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**Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in
Asia and the Pacific: consideration of building institutional
capacity and adopting innovative approaches to strengthen
the social dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals**

Innovative approaches and modalities to enhance the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals

Note by the secretariat

Summary

In this document, consideration is given to the key modalities for implementing the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including national ownership, institutional capacity, finance and budgeting, technology, partnership, monitoring and review. In that context, it contains highlights of good practices and effective approaches to achieving sustainable development in a balanced and integrated manner.

With a view to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) provides a comprehensive intergovernmental and knowledge platform that assists member States in developing and implementing their nationally owned sustainable development strategies, strengthening institutional capacity, mobilizing financial resources, harnessing technology and innovations to reduce inequalities, supporting multi-stakeholder engagement and bringing about transformative change for all peoples and the planet, in partnership for prosperity and peace.

The Committee is invited to review the issues and proposed recommendations in the document, and provide the secretariat with guidance for its future work in the area of social development, particularly in realizing the shared vision of the 2030 Agenda.

* E/ESCAP/CSD(4)/L.1.

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I. Introduction

1. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Governments globally have committed to achieving a comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred set of universal and transformative goals and targets, which integrate the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.¹ In addition to articulating the 17 integrated and indivisible Sustainable Development Goals, Governments specified fundamental means of implementing the 2030 Agenda: partnership; technology; capacity development; finance; trade; policy and institutional coherence; and monitoring.

2. As a complement to “Challenges in implementing the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals” (E/ESCAP/CSD(4)/1), this background paper prepared for the Committee on Social Development at its fourth session takes into consideration the aforementioned implementation modalities, with a particular focus on the social dimension of sustainable development.

3. In taking into account the comprehensive and interlinked nature of the Sustainable Development Goals, the paper contains an outline of some of the key modalities that are prerequisites for the successful implementation of an integrated strategy to achieve the Goals. Emphasis is given to key areas of institutional strengthening required to ensure better coordination and effective implementation of national development plans to achieve the Goals. It also highlights the steps already being taken by countries to position themselves to address the Goals to promote peer learning. The implementation modalities elaborated below should be supplemented by sector-specific actions for the Goals to be addressed effectively.

II. Ownership and political commitment

4. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, inclusive of the associated Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by United Nations Member States in September 2015, sets out an ambitious and transformative vision. In adopting the Agenda, Member States acknowledged that cohesive nationally owned sustainable development strategies, supported by integrated

¹ See General Assembly resolution 70/1, para. 2.

national financing frameworks, would be at the heart of their efforts. They also acknowledged that all Member States should implement “ambitious national responses to the overall implementation of [the] Agenda. These can support the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals and build on existing planning instruments, such as national development and sustainable development strategies”.² It is therefore widely acknowledged that successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires certain critical elements to be in place.

5. The first of these critical elements is political commitment at the highest level, whereby Governments place the 2030 Agenda at the centre of their national development plans and strategies. Several countries in the region have already started taking steps in this regard. The Government of Pakistan, for example, has launched a document entitled “Pakistan 2025: One Nation – One Vision”,³ which has been endorsed by the President and the Prime Minister. The document, which has been developed by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform in close consultation with the provinces, places the Sustainable Development Goals at the core of a comprehensive framework of actions to transform the country by 2025.

6. Second, cohesive national sustainable development plans and strategies must be integrated and multisectoral, thereby embodying the comprehensive and interlinked nature of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The Government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and the United Nations jointly organized the 12th High Level Round Table Meeting 2015, which was chaired by the Prime Minister of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic. That meeting brought together 300 delegates from the Government, development partners, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to discuss the lessons learned from implementation of the Seventh Five-Year National Socio-economic Development Plan (2011-2015) and using the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to underpin the Eighth Five-Year National Socio-economic Development Plan (2016-2020).⁴ The Government of Cambodia developed a forward-looking plan called the Climate Change Strategic Plan for Gender and Climate Change (2013-2023), which notes the interconnection between gender equality, women’s roles, poverty reduction and socioeconomic development. The plan is designed to respond to the needs of vulnerable women and men in rural and urban areas, and increase women’s participation in decision-making at all levels of governance as well as women’s employment opportunities in greening and cleaning the Cambodian economy.

7. Third, integration and coordination should be undertaken at all levels of government, from national to provincial to local levels. This has been proven to be an effective way to reach the populations that are left furthest behind. As many countries are large and/or federal in structure, concrete actions should be taken at the provincial, city and local levels. The Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments for the Post-2015 Development Agenda towards Habitat III is an example of one such initiative under which localization of implementation of the 2030 Agenda is advocated

² Ibid., para. 78.

³ Pakistan, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform, *Pakistan Vision 2025: One Nation – One Vision*. Available from www.pc.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Pakistan-Vision-2025.pdf (accessed 15 January 2016).

