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**Towards achieving sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific: regional agenda-setting for sustainable development**

## **Towards achieving sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific: regional agenda-setting for sustainable development**

### **Note by the secretariat**

#### *Summary*

In its outcome document, entitled “The future we want”, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development reaffirmed the political commitment to strengthening international cooperation to address the persistent challenges related to sustainable development for all, in particular in developing countries, and emphasized the significant role of the regional commissions in promoting a balanced integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

The secretariat herein provides an overview of emerging and persistent issues related to sustainable development and discusses its work on those issues in the context of the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, including its role in supporting dialogue among member States on regional agenda-setting vis-à-vis sustainable development.

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\* The late submission of the present document is due to the need to incorporate additional inputs from various contributors.

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## **I. Introduction**

1. In its outcome document, entitled “The future we want”, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) reaffirmed the political commitment to strengthening international cooperation to address the persistent challenges related to sustainable development for all, in particular in developing countries.<sup>1</sup>

2. Acknowledging that, since 1992, there had been areas of insufficient progress and setbacks in the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development,<sup>2</sup> aggravated by multiple financial, economic, food and energy crises, which had threatened the ability of all countries, in particular developing countries, to achieve sustainable development, the Conference called for a strengthened institutional framework focused on the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

3. The secretariat’s approaches to supporting member States in the wake of the Conference will be shaped by the specific challenges to sustainable development faced by the region. It is particularly relevant to note, without prejudging the outcomes of the intergovernmental process, that the topic of sustainable development is in the forefront of discussions pertaining to the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015.

4. The secretariat herein provides an overview of emerging and persistent issues related to sustainable development and, in particular, in relation to the main areas of work of the secretariat, namely energy security, water resource management, sustainable urban development and environmental sustainability.

5. In addition, the secretariat highlights its activities in responding to these challenges and promoting a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. Specific guidance on the secretariat’s future work is sought in section V of the present document.

## **II. Regional overview**

6. Developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region have experienced rapid economic growth in recent years, taking advantage of the opportunities brought about by globalization and the export-led growth model. High economic growth rates have helped lift millions out of poverty and achieved significant development gains.

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex.

<sup>2</sup> The three pillars of sustainable development are economic, environmental and social.

7. The focus on high growth rates has also resulted in great environmental and social externalities, leading to real economic costs. Among the most widespread difficulties are jobless growth, inflation, income disparities, energy and food insecurity, growing congestion costs and the growth of slums. Alarmingly, inequality has been rising in many countries in the region.

8. The hidden costs of resource-intensive growth strategies increase the long-term risks confronting the region. Despite the significant unmet needs, economic growth trends have resulted in dramatic increases of resource use by the region. Between 1970 and 2005, domestic material consumption in the region more than tripled, compared with an increase of approximately 50 per cent in the rest of the world. An analysis of the rapidly declining natural capital, climate impacts and climate-related disasters and trends related to energy security, water resource management and urbanization highlights some key challenges in these sectors.

9. In the ESCAP region, as of 2010, there were 628 million people without access to electricity and 1.8 billion people using traditional biomass. While energy efficiency among developing Asia-Pacific countries has improved significantly over the past decade, there is potential for further improvement that could contribute to economic growth. The region relies on renewable sources for 10 per cent of its energy production, but the share of renewable energy in total energy production has declined over the past 10 years.

10. Among the key issues, access to energy services, improvement of energy efficiency and an increased share of renewable energy sources are priorities in the area of energy security, and these were recognized by the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, which was held in Vladivostok, Russian Federation, from 27 to 30 May 2013.<sup>3</sup>

11. In its resolution 67/215, the General Assembly declared the decade 2014-2024 as the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, in which it stressed the need to improve access to reliable, affordable, economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sound energy services and resources for sustainable development. To that end, the Assembly also highlighted the importance of improving energy efficiency, increasing the share of renewable energy and cleaner and energy-efficient technologies. The Secretary-General has launched an initiative called “Sustainable Energy for All” to support the Decade.

12. There is increasing pressure on the limited ecological carrying capacity that underpins socioeconomic systems. The depletion of the natural capital links to increasing demand for agricultural products as inputs to industrial production and for energy. The growing demand means that land is expected to provide a broader array of ecosystem services while excessive exploitation is undermining its ability to do so. Worrying signs that the carrying capacity is being stretched to its limit are the food insecurity and agricultural production trends. Production in Asia of non-food crops is growing at the expense of food crops. Production of feedstocks for biofuels is a particular source of competition for food production. Non-food production is concentrated in several large countries, including those in which the proportion of people suffering from hunger is increasing or where food deprivation is deepening.

