analysis was recognized. The Forum also recognized the role of the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund in overcoming the health and development crisis, including through scaling up social protection programmes in response to COVID-19. The adoption of the Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific was welcomed as a basis for further regional cooperation. Several delegations noted their national efforts and programmes to strengthen social protection. The Forum was informed that three least developed countries in the region faced the simultaneous challenges of meeting the requirements to graduate from the category of least developed countries by 2026, and the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. The call for development partners to act quickly to support and ensure the success of these efforts was noted.

16. Major groups and other stakeholders noted that despite global commitments, the socioeconomic perspectives and concerns of women, youth and marginalized and vulnerable stakeholders were not sufficiently reflected in national policies, requiring greater accountability of governments and support from the United Nations system. Several stakeholders called for greater consideration of gender and human rights and for their collective voices to be heard in the process of regional discussions and reporting on women and youth empowerment.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://knowledge.unasiapacific.org>.

#### IV. **Review of regional progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: parallel round tables for an in-depth assessment of Goals 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17**

17. The Forum received summaries from the rapporteurs of nine parallel round tables dedicated to Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17 which reviewed progress towards each Goal under agenda item 2. Each of the round tables was organized by United Nations system entities, with inputs from other stakeholders, under the overall coordination of ESCAP. The summaries of all nine round tables would be issued as an addendum (ESCAP/RFSD/2021/4/Add.1).

18. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No poverty) covered the areas below.

19. **Build human capabilities and empower government service providers.** Eradicating all forms of poverty required significant increases in investments to build human capabilities in areas such as health, nutrition and education. The capacity of government service providers needed to be improved. Building human capabilities should be a regular practice pursued even before crises hit.

20. **Promote and protect economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to social security.** Expanding universal social protection in accordance with Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), following a life cycle approach was key to reducing poverty. Social protection systems needed to be disaster responsive, risk informed and coherent with other policies.

21. **Foster women's participation in all facets of decision-making for nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures.** To enhance economic empowerment, targeted social protection measures were required to address women's needs. It was important to recognize the transformational impact that increased ownership and opportunities to access land and resources could have on women while also acknowledging the nuance of gender identification and the impact it had on the effectiveness of response measures.

22. **Build the resilience of poor, at-risk and marginalized groups and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to shocks.** Expanding the coverage of social protection was imperative for sustained poverty eradication. Inclusive social protection would entail expanding its traditional role to encompass promotive and transformative functions, which would help to build resilience.

23. **Enhance climate and disaster risk reduction action to protect life and livelihoods and reduce disruptions in access to infrastructure and basic services.** Management of disaster and climate risks was necessary to minimize human and economic loss. Additional investments in strengthening multi-hazard disaster risk governance systems were needed to enable multi-sectoral implementation of such strategies for effective reduction of deaths and losses.

24. **Enhance capacities to collect and use better data.** Disaggregated data were necessary for identifying who was being left behind. Collecting comprehensive and disaggregated data required building frameworks for enhancing data development and analysis skills. Governments should partner with the private sector to enhance their data collection capacities.

25. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero hunger) covered the areas below.
26. **Investments and public-private partnerships in food systems.** Investments were needed to make nutritious food more affordable, create efficient value chains and promote healthy diet communication and education through social media. Food fortification was another avenue for improving nutrition.
27. **Cost-effective data collection, surveillance and monitoring of food security, nutrition and livelihoods.** Digitalization in data collection required technologies, infrastructure and governance along the food chains. Actions were required for data governance, data privacy and transparency to avoid inappropriate use.
28. **Upscaling digitalization across the food system.** Digitalization was a key driver to transform food systems and improve efficiency through information and communications technology infrastructure, extension services and other enabling conditions. Digitalization should ensure inclusive access to technologies and skills development, avoid exclusion and narrow the digital divide between rural and urban areas and between men and women.
29. **Strengthening urban agriculture and short value chains to improve nutrition for the urban poor.** More countries were promoting urban food through incentives, regulations and accessible technologies. Urban food governance was needed to protect the environment, minimize pollution and ensure safe food for human health.
30. **Leveraging social protection systems to enhance food security and nutrition.** Expanding social protection required collaboration with other sectors such as health, education and agriculture as well as the involvement of civil society.
31. **Stronger investments in disaster and pandemic preparedness.** Greater investments were needed in education and research, disaster and pandemic preparedness, and early warning, monitoring and response systems, especially in rural areas and among small-scale enterprises.
32. **Increase women's access to productive resources, technology and skills.** Greater women's participation was needed in policies to improve access to productive assets such as land, better training and skills development, rural services, and incentives to engage in agriculture and urban farming.
33. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good health and well-being) covered the areas below.
34. It was highlighted that countries should focus on strengthening health systems to achieve more equitable coverage of health services, including sexual, reproductive, maternal and newborn health services. Countries should strengthen the capacity of their health workforce, paying particular attention to services for vulnerable population groups and those in fragile settings.
35. Innovations in the provision of health care should be explored to ensure coordination and continuity of care using new technologies. To achieve better coverage and quality of health services, it was recommended that countries invest in health and logistics management information systems, strengthen data quality and improve the availability of disaggregated data.