⁴ See <http://rtm.org.la/high-level-round-table-meeting-2015/> (accessed 15 January 2016).

and the capacity of local and regional governments is enhanced to address the Sustainable Development Goals.⁵

III. Institutional capacity

8. Institutions and institutional mechanisms are essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. To this end, there is a need to strengthen institutional and technical capacity to manage the interrelated and indivisible social, economic and environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda. Institutional strengthening is applicable to all government entities, given that a “whole-of-government” approach, characterized by effective and high-level coordination across ministries, is a critical means of promoting coherence across policies, plans and programmes for sustainable development. For example, in Pacific island countries, where lives are influenced by the ocean and climate change, government institutions may more effectively address the challenges to sustainable development by coordinating initiatives related to preventing depletion of fisheries, controlling transnational crime and advancing trade regimes that equitably benefit small and large countries.

9. The ongoing challenge of integrating the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development through coordinated and capable action across institutions was highlighted in the review of national reports prepared for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.⁶ There is a risk that sustainable development is misconstrued as development focused on environmental matters, with “social” concerns, such as health, education, inclusion, equality and empowerment, being of subsidiary importance. Thus, at the institutional level, it is critical that policymakers and practitioners understand and embrace the interdependent dimensions of sustainable development, such that the development frameworks and implementation strategies strategically address the multiple needs, circumstances and priorities of all women, men, girls and boys.

10. A particular government institution that has a key role to play in implementing the 2030 Agenda is the national statistical office. This is because reliable, current and disaggregated data are essential for assessing progress and identifying challenges towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for all. Thus, the national statistical office plays a key role in collecting, analysing and disseminating data that may be used to guide planning and for monitoring. In terms of institutional capacity, investment in gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data in particular are critical to implementation of the 2030 Agenda, given that gender is a cross-cutting issue and gender equality is a prerequisite for the achievement of the Goals. Similarly, if all persons without distinction are to benefit from actions arising from the 2030 Agenda, institutional capacity must exist in relation to civil registration and vital statistics.

11. Further capacity is required across government institutions with respect to targeting the population groups that are deemed to be vulnerable, marginalized or otherwise disadvantaged, such as women, persons with disabilities, indigenous populations, sexual minorities and elderly persons.

⁵ See www.gtf2016.org/#!why/c1w2r.

⁶ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and United Nations Development Programme, *Synthesis of National Reports for Rio+20* (New York, 2012). Available from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/742RIO+20_Synthesis_Report_Final.pdf.

The ability to target policies, programmes and service provision at the specific needs and priorities of various persons within a national population is integral to reducing inequality and promoting shared prosperity.

12. The capacity of government institutions to actively engage with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals may be strengthened through partnership with civil society and private-sector actors. Through partnership, knowledge may be shared, multiple perspectives on a particular issue considered and ownership of resulting actions promoted. Multi-stakeholder ownership is a foundational element of sustainable development. At the regional level, partnership that fosters institutional strengthening is facilitated through the United Nations system, development banks and other development actors. For example, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has partnered with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to support pro-poor waste management programmes engaging the Governments, civil society organizations and the private sector. Civil society contribution to strengthening institutions is evident in communities in such countries as Bangladesh and Nepal where innovative approaches to waste management have been adopted. Livelihood opportunities have been created in these communities by promoting recycling and using renewable energy sources. The relevant government institutions may analyse and adopt such initiatives for the prospect of scaling up to create a wider impact in tackling both social and environmental challenges.

13. Alongside civil society and the private sector, academic institutions play an important role in contributing to the evidence base from which institutions can act in a strategic manner. An example of the contribution of academic institutions to sustainable development is provided by the Design and Social Development Research Centre of Yunnan University in China and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, which developed a community-run service model for migrant families that provides education, livelihood, health and childcare services. The lessons learned from this community model have been shared with government institutions to strengthen public-provided social and economic services for migrants.

14. As well as strengthening institutional capacity through cooperation and collaboration, a key capability in implementing the 2030 Agenda pertains to good governance, through which there is accountability, transparency and absence of corruption. Thus, institutional mechanisms and cultures that enable and embrace accountability and transparency need to be encouraged, so as to promote participatory action, including at the decision-making levels, with access to justice to redress discriminatory practices and inequalities. This is particularly important for women and girls, persons with disabilities, displaced populations and persons otherwise denied the right to development. In this respect, participatory budgeting is a specific means by which institutional capacity and an all-of-society approach to sustainable development can be pursued. Participatory budgeting supports government institutions in, for example, engaging the various sectors of society, understanding particular needs and circumstances, targeting expenditure and correcting imbalances in development outcomes.