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<sup>3</sup> For further information regarding the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, see E/ESCAP/CED(3)/2. For the report of the Forum, see E/ESCAP/APEF/3.

13. Pressures on natural systems also affect the water sector. Just as growing demand for energy has had an impact on food production, the growing demand for water may do the same if current trends continue. Notably, Asia and the Pacific has the lowest per capita endowment of water, but withdraws the world's largest proportion of it from available renewable sources. The region is also among the most vulnerable to climate-related disasters.

14. Water-related challenges of access, depletion, pollution, sanitation and disasters in the Asia-Pacific region continue to increase, sometimes with multiple challenges within a country. The multiple water-related challenges of access, depletion, pollution and disaster in the Asia-Pacific region present different components of water security. A country facing a combination of these challenges is highly vulnerable to water scarcity, which may impede efforts to advance its development agenda.

15. Water scarcity affects food security, through the reduced availability of water for irrigation and human health through the inability to deal with human waste, which, in turn, results in contaminated water supplies and increased prevalence of water-borne pathogens, and environmental sustainability as countries deplete water sources.

16. Between 1990 and 2010, the proportion of the region's population with access to improved drinking water sources increased from 73 per cent to 88 per cent; thus, an estimated 1.5 billion people in the region gained access to improved water between 1990 and 2010. Nevertheless, important disparities exist between the proportion of the population with access to improved water sources in rural areas as compared to urban areas due to high rates of economic development and the processes of urbanization. This is found even in the more developed economies and within urban areas, there are important variations.<sup>4</sup>

17. In the ESCAP/UNISDR Asia Pacific Disaster Report 2012, it was noted that 74.6 per cent of fatalities between 1970 and 2011 from global disasters and \$294.8 billion or 80 per cent of the total global losses resulting from disasters in 2011 took place in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>5</sup>

18. Although progress has been made in accessing improved sanitation in rural areas in the region, more than half of the rural population still lacks access to improved sanitation in many member countries. In addition 80-90 per cent of all wastewater generated in developing countries is discharged directly into surface water bodies without any treatment.<sup>6</sup> Poor sanitation and wastewater management in developing countries results in the contamination of fresh water sources, which is a major cause of disease and death and also affects the health of eco-systems.

19. Population growth, rapid urbanization and the impact of climate changes will further add to the water-related complexity, especially because

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<sup>4</sup> ESCAP *Statistical Yearbook 2013* (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Commission and United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, *Reducing Vulnerability and Exposure to Disasters: The Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2012* (Bangkok, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, "Water: A Matter of Life and Death", International Year of Freshwater 2003 (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2002). Available from [www.un.org/events/water/factsheet.pdf](http://www.un.org/events/water/factsheet.pdf).

many Asian population centres are located in extreme and high risk areas, such as flood plains, deltas and coastal regions.

20. An estimated 46 per cent, or 1.96 billion, of the Asia-Pacific region's population lived in urban areas in 2012, an increase of 2.4 per cent from the year before.<sup>7</sup> By 2020, the urban population is estimated to reach 50 per cent, an absolute growth in numbers of approximately 500 million.<sup>8</sup> The growth in both the number and size of the megacities (cities with a population of more than 10 million) in Asia and the Pacific continues to be an important regional trend. By 2025, the total number of megacities worldwide is expected to reach 37, with 23 in Asia alone.<sup>9</sup>

21. However, most of the region's urban population is in towns and small and medium-sized cities, which are experiencing a large part of the high growth rates. The medium-sized urban areas are home to two billion people, with their growth rate in terms of population exceeding that of larger cities. Thus, addressing the needs of medium-sized urban areas is most critical for development.

22. The Asia and Pacific region continues to become more urban. The characteristics of this growth have distinct subregional and national conditions. Although, urbanization is associated with higher levels of development in the region, with urban agglomerations responsible for an estimated 80 per cent of the region's economic activity, this growth also poses considerable challenges in terms of sustainable and inclusive development.