36. Quality of care should be improved using human-centred approaches to reach those left behind and promote efficient and equitable care while maintaining quality across populations. Countries should increase engagement and awareness among health and non-health stakeholders, promote health in all policies, ensure inclusiveness and adopt policy frameworks that promote integrated approaches between environmental, animal and human health.

37. It was highlighted that health expenditures should be increased, including to improve domestic resource mobilization and ensure that all countries had allocated sufficient resources to strengthen their health systems and finance their national health plans, including pandemics and other emergency preparedness and response plans.

38. In conclusion, the round table invited all countries to sustain and protect the progress that had been made thus far in the region and to recover the gains lost during the pandemic. It pointed out that health for all was within reach and urged renewed commitment to reduce inequities and to improve quality of health services using data-driven interventions and cross-sectoral partnerships for innovation.

39. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth) covered several areas. The round table acknowledged the setback that countries in the region were facing in their capacities to advance on the numerous lofty targets of Goal 8 as economies and labour markets were still reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who had been most affected by the crisis were those already among society's most vulnerable, including women, youth, informal workers and migrant workers. The crisis thus made it even more urgent for governments, workers' and employers' organizations and civil society organizations to work together to come up with durable solutions to create job-rich sustainable economic growth that benefited all segments of the population.

40. Among the numerous policy areas highlighted by the round table to advance progress on Sustainable Development Goal 8, particular emphasis was placed on the importance of integrated planning to promote the principles of the Goal and collectively design and implement policies and programmes. A call was made to strengthen labour market institutions for ensuring effective and inclusive labour market governance. The need to extend the reach of labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for vulnerable groups was emphasized, with consideration given to women, youth, people with disabilities, home-based workers and migrant workers. One labour right that was highlighted in particular was occupational safety and health, and the round table called for a renewal of commitments to protecting all workers from the current and future pandemics and other emerging occupational, safety and health hazards.

41. Other policy areas highlighted included stepping up investments in human capital to better facilitate labour market transitions; scaling up investment in decent work, including for informal workers; and paying particular attention, including through enhanced public investment, to the recognition of unpaid care work, the advancement of equal pay and the removal of all barriers to women's labour force participation.

42. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced inequalities) covered the areas below.

43. **Increase investment in social protection.** All countries in the region needed to step up investments in universal, accessible, gender-sensitive and disaster-responsive social protection to address inequalities.

44. **Promote decent job creation and equal pay.** Policies should be developed across the four pillars of decent work, comprising principles and rights at work, job creation, social protection and social dialogue.

45. **Address discrimination.** Recognizing that inequalities were often the result of discriminatory laws, policies and social practices, Governments should adopt and implement effective anti-discrimination agendas.

46. **Protect the most vulnerable from the impact of natural and human-caused hazards.** As demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the most vulnerable were disproportionately affected by shocks and unexpected disruptions, and inequality gaps widened as a result. It was essential to address the disempowerment of marginalized communities and their lack of voice and visibility as a root cause of vulnerability.

47. **Address inequalities faced by migrants.** Efforts to achieve equality must include all migrants, including addressing inequality as a driver of displacement.

48. **Identify the furthest behind through sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data.** Identifying the furthest behind through rigorous analysis and evidence would create a foundation for developing policies to reduce inequality.

49. **Address the digital divide.** The ongoing pandemic had demonstrated how digitalization could exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. Specific attention should be given to the existing and projected future digital divide in the region as it pertained to the socioeconomically disadvantaged, older people and people with disabilities.

50. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production) covered the following areas:

(a) Adopting efficient plastic waste management systems, including the key need for strong regulatory and legal frameworks, national road maps and support for local governments to invest in capital and infrastructure;

(b) Strengthening sustainable consumption and production monitoring systems and indicators;

(c) Increasing awareness-raising on sustainable consumption and production and on Sustainable Development Goal 12;

(d) Mainstreaming approaches by integrating sustainable consumption and production into core national strategies and more holistic approaches to policies that addressed production as well as lifestyles and consumption;

(e) Empowering women entrepreneurs to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, including financing women entrepreneurs involved in sustainable products and services, providing capacity-building, ensuring their access to technology, designing supporting policies and establishing financial frameworks;

(f) Promoting green recovery as the engine for COVID-19 recovery, including the removal of subsidies for energy products and the reallocation of that revenue towards social welfare and social safety nets;

(g) Enhancing stakeholder involvement, including in the private sector, communities and the informal sector;

(h) Strengthening frameworks for sustainable consumption and production, with possible supportive policies including strict industrial standards on environmental protection and pollution mitigation, the internalization of environmental externalities into the price of goods and services, and strict standards on air pollution and emissions from vehicles;

(i) Accelerating efforts to implement the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns;

(j) The region must adopt an integrated circular economic model that strengthened resource efficiency and improved waste management;

(k) Strengthening capacity-building, technical and financial support, including strengthening domestic support and the development of financial instruments at the national level and collaborating on climate finance.

51. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 13 (Climate action) covered the areas below.

52. To raise the ambition levels in the nationally determined contributions, countries must take ambitious climate action to achieve the 1.5° C pathway, including through decarbonization, reducing gas use, transitioning to renewable energy, and commitments to carbon neutrality, while increasing resilience and adaptation efforts. Countries must seize the opportunities presented by COVID-19 recoveries to accelerate climate and disaster risk reduction and align them with green recoveries which avoid climate-intensive actions. Redesigning finance and investment systems to make them compatible with climate action was a key component of such recoveries. Climate action conditionality should be included in post-COVID-19 recovery packages. Reforms to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies and the integration of climate change and disaster risk reduction into public financial management and private investment were critical priorities. Climate finance should include a focus on adaptation and take into consideration loss and damage issues.

53. Adopting an inclusive whole-of-society approach could include the following measures:

(a) Enhanced institutional frameworks to support ambitious climate action;

(b) Enhanced capacities of local governments to accelerate local climate actions; and empowerment of local authorities and communities which must include access to finance, data and information, and capacity-building;

(c) Strengthening climate information services for vulnerable sectors and communities, integrating human rights approaches, and developing gender-responsive monitoring systems, data collection and applications; and policy actions which should include empowerment of youth, women, vulnerable and marginalized communities;

(d) Investments in environmentally and climate friendly technologies which benefit women by providing equal opportunities to green jobs;

(e) Mainstreaming climate change into education for sustainable development; climate change education which should leverage co-benefits with Sustainable Development Goal 4; and policies which should address disruption to educational opportunities resulting from climate change.

54. There was a general understanding at the round table that action must be accelerated and more ambitious and inclusive solutions must be developed to realize the climate targets.

55. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) covered the following areas:

(a) Uphold fundamental freedoms and ensure public access to information; prioritize States' accountability in ensuring access to information and freedom of expression; protect journalists, human rights and environmental defenders; and ensure that legislation meets international human rights standards;

(b) Ensure equal access to justice for all; explore innovations on e-justice while ensuring accessibility for all, including people with disabilities; and expand online court hearings and provide remote access to legal advice while upholding international standards relating to human rights and the rule of law;

(c) Strengthen environmental rule of law through effective legal frameworks, strong institutions, access to information and justice in environmental matters; and provide a safe enabling environment for environmental defenders, including indigenous peoples;

(d) Address discrimination and stigma; counter hate speech with freedom of expression, the right to information and public communication that rejects xenophobia, racism and all forms of intolerance; increase efforts to change negative social norms; and take a whole of society approach to address misinformation/disinformation both online and offline;

(e) Improve the collection and quality of data, particularly disaggregated data; strengthen national capacities for data collection, analysis and data prioritization, including to disaggregate data by sex, race, colour, age, language, religion, national, ethnic or social origin, disability, migration or other status;

(f) Increase efforts to eliminate gender-based violence and violence against children, including by addressing discrimination, harmful social norms and practices and gender stereotypes; strengthen laws, policies and national action plans and increase the capacity of frontline workers; and take additional measures for persons at heightened risk of violence;

(g) Strengthen responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels; increase efforts to promote the full, equal and meaningful participation of everyone in decision-making at all levels; commit to diversity, gender parity and equitable representation in decision-making bodies; and amend electoral codes and introduce temporary special measures to strengthen the participation of underrepresented groups;

(h) strengthen efforts towards providing a legal identity for all through universal civil registration and vital statistics; accelerate efforts towards universal registration of births, deaths and other vital events to achieve legal identity for all; and focus on hard-to-reach and marginalized groups to ensure registration for all.

56. The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) covered the areas below.

57. The round table underscored that strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the partnership for sustainable development was essential for implementing the 2030 Agenda. It noted that the Asia-Pacific region was not on track to meet any of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. To accelerate progress, deliberations focused on strengthening fair and open means of implementation and global partnerships that left no one behind.