15. With institutional strengthening, Governments across the region may have the capacities necessary to address the range of inequalities that exist between peoples within and across countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Public institutions, in partnership with other development actors, may facilitate collaborative development, implementation, monitoring and review of diverse and targeted social policies, plans and programmes that concretely meet the priority needs of all persons, so that no person is left behind. In this

regard, ESCAP works closely with various line ministries of member States and other partners to develop evidence-based policies and programmes that address a broad spectrum of social issues, including ageing, migration, disability and youth as well as gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

IV. Finance and budgeting

16. Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a complex issue, as it concerns a range of national, regional and global matters and engagement of a diverse array of stakeholders. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, for example, itemizes seven action areas: domestic public resources; domestic and international private business and finance; international development cooperation; international trade; debt and debt sustainability; systemic issues (to advance financial stability); and science, technology, innovation and capacity-building.⁷ These action areas are reiterated in the 2030 Agenda, under Sustainable Development Goal 17, with targets to address, inter alia, domestic resource mobilization, official development assistance and debt sustainability.⁸

17. Across the range of financing modalities, and underpinning the desired cohesive nationally owned sustainable development strategies supported by integrated national financing frameworks, core principles must prevail if the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are to be realized. This is particularly the case for financing the social dimensions of sustainable development, which should adhere to the principles of (a) respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights; (b) equality, equity and non-discrimination; (c) accountability; (d) transparency; (e) participation and partnership; (f) efficiency; and (g) sustainability.⁹ From this foundation, Governments may pursue a compilation of financing modalities, recalling that, as stated in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and in the context of an enabling international economic environment, chief responsibility for economic and social development lies with national Governments.¹⁰

18. Among the various financing modalities, taxation is critical to Governments having the resources to tackle systemic challenges to development, given that it is a predictable and sustainable source of revenue. There are multiple manifestations of taxation that Governments can utilize to finance such national priorities as poverty reduction, food security, health, gender equality, good-quality education for all and peace and security: taxation of personal and corporate incomes, consumption, property, inheritance, trade, natural resources and interest earned on financial assets. Governments can also levy fees for public services, sell public assets or administer hypothecated (“ear-marked”) taxes. Whatever combination of

⁷ See General Assembly resolution 69/313.

⁸ See General Assembly resolution 70/1.

⁹ The selected principles are drawn from the Charter of the United Nations; General Assembly resolutions 55/2 and 69/108; the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development; reports of the Human Rights Council that address such issues as foreign debt and financing (e.g. A/HRC/20/23, A/HRC/26/28); and the rights-based approach to development (https://undg.org/main/undg_document/the-human-rights-based-approach-to-development-cooperation-towards-a-common-understanding-among-un-agencies/).

¹⁰ See General Assembly resolution /69/313, para. 9.

taxation modalities are selected, with the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all persons without distinction,¹¹ Governments are obliged to ensure that their taxation systems contribute to, rather than detract from, equality and social justice.

19. Across Asia and the Pacific, opportunities exist to strengthen taxation systems and administrations. For example, by instituting reforms to close their tax gaps, such low tax performers as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand¹² could strengthen their capacity to finance sustainable development for all women and men, girls and boys.

20. Given that “[t]ax evasion and avoidance not only affect horizontal equity as individuals and companies with the same capacity to pay are not contributing in the same way, but also reduces the redistributive impact of tax policy”,¹³ preventing tax evasion and avoidance is a further key strategy for increasing the financial revenue for social sector expenditure. The tangible consequence of curbing illicit financial flows was recognized in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, wherein Governments stated that they would redouble efforts to substantially reduce illicit financial flows by 2030, with a view to eventually eliminating them, including by combating tax evasion and corruption through strengthened national regulation and increased international cooperation.¹⁴ Governments may thus increase their revenues by, for example, strengthening legislation, minimizing tax exemptions and deductions, enforcing substantial penalties for non-compliance, closing tax havens, implementing the Financial Action Task Force standards to combat money laundering,¹⁵ and becoming party (if not already one) to the Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters.¹⁶ Governments may also consider establishing a progressive tax system with clear redistributive aims, which is an important tool to reduce income inequalities.

21. In support of Government efforts in tax reforms, ESCAP is planning to establish an Asia-Pacific forum for cooperation on tax matters as a knowledge platform to strengthen national tax administrations and promote regional tax cooperation.

22. In addition to taxation, for many developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region official development assistance is a relatively secure and

¹¹ For example, see article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (available from www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/) and article 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (available from www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx).

¹² *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2015* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.II.F.7).

¹³ From a statement to the Financial Transparency Coalition and Latindadd Conference “Hidden Money, Hidden Resources: Financing Development with Transparency”, Lima, 14 and 15 October 2014. See www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Initiative-Statement.pdf.

¹⁴ See General Assembly resolution 69/313, para. 23.

¹⁵ www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/fatfrecommendations/documents/fatf-recommendations.html.

¹⁶ www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/taxation/the-multilateral-convention-on-mutual-administrative-assistance-in-tax-matters_9789264115606-en#page1.

long-term source of financing for sustainable development. Additionally, the pool of official development assistance available for investment in the social sector would expand if each economically advanced country fulfilled its 1970 commitment to progressively increase its official development assistance to the developing countries to reach a minimum net amount of 0.7 per cent of its gross national product at market prices,¹⁷ as reaffirmed in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.¹⁸

23. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda also delineates a role for the private sector – corporations, businesses, companies which exist for profit and their foundations – in financing sustainable development. As a source of financing for development, social impact investment by private-sector actors is receiving increasing attention and gaining momentum. In responding to this interest, the Group of Eight, for example, established the Global Social Impact Investment Steering Group in 2015 for the purpose of promoting a unified view of impact investment, facilitating knowledge exchange and encouraging policy change in national markets.¹⁹ Social impact investing is gaining momentum in the Asia-Pacific region. Intellect in India and the Asian Venture Philanthropy Network and Shujog based in Singapore are among the active networks that promote social impact investing and innovative business solutions, to help build and scale up profitable and sustainable enterprises dedicated to social and environmental change.²⁰

24. Additionally, mobilization of the private sector in financing the social dimension of sustainable development seems possible given evidence of interest in the environmentally oriented Sustainable Development Goals. For example, elements of the private sector have expressed support for a carbon tax. Broad support for a tax on carbon dioxide emissions that come from burning fossil fuels has been expressed, for instance in the World Bank statement “We support putting a price on carbon”,²¹ in an article by Peter Bakker, chief executive officer of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development²² and in a call for action by the Carbon Pricing Panel.²³ If momentum can be generated around the specific issue of climate change, it is conceivable that private-sector stakeholders could similarly support strengthening the financing of the more socially oriented elements of the 2030 Agenda.

25. One modality through which private-sector entities are financing sustainable development is public-private partnerships. There is, however, a need for public-private partnerships to broaden the focus from the favoured infrastructure, telecommunications and energy sectors, to embrace the social dimension of sustainable development. Successful investments through this modality are suggested by the partnership of the United Nations Trust Fund

¹⁷ See General Assembly resolution 25/2626, para. 43. Available from <http://www.un-documents.net/a25r2626.htm>.

¹⁸ See General Assembly resolution 69/313, para. 51.

¹⁹ www.socialimpactinvestment.org/.

²⁰ United States Agency for International Development, *Gender Lens Investing in Asia* (September 2015).

²¹ Available from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSDNET/Resources/carbon-pricing-supporters-list-092114.pdf>.

²² See www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-bakker/put-a-price-on-carbon-now_b_5882236.html.

²³ www.carbonpricingleadership.org/carbon-pricing-panel.

to End Violence against Women with, for example, Yuwei Designs, Music for Life International, Soko and Fash United.²⁴

26. One product of financially successful businesses is a philanthropic enterprise. The financing available through philanthropic venture is seemingly sizeable, suggesting that efforts to direct philanthropic funds to initiatives oriented to social justice may be well spent. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimated the philanthropy value of all Development Assistance Committee donors for 2011 at \$31.5 billion. In the Asia-Pacific region, Japan is a key source of such value, with philanthropic contributions to international development having totalled approximately \$5.51 billion in 2010.²⁵

27. In relation to private-sector engagement in development, it is important to recall that ultimate responsibility for the fulfilment of all human rights for all persons, including the right to development, rests with Governments, and that the operations and investments of the private sector in development must be regulated.²⁶ As stressed by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Ms. Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, States should take measures to ensure that business enterprises for which the State is in a position to regulate, including legal, accounting and other specialized firms that assist in tax abuse, do not participate in or facilitate tax abuse or illicit financial flows, given that such actions have a detrimental impact on the realization of economic, social and cultural rights.²⁷

28. Accompanying the adoption of financing modalities and regulations, it is crucial that Governments implement comprehensive and socially responsive planning and budgeting. For instance, the majority of countries in the Asia-Pacific region have increased investments in social protection, which has proven to be an effective measure to tackle disparities in income and unequal access to health care and education as well as to empower vulnerable populations.²⁸ By reducing income and social inequalities, social protection also contributes to environmental sustainability. For example, Australia, Japan and New Zealand, which spend more than 40 per cent of their total government expenditures on social protection, have good environmental track records as evidenced by their Environmental Performance Index of over 70.

29. Investments in basic social protection are increasingly recognized as feasible even for low-income countries.²⁹ As well-designed social protection

²⁴ See www.unwomen.org/en/trust-funds/un-trust-fund-to-end-violence-against-women.

²⁵ Center for Global Prosperity, *The 2013 Index of Global Philanthropy and Remittances with a Special Report on Emerging Economies* (Washington, D.C., Hudson Institute, 2013). Available from www.hudson.org/research/9914-2013-index-of-global-philanthropy-and-remittances-with-a-special-report-on-emerging-economies.

²⁶ See General Assembly resolution 69/313, para. 36.

²⁷ See A/HRC/26/28 and Corr.1, para. 6.

²⁸ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Time for Equality: The Role of Social Protection in Reducing Inequalities in Asia and the Pacific* (ST/ESCAP/2735).

²⁹ *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2013* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.II.F.2); International Labour Organization, *World Social Protection Report 2014-15: Building Economic Recovery, Inclusive Development and Social Justice* (Geneva, 2014).

systems can play a key role in reducing inequalities and be conducive to all three dimensions of sustainable development, finding the fiscal space for social protection is a question of political will.