23. Many of the benefits of urbanization to a country are the result of the economies of scale that allow more cost effective delivery of critical services, such as transport, health and education. However, as a consequence of the pressures and demands of rapid rates of growth or poorly managed urbanization, the region also faces considerable challenges. Some of these challenges, such as inadequate access to water, the spread of communicable diseases and shortages of adequate and affordable shelter, can be quantified. For example in 2009, more than half a billion people in the region were living in slums and did not have access to at least one of the following basic necessities: security of tenure; structural quality and durability of dwelling; access to safe water; access to sanitation facilities; and sufficient living area.<sup>10</sup> This number represents 30 per cent of the urban population in the region and 60 per cent of the global slum population. The problem of slum-dwellers is particularly acute in the low-income countries of the region where nearly two thirds of the urban population live in slums.<sup>11</sup>

24. Less measurable, but an area of increasing interest, are key environmental indicators that are needed to support a shift to more sustainable urban patterns of growth. The rate and patterns of urban growth is posing immense pressure on ecosystem services, other resources and capacities, and existing institutional frameworks. New approaches to such

<sup>7</sup> *ESCAP Statistical Yearbook 2013* (forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup> UN-Habitat, *Cities and Climate Change Initiative – Asia-Pacific, Regional Strategy* (Fukuoka, Japan, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, Highlights and Advance Tables*. ESA/P/WP.228 (New York, 2013). Available from [http://esa.un.org/wpp/Documentation/pdf/WPP2012\\_HIGHLIGHTS.pdf](http://esa.un.org/wpp/Documentation/pdf/WPP2012_HIGHLIGHTS.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

demands are urgently required, as it is increasingly evident that business-as-usual cannot accommodate the demands of anticipated urban growth through this century.

25. Air pollution problems in Asia and the Pacific have intensified in recent years, both at the urban level and in a transboundary context.<sup>12</sup> Plans to build 1,000 coal-fired power plants in the region,<sup>13</sup> which are highly pollutant, indicate the need for policymakers to urgently consider shifting the economic growth patterns to greener and more eco-efficient ones.

26. The mismatch between conventional economic growth strategies and the challenges confronting the Asia-Pacific region is increasingly evident. Focusing on high growth rates in the short term has resulted in great environmental and social externalities, leading to real economic costs in the longer term.

27. Many stakeholders, such as governments, research institutes and civil society organizations, are taking a closer look at the economic approaches that are being undertaken to promote sustainable development. The challenges and approaches are different for each country and for each sector, as illustrated by the range of initiatives being deployed by member States. Acknowledging that economic growth “has come at considerable environmental cost and has not benefited all segments of the population”,<sup>14</sup> Malaysia, through the development of a new economic model, is aiming to be a “developed and competitive economy whose people enjoy a high quality of life attained a high level of income which is the result of growth that is both inclusive and sustainable by 2020”.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, Thailand has integrated low carbon concepts and the philosophy of “sufficiency economy” into its eleventh five-year plan, India is incorporating ecological values into national accounts and Bhutan has used Gross National Happiness measures as a basis for planning.

28. In terms of green growth, Kazakhstan is one of the prime movers in the region. In addition to adopting the Kazakhstan National Green Growth Plan, it has initiated specific actions related to the green economy. Cambodia, as another example, approved a national policy and strategic plan for green growth (2013-2030) in March 2013 after it had adopted a national green growth road map. Similarly, Viet Nam adopted a “National Green Growth Strategy for the period 2011-2020 with a vision to 2050”.<sup>16</sup> The introduction of environmental fiscal reform in Viet Nam in 2012 could be a success story as it has the potential to bring in a lot of beneficial environmental, social and economic results.

29. Lessons can be learned from these efforts, and other practical experiences in the region can be shared. Regional and cross-regional

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<sup>12</sup> See [www.unescap.org/news/un-escap-calls-urgent-regional-action-improve-asia-pacific-air-quality](http://www.unescap.org/news/un-escap-calls-urgent-regional-action-improve-asia-pacific-air-quality).

<sup>13</sup> Assad W. Razzouk, “Power-hungry Asian countries set to roast the planet”, *Bangkok Post*, 5 July 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Malaysia, National Economic Advisory Council, *New Economic Model For Malaysia, Part 1 Strategic Policy Directions*. (Putrajaya, NEAC, 2009). Available from [www.btimes.com.my/Current\\_News/BTIMES/Econ2007\\_pdf/New%20Economic%20Model](http://www.btimes.com.my/Current_News/BTIMES/Econ2007_pdf/New%20Economic%20Model).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Viet Nam, *Viet Nam National Green Growth Strategy* (Hanoi, 2012). Available from [www.greengrowth-elearning.org/pdf/VietNam-GreenGrowth-Strategy.pdf](http://www.greengrowth-elearning.org/pdf/VietNam-GreenGrowth-Strategy.pdf).

initiatives can play an important role in the drive to promote green growth in the region. One such initiative could be the Green Bridge Partnership, which was developed by the Government of Kazakhstan, welcomed at the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference<sup>17</sup> as an implementation mechanism for the Astana Green Bridge Initiative,<sup>18</sup> and welcomed in the Rio+20 outcome document.