58. While partners in the Asia-Pacific region were invited to mobilize resources and scale up South-South and triangular cooperation, the region would need to work on a comprehensive and concrete proposal to enhance its role and impact, particularly within the scope of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

59. The round table also underscored the criticality of investments in national data governance, stewardship and innovation to guarantee data accessibility, ownership and use, and in a shared vision of universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and ensure equitable coverage of all people and geographical areas, especially populations hardest hit by the pandemic.

60. Participants noted that public finance was critical for financing COVID-19 recovery packages and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially to provide for public goods and ensure equity. In that context, governments were called upon to widen tax bases and strengthen tax administration. Private sector finance needed to be leveraged at a much larger scale and directed more effectively to build back better and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

61. Lastly, participants noted that contraction in trade had shrunk the fiscal space of developing countries to combat the COVID-19 crisis. Amid the global shift towards the digital economy, participants called for the acceleration of trade digitalization to make trade more inclusive and increase access to developed markets. They stressed the need to provide sufficient policy space for countries to address the crisis, and to facilitate technology transfer towards developing countries, including with regard to closing the digital divide.

62. Following the delivery of the summaries of the round table outcomes, member State and other delegations addressed the Forum. Several delegations informed the Forum of their efforts to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into their national planning and of their progress on the Goals including in the context of the pandemic and highlighted the crucial need to monitor and track progress on the Goals, especially with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic.

63. The Forum stressed the need for regional collaboration. Specific areas of need included understanding the effects of the pandemic on the Sustainable Development Goals; a coordinated and integrated response to the pandemic rooted in the framework of the Goals; and enhancing collective efforts to improve data collection and analysis.

64. The Forum was informed about the discussions of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme, in which the Assembly highlighted that the pandemic created threats but also opportunities to transform people's relationship with nature

through green recovery packages. Some delegates also stressed that the pandemic was an opportunity to review the current development models to be more just and more environment and people centred. One delegate highlighted the importance of the regional follow-up and review processes for the Sustainable Development Goals, and recommended that specific solutions be proposed to address systemic barriers to implementation and that the links between the global, regional and national follow-up and review processes be strengthened and more inclusive.

## **V. Strengthening follow-up and review to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

65. A panel discussion was held on sharing experiences in the preparation of voluntary national reviews. The panel highlighted the fact that more ambitious objectives were set by countries preparing their second or third voluntary national reviews. Generally, second and third voluntary national reviews provided deeper analysis, and the process of developing them was more inclusive and innovative. Deepening stakeholder engagement was seen as a strategy to enhance the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and panellists pointed to the need to include civil society organizations, marginalized groups, academia, and environmental and youth groups in the voluntary national review processes. The second voluntary national review was also an opportunity to better analyse the situation of the most vulnerable groups. It was recognized that data collection should involve not only national statistical offices but also business entities and civil society groups.

66. The Forum noted that several countries had engaged in online consultation processes and written surveys to adapt to the pandemic. It was further noted that parliamentarians were important stakeholders in consultation and in building accountability in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

67. Delegations presented key features and lessons learned from their voluntary national review processes, emphasizing stakeholder engagement and the need to localize the Sustainable Development Goals and stressing aspects of data gathering and the alignment of reporting processes. Innovative approaches to promoting the Sustainable Development Goals included utilizing them as an instrument for the revitalization of local communities, developing Goal awards and providing financial incentives to cities. One country developed an unofficial voluntary national review on an annual basis, which was used to assess progress made in implementation at the national and local levels.

68. The Forum noted advances regarding planning frameworks and the localization of targets to ensure a whole-of-society approach. The importance of aligning Sustainable Development Goal reporting and reviews with surveys, policy reviews and reporting obligations such as those included in the human rights conventions was underlined. Holistic planning approaches were also urged to ensure social embeddedness and coherence of policy frameworks. New partnerships were needed to mobilize more funds for implementation efforts related to the Sustainable Development Goals. One delegation urged United Nations agencies to recognize the data collected and provided through the national Sustainable Development Goal indicator matrices as inputs to data portals and United Nations reporting on the Goals.

69. Delegations of major groups and other stakeholders called for urgent attention to the loss of life among those asserting their civil rights, to reverse the trends of shrinking civic and democratic space and to promote inclusion in policymaking, transparency and accountability as well as to tackle systemic barriers, including global economic policies that countered progress. There was a further call to ensure a voice for sexual and gender minorities in addition to their protection and empowerment. Specific indicators had been developed to track development justice. The institutionalization of multi-stakeholder platforms was emphasized to ensure all voices were heard.

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