30. In many developing countries, social protection has typically been financed through a combination of government tax revenues and official development assistance. However, countries in Asia and the Pacific have increasingly begun to use innovative schemes, such as impact investing, microfinance, sovereign wealth funds and third-party payer systems, as a complement to traditional resources to finance social protection. Examples from the region include the Human Development Fund in Mongolia, which since 2009 has been used for providing health care, housing and education through accumulated excess revenues from the mining sector.³⁰ Another is the Afat Vimo microinsurance mechanism in India, set up in the aftermath of the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat. The All India Disaster Mitigation Institute brought together entrepreneurs and stakeholders, including commercial and public insurance companies, to develop Afat Vimo, which covers holders, mainly low-income households, against 19 types of disaster at a small premium.³¹

31. Gender-responsive planning and budgeting has been identified as fundamental to the translation of political commitments into policies, legislation, action plans, programmes and services that deliver concrete outcomes for women and men, girls and boys.³² The Government of Indonesia has institutionalized gender-responsive budgeting at both national and local levels, with multisectoral coordination and planning led by an interministerial steering committee and engaging a range of actors, including civil society groups. In the Philippines, all government departments are required to integrate gender into their planning, with at least 5 per cent of the total agency budget allocated to supporting gender and development activities.

32. In mobilizing domestic resources for social development, many countries in the region have developed national investment cases, wherein a strategic, evidence-based investment approach is adopted to optimize funding allocations and reduce inefficiencies. For instance, to address the spread of HIV infection, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam have developed national HIV investment cases to explore options for innovative funding and service delivery, to identify specific steps to enhance equity and

³⁰ Alicia Campi, “Mongolia’s quest to balance human development in its booming mineral-based economy”, *Brookings East Asia Commentary*, No. 56 (January 2012). Available from www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/01/10-mongolia-campi.

³¹ United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the United Nations Development Programme, *Building Disaster Resilient Communities: Good Practices and Lessons Learned* (Geneva, 2007). Available from www.unisdr.org/files/596_10307.pdf.

³² European Commission, ILO International Training Centre and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), *Handbook on Costing Gender Equality* (New York, UN Women, 2015); Stephanie Seguino, “Financing for gender equality: reframing and prioritizing public expenditures to promote gender equality”, UN Women, Policy Brief (2013, UN Women) (available from www.gender-budgets.org/index.php?option=com_joomdoc&view=documents&path=suggested-readings/seguino-s-paper&Itemid=587); Rhonda Sharp and Ray Broomhill, “Budgeting for equality: the Australian experience”, *Feminist Economics*, vol. 8, No.1 (2002).

inclusiveness for key populations and to use available evidence to understand better the health and economic benefits of interventions.

33. In view of the various financing measures available and noting that reliance on a single revenue source is neither sound nor sufficient, Governments may wish to pursue pluralistic funding, drawing upon and coordinating a range of options, such as taxation, international financial assistance, public-private partnerships, foreign direct investment and remittances. In this way, Governments may capitalize upon the advantages of different financing measures while compensating for particular shortcomings.

V. Technology

34. Technology is recognized throughout the Sustainable Development Goals as a key enabler for development, including across the social dimension. A key example of this acknowledgement is expressed in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 5, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Target 5.b of that Goal calls upon Member States to enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.

35. The valuing of technology as a tool for change is particularly important in a context where a laissez-faire approach to the dissemination of technology has been associated with inequalities between specific groups of people, including women, with respect to access and benefiting from the opportunities that modern forms of technology can provide. For example, a survey by Groupe Speciale Mobile Association (GSMA) across 11 low- and middle-income countries found that women are 14 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone than men, a gap that increases to 38 per cent in South Asia. Moreover, the capacity of people to use such innovations varies significantly. GSMA found that lower levels of literacy among women who did own mobile phones reduced their ability to use these devices.³³

36. Overcoming social, economic and environmental barriers to technology can be a key enabler of sustainable development, particular for marginalized and vulnerable groups of people. For example, in Bangladesh, where more people have access to mobile phones than sanitation,³⁴ the Mobile Alliance for Maternal Action uses text and voice messages to provide messages on ensuring healthy pregnancies. The messages are tailored to pregnant women and to the partners of pregnant women. The programme is based on research about mobile phone access and usage, as well as the needs of users, with a view to ensure that the methodology is effective. In addition, the initiative established partnerships with private-sector organizations (mobile phone operators) to address issues of costs and to ensure that the messages do not overload the telecommunications system. Alignment with the national objectives of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare was also ensured.³⁵

37. In Viet Nam, an online information platform on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS was established to work against the rise in the number of

³³ GSMA, *Accelerating Digital Literacy: Empowering Women to Use the Mobile Internet* (London, 2015). Available from www.gsma.com/connectedwomen/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/DigitalLiteracy_v6_WEB_Singles.pdf.

³⁴ See <http://mobilemamaalliance.org/sites/default/files/BangladeshCaseStudy2014.pdf>.

³⁵ Ibid.

unwanted pregnancies and HIV cases in 2003.³⁶ The Center for Creative Initiatives in Health and Population behind this platform, supported by the Ministry of Information and Communications, utilizes the Internet to offer free online counselling, information dissemination and e-mail discussion to Vietnamese people.