### III. Actions taken by the secretariat

30. The secretariat, in line with its current programme of work, is undertaking capacity-building activities, implementing pilot projects, facilitating the sharing of best practices, supporting decision-making for sustainable development and promoting quality economic growth.

31. The assistance extended by the secretariat to member States is oriented towards providing the overall policy support needed to deal with environment and development challenges, as well as sectoral challenges pertaining to energy, water and sanitation, and sustainable cities and human settlements.

32. The recognition of the importance of green economy at Rio+20 within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, as one of the important tools available to achieve sustainable development,<sup>19</sup> coupled with regional agreements<sup>20</sup> and the continuing requests for support from member States, provide important guidance to the secretariat in its work. In addition to the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, the Rio+20 outcome document identified a number of thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues in relation to the framework for action and follow-up that are directly relevant to the work of ESCAP.

33. Regional cooperation will be essential for addressing many of the environment and development challenges facing the region. In response to member country requests and to requirements to support global processes, such as the newly established High-level Political Forum on Sustainable

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<sup>17</sup> The Conference was held in Astana from 21 to 23 September 2011. For details on the Conference, see [www.unece.org/env/efe/Astana/welcome.html](http://www.unece.org/env/efe/Astana/welcome.html).

<sup>18</sup> The Initiative was adopted at the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific on 2 October 2010 (E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/13).

<sup>19</sup> In the Rio+20 outcome document “The future we want”, the heads of State and Government and high-level representatives considered green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication as one of the important tools available for achieving sustainable development. In that regard, they acknowledged that green economy would enhance the ability to manage natural resources sustainably and with lower negative environmental impacts, increase resource efficiency and reduce waste.

<sup>20</sup> The Commission in its resolution 67/3 on the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific welcomed and recognized the outcomes of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2010, which included the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2010. In the Declaration, the ministers for environment and development and heads of delegations of the members and associate members of ESCAP recognized that green growth, as appropriately adapted to country-specific circumstances and as understood in the context of sustainable development, is one of the approaches for supporting rapid economic growth, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and environmental sustainability (see E/ESCAP/67/8).

Development, the secretariat will continue to organize meetings for Governments and other stakeholders to support regional agenda-setting and to identify regional perspectives.

#### **IV. Current efforts and ongoing initiatives by the secretariat**

##### **A. Environment and development policy**

34. The secretariat is implementing the decisions of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific and Rio+20 by extending assistance, upon request from member States, in the form of training activities and advisory missions and through the development of policymaking and decision support tools.

35. Key areas of such assistance include the formulation and implementation of sustainable development policies, including green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and the promotion of a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Notably, the regional commissions are being urged to prioritize sustainable development through, among other things, more efficient and effective capacity-building, development and implementation of regional agreements and arrangements as appropriate, and exchange of information, best practices and lessons learned. Highlights of these activities are listed below.

36. The secretariat is conducting policy-oriented analytical studies that evaluate a range of policy options to help countries transition towards achieving sustainable development. The most comprehensive one so far is the Low Carbon Green Growth Roadmap for Asia and the Pacific, published in April 2012, which provides detailed guidance and actionable options towards transitioning to a green growth approach with an aim to achieve a resource-efficient economy. Written primarily for policymakers, the road map aims to assist countries in capitalizing on two key challenges, namely resource constraints and climate crisis, by turning them into economic growth opportunities to reduce poverty according to national circumstances. The road map contains 63 fact sheets, 51 case studies and seven policy papers. Upon request, the secretariat has given the publication to more than 1,000 policymakers from 44 member States.