38. Although technology is recognized in the Sustainable Development Goals as an enabler, its impact cannot be fully realized without full digital inclusion. Universal Service Obligation Funds are an example of a financing mechanism to promote digital inclusion, which is being implemented throughout the Asia-Pacific region, including in Australia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Thailand. Based on the principle of providing good-quality telecommunications services at affordable rates for all, the Universal Service Obligation Fund supports initiatives and programmes that promote digital inclusion. In India, the funds are directed to promoting access in rural and low-income areas, by, for example, supporting rural telecommunications infrastructure development with innovative powering solutions and marketing techniques.³⁷ In Thailand, the Fund is used to finance an initiative for persons with disabilities so that they will have access to information and books through the Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY). Further efforts are required to ensure that such funds are managed and allocated in a transparent and accountable manner, which focuses on addressing root causes of digital exclusion rather than piecemeal interventions.

39. Digital literacy skills will also be an increasingly vital skill for the global workforce. Information and communications technology (ICT) is being integrated into educational and vocational training programmes to ensure that future generations are equipped with the necessary ICT and technological skills. In Myanmar, the Ministry of Education, in partnership with Russian and Vietnamese mobile phone companies, developed a 30-year plan on ICT development and integration into education (2000-2030). As a result, by 2009, 33,947 e-learning centres had been established, and college students are required to undergo 30 hours of ICT literacy courses. In Bangladesh, Young Power in Social Action, a social development organization with financial support from Microsoft and the World Bank, established a training programme to encourage and nurture skills among persons with disabilities.³⁸

40. Technology can be utilized to help bridge gaps in service provision, reaching the most marginalized portions of a population, and so making the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for all. Successful development and application of technology requires thorough research as to context and needs, with the collection and analysis of disaggregated data. To facilitate meaningful and tangible changes, it is essential that a social dimension be integrated into technology-related policies, so that they underpin the reduction of inequalities.

³⁶ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technologies and Development, *A Digital Shift: Youth and ICT for Development – best practices* (New York, 2009). Available from <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/gaid/unpan036084.pdf>.

³⁷ www.usof.gov.in/usof-cms/home.jsp.

³⁸ World Bank, “Empowering youth with disabilities in Bangladesh: providing ICT skills”, 26 November 2013. Available from <http://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/empowering-youth-disabilities-bangladesh-providing-ict-skills-0>.

VI. Partnership

41. In order to eradicate entrenched inequalities and achieve the broad and interconnected targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States have committed to building strong and innovative partnerships, as expressed in Sustainable Development Goal 17. According to the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the 2030 Agenda will require partnerships that are built on principles of common humanity and mutual respect, have a new spirit and are completely transparent.³⁹ Shared sentiment as to the significance of partnership as a key means of implementing the 2030 Agenda was also evidenced in a 2014 survey, in which 90 per cent of canvassed executives, managers and thought leaders agreed that sustainable development could not be achieved without collaboration.⁴⁰

42. Collaboration requires going beyond the scope of “business as usual” to leverage diverse expertise and resources from a range of players and sectors, fostering partnerships that can advance innovation, resource mobilization, knowledge and technology. The engagement of different actors, and thus perspectives, is also of inherent importance given the multidimensional nature of the 2030 Agenda, and the interconnected nature of its social, economic and environmental dimensions. Global partnerships are already being forged to promote the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including, for example, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, the Sustainable Development Goals Fund, and Business for 2030.

43. For implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific, partnerships – the voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task, and to share risks, responsibilities, resources and benefits⁴¹ – need to be inclusive, bringing together the various development stakeholders: Governments, parliaments, academia, civil society entities, the private sector and workers’ organizations.

44. As well as being inclusive, effective partnerships require clear articulation of purpose(s), roles, responsibilities, work plans and accountability mechanisms.⁴² In recognition of their size, scope, function, composition and processes, tailored governance mechanisms are required to ensure successful collaboration and realization of shared goals. Thus, governance mechanisms must facilitate accountable decision-making, innovation and action, alongside economic use of resources.

45. An example of accountability through partnership is the Accountability Framework established for the Sustainable Energy for All initiative, a partnership of Governments, investors, the business sector, civil society and United Nations entities to promote an energy transformation, as

³⁹ United Nations, *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development — the report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*. Available from www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf.

⁴⁰ A/70/296, para. 5.

⁴¹ See A/64/337, para. 8.

⁴² See A/70/296.

well as economic growth and social development.⁴³ The Framework was constructed to enable transparent recognition and tracking of voluntary commitments to the initiative, facilitating feedback and learning.⁴⁴ The Framework provides scope for flexibility and is intended as a living document that will evolve together with the partnership and country commitments.