37. Facilitating an effective translation of sustainable development policies into concrete action at the national level requires that countries, among other things, put in place more comprehensive methodologies and indicators for the evaluation of system changes towards sustainable development and improve their capacity for assessing different policy options beyond traditional economic analysis. To further assist policymakers in efforts to evaluate the range of social, environmental and economic factors and their integration into development planning, the secretariat is carrying out policy-oriented research work, which aims to develop decision support toolkits, including relevant indicators and economic models that incorporate the quality of economic growth in the analysis. This initiative, which is being implemented in partnership with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation of Australia, entails adapting state-of-the-art economy-wide modelling tools to investigate key socioeconomic parameters, including resource use, job creation, inequality, consumption patterns, investment flows and debt levels. The secretariat engaged experts from a wide range of disciplines for this endeavour through the Expert Dialogue on the Quality of Growth, which was held in Bangkok from 14 to 16 November



2012, and a follow-up study tour for economic modellers in September 2013. Further support in this area is being provided in partnership with other entities of the United Nations system.

38. The secretariat has also undertaken initiatives to strengthen and enlarge the pool of professionals in Asia and the Pacific that possess an in-depth understanding of sustainable development policies and their application in different national contexts. In partnership with the Korea International Cooperation Agency, the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, it has established an e-learning facility ([www.greengrowth-elearning.org/lms](http://www.greengrowth-elearning.org/lms)). The maiden online course, entitled “Fundamentals of Green Growth”, which runs for six weeks, has been offered 14 times. Thus far, 900 policymakers from 59 countries in the Asia-Pacific region have completed the course.

39. To support the roll-out of the course at the national level, the secretariat is partnering with national institutions to serve as national e-learning centres. As of July 2013, these centres were set up in Brunei Darussalam, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, India, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. The secretariat also organized national training-of-trainers seminars from September 2012 to June 2013. Five hundred policymakers from nine countries in the Asia-Pacific region received training and were involved in various training and policy development activities in their respective countries.

40. In response to the needs of policymakers and stakeholders in the region, a new e-learning course will be launched in late 2013 based on the Low Carbon Green Growth Roadmap. The focus of the course will be on the main elements of developing low carbon green growth. Two more thematic courses pertaining to “liveable cities” and “sustaining growth” are also being developed.

41. Upon the request of the Ministry of Environment and Green Development of Mongolia, the secretariat has been supporting the ministry in carrying out a capacity-building programme, which has included the further development of the country’s national road map on green development. The secretariat has extended similar support to the Government of Cambodia for the development of the National Green Growth Roadmap, which has become the national planning document to be implemented by the recently established National Green Growth Commission of Cambodia. It has also initiated activities in Mongolia in partnership with the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies that began with the launch of a capacity development programme and a consultation meeting on the country’s National Green Development Roadmap.

42. The secretariat has also provided capacity development support to member States through the Seoul Initiative Network on Green Growth (SINGG), which was set up seven years ago. In partnership with the SINGG secretariat, which is supported by the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Korea, the ESCAP secretariat organized annual policy consultation forums under the themes “Double dividend of green and economy” (2012) and “Biodiversity for sustainable development” (2013). These consultations have benefited 35 policymakers from 20 member States. The secretariat also has organized the Seoul Leadership Programme on Green Growth, a two-week long intensive training course, which has been offered annually since 2006. The 2013 course will be held in Incheon, Republic of Korea, from 15 to 25 October.

43. Through SINGG, the secretariat has furnished expert and financial support to Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia and Pakistan in implementing pilot projects on developing guidelines for waste and e-waste management, promoting awareness raising on environmental issues and developing national education and training materials on low carbon green growth policies.

## **B. Energy security and the sustainable use of energy**

44. The Asia-Pacific region is dealing with a number of issues and challenges with regard to energy security and the sustainable use of energy. Some of the common constraints centre on the need to set clear policies and strategies, as well as to put in place appropriate institutional arrangements and robust financial mechanisms. In particular, energy sector planning in the region is often challenged over establishing clearer linkages to sustainable development goals and primarily focuses on the supply and demand of energy for economic growth.

45. Integrating energy for sustainable development can be approached in two ways. One approach is to integrate energy issues into the overall national development policy that guides sectoral policies, such as those related to industry, transport, education, health and the environment, to clearly identify the role of energy. The other approach is to continue to integrate the three pillars of sustainable development in energy sector policies

46. The secretariat is implementing a project on energy access using the Pro-Poor Public-Private Partnership mechanism which is based on a model that was developed in Indonesia 10 years ago. Under the project, the community utilizes the revenue derived from electricity generated by a mini-hydro system to support its residents who are poor while the facility is maintained through a cooperative arrangement. Membership of the cooperative has increased over the years, which has helped strengthen the community. The secretariat is working with the International Fund for Agricultural Development in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Nepal to make policy recommendations for adopting the model based on the activities in the context of each country.