46. A particular manifestation of partnership that is currently being pursued as a key means of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is the public-private partnership. The role of the private sector has expanded beyond the conventional public sector procurement of services by private companies to include the corporate sector as a partner and stakeholder in development cooperation and agenda-setting. One new and emerging area where the United Nations is engaging business is the humanitarian sector, where public-private partnerships are leveraging the resources, outreach and technology of the private sector to more effectively respond to humanitarian needs. Public-private partnerships can also be a means of catalysing efforts towards innovation. For example, the Global Pulse and Data for Climate Action are aimed at using big data, including from the private sector, to identify climate-change solutions by analysing mobile networks, social media, financial, retail and energy usage data to measure and strengthen resilience, examine risks and identify innovative solutions.⁴⁵

47. Measures to establish transparency and ensure that both accountability and integrity are in place to promote stronger partnerships between the United Nations and business, such as through guidelines developed by the United Nations Global Compact and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (A/HRC/17/31). There is still, however, a lack of comprehensive assessments of such partnerships, including their risks and added value, information which could inform a robust guidance framework. Moreover, there is concern with regard to the lack of the gender dimension in the overall discourse with the private sector, highlighting the critical need to ensure that such partnerships are hinged on core United Nations principles and values.

48. South-South cooperation features as another important modality for middle- and lower-income countries to share knowledge, expertise and resources to meet their development goals. The SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024 reaffirmed the importance of South-South cooperation in achieving sustainable development. Increasingly, the countries that are not members of the Development Assistance Committee are assuming a greater role in development assistance, highlighting the shifting landscape for development cooperation and partnership from that dominated by traditional OECD donor countries. In the Asia-Pacific region, China, India and Turkey have embraced South-South cooperation in their development efforts, as well as partnering with the United Nations and OECD Development Assistance Committee countries in triangular cooperation projects. It is critical for sustainable development in the region that the capacities of such countries be enhanced

⁴³ The aim of the Sustainable Energy for All initiative is to “bring strategic focus to individual actions, scale up existing best practices and successful initiatives, foster partnerships, and provide all stakeholders with clear indicators of progress toward the initiative’s objectives” (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1644se4all.pdf>).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ See A/70/296.

so that they could become stronger players in development cooperation and establish a more diversified funding base for development cooperation.⁴⁶

49. New players and patterns of cooperation are also emerging. In the context of rapid urbanization in some areas across Asia and the Pacific, local governments are increasingly prominent partners in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The exchange of experiences between developing countries with common priorities and challenges has proven to be mutually beneficial, particularly for fragile (fragile-to-fragile cooperation) and low-income countries.⁴⁷ With the emergence of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank, new players from the South are emerging to take their place on the development cooperation playing field. Alternative and flexible models of development cooperation should be forged to move beyond the North-South and South-South binaries in order to foster partnerships with emerging partners for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

50. As greater emphasis is placed on partnerships as a key modality to implement the 2030 Agenda, dedicated efforts and resources are required to shape and navigate these partnerships. As an interregional, multilateral, intergovernmental convener, ESCAP provides a useful platform for steering and promoting strong and innovative partnerships, underpinned by good governance and human rights. ESCAP has, for instance, fostered South-South cooperation in its technical capacity development, as well as in establishing partnerships with the private sector and other stakeholders. Additionally, as partnerships are created to implement the 2030 Agenda, further assessments are required to examine the development impacts of existing partnerships in order to develop methodologies and frameworks to guide good governance and modalities on partnerships. ESCAP is well positioned to serve as a regional hub for such research and knowledge about fostering partnerships for sustainable development.

VII. Follow-up and review

51. Follow-up and review of progress in implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is fundamental to the effective and efficient realization of the shared Goals. The significance of follow-up and review, at the national, regional and global levels, has been collectively stressed by Governments, as evinced in the claim that a robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review framework would make a vital contribution to implementation and would help countries to maximize and track progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda in order to ensure that no one was left behind.⁴⁸ Data, multi-stakeholder participation and various modalities are needed in order for the voluntary and country-led initiatives to result in documentation of process and outcome successes and obstacles that can continually inform policy development and implementation.

⁴⁶ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Multilateral Aid 2015: Better Partnerships for a Post-2015 World* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2015). Available from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264235212-en>.

⁴⁷ Rahul Chandran and Hannah Cooper, "Meeting the challenges of the 2030 Agenda: alternative forms of development cooperation and the United Nations", United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (United Nations University, 2015).

⁴⁸ See General Assembly resolution 70/1, para. 72.

52. Strategic implementation of the 2030 Agenda, such that the needs and interests of all persons are met, is contingent upon the collection, analysis and dissemination of good-quality, timely and reliable quantitative and qualitative data, disaggregated by, at the minimum, sex, age and location, as well as income, ethnicity, disability and other socially ascribed population markers. The national statistical offices will have key roles to play in applying a global indicator framework for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals in the particular contexts of their countries; such a framework is expected to be adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2016. In this respect, strengthening the technical and technological capacities of, and adequately resourcing, national statistical offices are critical measures. In terms of technology, Internet platforms, online databases, mobile networks and other innovative and evolving forms may provide economical and effective means of gathering and sharing data on the Sustainable Development Goals; such data can inform policies, plans and programmes.

53. The capacity of the national statistical offices to fulfil their challenging mandates is, in part, dependent upon cooperation and collaboration, particularly given that the collection, analysis and dissemination of data should be an empowering process engaging various stakeholders. Partnerships are thus another key element of effective monitoring and review of progress in implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Participatory and comprehensive review mechanisms, which extend from the local, through national, to regional and global levels, may take multiple forms. One example is provided by Bangladesh. In that country, national consultations resulted in the proposal to adopt participatory monitoring for accountability as a framework for implementing the 2030 Agenda. Underpinning that multi-stakeholder monitoring framework are, among others, Paulo Freire's participatory action research, concepts of social audits, commitment to public disclosure of information and identifying local solutions to local problems, while connecting to national priorities and the 2030 Agenda.⁴⁹ Beyond Bangladesh, the participants in people-centred, gender-sensitive monitoring and review processes, with a particular focus on the poorest and most vulnerable and those furthest behind,⁵⁰ will thus need to be drawn from parliaments, public service providers, local governments, the private sector, academia, workers' organizations, civil society and other development stakeholders, representing the diversity that characterizes the limited categories of women, men, girls and boys. Through such participation, the exchange of good practices can be maximized, as can shared and – depending on modality – experiential learning. The participatory aspect of constructive monitoring and review also needs particular emphasis because it is fundamental to duty-bearers enacting their responsibilities and to rights-holders extracting accountability. Moreover, participation fosters a sense of ownership and thus interest in contributing to attaining the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

54. Participatory and data-dense monitoring and review mechanisms will vary between the local and national levels, as well as across countries. At the regional level, monitoring and review will also take various shapes. One such shape is that of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, which can furnish a key regional platform to monitor progress towards achievement of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, identify good practices

⁴⁹ United Nations, *The Second Round of National Consultations on Post-2015 Development Agenda – Means of Implementation: Participatory Monitoring for Accountability in Bangladesh* (Dhaka, 2014). Available from www.un-bd.org/Docs/Publication/Post_2015_Development_Agenda.pdf.

⁵⁰ See General Assembly resolution 70/1, para. 74.

for adapted replication and formulate solutions to address foreseen and encountered challenges. It is anticipated that the 2016 session of the Forum will involve the adoption of a regional road map for implementation, monitoring and review of the 2030 Agenda.

55. At the regional level, useful lessons can also be drawn from the monitoring of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Every five years, progress in implementation of this global framework for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is reviewed by the Commission on the Status of Women. In support of the global review, regional commissions lead the regional reviews, building on the outcomes of national reviews.

56. Thus, development and adaptation of context-attuned, participatory and rights-based monitoring and review mechanisms, at the local, national and regional levels, will be critical for Asia-Pacific countries to individually and collectively realize the Sustainable Development Goals, as they will be for countries globally.

57. With broad forums such as the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, and more specific mechanisms such as the regional reviews of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, ESCAP furnishes a vital regional platform to continue supporting member States in the follow-up and review of progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda.⁵¹

VIII. Conclusion: the way forward for strengthening the social dimension of sustainable development

58. Realization of the 17 ambitious Sustainable Development Goals and 169 associated targets of the 2030 Agenda will require intensive, collective, resourced and sustained action that addresses the needs, interests, priorities and circumstances of all women and men, girls and boys.

59. For building on the analysis of key modalities for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda, key actions proposed for the consideration of member States are highlighted below:

(a) Demonstrating political commitment to placing the 2030 Agenda at the centre of each country's national development plan, supported by a high-level coordination body that oversees balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda;

(b) Developing institutional mechanisms and building capacity from national to local levels to ensure policy coherence, consistency and coordination in implementing the 2030 Agenda;

(c) Mobilizing resources through tax reforms as well as diverse and innovative financing mechanisms, such as public-private partnerships and impact investing, to support social progress along with economic growth;

(d) Harnessing technology and innovations to reduce inequalities and reach the most marginalized people as well as those who are left behind;

⁵¹ See General Assembly resolution 70/1, paras. 80 and 81.

(e) Developing multi-stakeholder platforms to enhance participation and accountability in the monitoring and review of progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

60. As a comprehensive intergovernmental platform, ESCAP is well situated to support member States in developing, implementing and reviewing their nationally owned sustainable development strategies, inclusive of sector-specific issues and the aforementioned modalities of bringing about transformative change for all peoples and the planet, in partnership for prosperity and peace.

61. In alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and regional priorities, ESCAP will continue to contribute to the knowledge base, by conducting and disseminating the results of quantitative and qualitative research, such as through the development of a regional knowledge platform. From research data and information gathered, combined with technical advisory services, ESCAP can support the strengthening of normative frameworks, capacities and institutions of member States. In addition, ESCAP serves as an effective facilitator for South-South cooperation and regional partnerships that promote sustainable approaches and innovative practices.

62. In view of the issues presented in this document, the Committee may wish to deliberate the following questions:

(a) What are the national mechanisms that need to be put into place to ensure a balanced integration of the social, economic and environment dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

(b) What kind of financing framework is needed to strengthen the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda?

(c) What technical assistance and support are required from the regional commission in addressing social concerns and emerging priorities of member States?