47. The Indonesian case study demonstrates that it is important to be able to place energy as an effective means for development that goes beyond securing supply. Energy is not only a fundamental input to economic growth but it also provides the basis for social development. Energy security at all levels, the household, nationally and regionally, needs to be enhanced as deliberated extensively at the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum,

48. Often the linkages between energy and its productive use to generate income and an improved environment are not considered holistically. The Development Account Project on South-South Cooperation is aimed at boosting the affordability of sustainable energy options in Asia and the Pacific. It attempts to broaden stakeholder involvement by focusing on understanding the value chain with a view to enable effective technology transfer among developing countries that is adaptable under local conditions and adds value to the development process.

49. Energy efficiency needs to be recognized as an important economic instrument in improving efficiency of not only an economy but also in supporting social and environmental objectives. In national development strategies, the role of enhancing capacity to develop and disseminate energy

efficiency and renewable energy needs to be recognized more clearly in support of sustainable development and the outcomes of Rio+20.

50. In collaboration with the Economic Commission for Europe, the secretariat is encouraging the private sector to actively pursue energy efficiency by sharing the experiences of countries in South and South-West Asia, South-East Asia, East and North-East Asia with North and Central Asia. In particular, with a view towards harmonizing policies on energy efficiency in North and Central Asia, a database on energy efficiency policies is being developed. The database stands to complement a global database on this matter that was developed by the International Energy Agency.

### C. Water resources and sanitation

51. Management of water resources must be overarching, holistic and integrated in order to effectively tackle water insecurity, ensure the provision of water services, such as water supply and sanitation, and deal with issues related to agriculture, fisheries, hydropower and the environment. Such management is also required to help build resilience to water-related disasters, such as floods, droughts, cyclones, water pollution, landslides and erosion.

52. Improved holistic water governance is vital for enhanced water security. Even though many member countries already have such policies, legislation and plans in place, they have yet to implement them. Many of the recent investments in water resources do not factor in proper sanitation practices as part of the holistic water system. These investments provide only short-term benefits and are not sustainable.

53. The secretariat is involved in a number of normative and analytical work projects that focus on water resources management, disaster mitigation and sanitation. These include a series of reports on water eco-efficiencies, namely the water resources series of publications: *Developing Innovative Strategies for Flood-resilient Cities*; *Climate Change Adaptation for Water Management in a Green Economy*; *The Status of the Water-Food-Energy Nexus in Asia and the Pacific*; and *Development Financing for Tangible Results: A Paradigm Shift to Impact Investing and Outcome Models, The Case of Sanitation in Asia*. It is also working with UN-Water on a joint publication, *Water Security and the Global Water Agenda - A UN-Water Analytical Brief* and the series of World Water Development Reports. In addition, the secretariat contributed to the Asian Development Bank publication *Framework Document on Water and Climate Change Adaptation – For Leaders and Policy-makers in the Asia-Pacific Region* and the *Asian Water Development Outlook 2013*.

54. As a member of UN-Water, the secretariat co-chairs the UN-Water Task Force on Water Security and the UN-Water Task Force on Regional Level Coordination. It is also a key member of the Asia-Pacific Water Forum, providing support to its programmes. With regard to capacity-building, since 2009, the secretariat has co-organized, with various partners, a series of training-of-trainers programmes on water-related topics, including, among others, hydrologic data management, river basin organization management, conflict resolution, integrated lake management, integrated urban flood management and international water resources management as an adaptive tool to manage climate change.

55. The theme study for the sixty-ninth session of the Commission focused on building resilience to natural disasters and major economic crises

and called for improved governance, combined with more sustainable solutions that would be better integrated and offer wider development strategies. At the sixty-ninth session of the Commission, member countries adopted resolution 69/8 on enhancing knowledge-sharing and cooperation in integrated water resources management in Asia and the Pacific and resolution 69/12 on enhancing regional cooperation for building resilience to disasters in Asia and the Pacific. Specifically, in resolution 69/8, the Commission requested the executive secretary to coordinate with United Nations and other international agencies to make effective use of technology and innovation; facilitate the sharing, by members and associate members at the regional and subregional levels, of experiences, best practices and technologies; continue to provide and support, in consultation with members and associate members, a capacity development programme to build resilience to water-related disasters and to manage water-related risks in Asia-Pacific countries that suits various groups of stakeholders through knowledge-sharing; and take appropriate steps to promote awareness of the importance of integrating water into sustainable development within the framework of the mandate and programme of the work of the secretariat. The resolutions are in line with paragraphs 119 and 120 of the Rio+20 outcome document, in which heads of State and Government and high level representatives recognized “that water is at the core of sustainable development” and expressed their commitment “to significantly improve the implementation of integrated water resource management at all levels as appropriate”.

56. The secretariat is working with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme to implement a project in South-East Asia to strengthen the capacity of policymakers in promoting policies and developing plans for improving wastewater treatment and re-use in urban and peri-urban areas. Under the project, resource centres will be developed in the region to serve as referral points for expertise and the promotion of decentralized wastewater management systems.

#### **D. A sustainable urban future**

57. The secretariat is supporting member States and associate members in efforts to achieve inclusive and sustainable urban development through a number of endeavours, including among them, facilitating technical support for regional knowledge-sharing and norm-setting on key urban development issues. In this regard, some of the major activities undertaken by ESCAP are highlighted below.

58. ESCAP is working on a project with Waste Concern, a non-governmental organization that promotes pro-poor and sustainable solid waste management in small towns and secondary cities in the Asia-Pacific region. Through this project, the secretariat is helping governments develop strategies for solid waste management that are financially viable, environmentally sound and pro-poor. As a result of the project, decentralized integrated resource recovery centres (IRRCs) have been established in eight cities, in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam, with the objective to recover value from waste and provide livelihood opportunities to urban poor. The IRRC model uses simple technology, is low cost and aims to be financially viable by converting organic waste into compost and give value to recyclable waste made available through the separation of waste at source. These centres are able to recycle up to 90 per cent of the incoming waste, thereby considerably reducing the amount of waste going to landfill and the associated costs, which represent a considerable financial burden for local governments.

59. ESCAP is undertaking a project entitled “Application of community-based integrated water supply and wastewater treatment systems to improve resilience to climate change”. As part of this activity, the secretariat implemented a pilot project in collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology-Region 7 and government of Cebu City, Philippines to develop an integrated rainwater, stormwater and wastewater management system at a school and collaborated with the government of Bandung City, Indonesia and the Institute of Technology Bandung to create an integrated rainwater and wastewater system with participation from civil society in order to restore a river and to develop local models of integrated rainwater and wastewater management for selected communities.

60. The secretariat has supported research in the field on pro-poor eco-settlements in the Philippines. As a result, the settlements have better access to water through more effective harvesting of rainwater and the upgrade of wells, food security has improved thanks to community greening, passive cooling is available and the risk of erosion has lessened.

61. In addition, through a joint project with the Hilti Foundation and the Homeless People’s Federation Philippines/the Philippine Action for Community-led Shelter Initiatives entitled “Implementing alternative building technologies for housing the urban poor”, the secretariat has organized several local and national workshops and participatory activities to raise stakeholders’ awareness of affordable and green building materials and resilient housing systems as well as promote business and income opportunities, especially through pro-poor social cooperatives. Technical and business research is underway to do the following: ensure that the materials are of a high quality and resilient; develop a business plan for upscaling earth block production; and understand local markets and the national context for the development of social enterprises for manufacturing bamboo and coconut-based building materials.

62. Also, in a joint project with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and the Rockefeller Foundation entitled “Capacity development for cities in Asia and the Pacific to increase resilience to climate change impacts”, the secretariat is finalizing preparations of a quick guide for policymakers on pro-poor urban climate change adaptation and resilience, which will contain 30 good practices on pro-poor urban climate change adaptation from across the Asia and Pacific region. In addition, under the project, a number of capacity-building exercises for policymakers and key stakeholders are planned for 2014 to support and complement the release of this tool.

63. The secretariat is also reviewing the latest thinking and current practices of eco-city planning in the region with a view to identifying innovative approaches in urban planning based on the integration of sustainability dimensions, increased liveability and quality of life. It has commissioned an analysis to be completed on urban planning for sustainable cities to help promote enhanced knowledge-sharing and capacity-building on urban sustainability frameworks and planning principles.

64. A project on municipal governance and urban infrastructure development in Central Asia was implemented in collaboration with the Center for Economic Research, a research institution established by the Government of Uzbekistan and the United Nations Development Programme with funding from the Russian Federation. As a result of the project, urban experiences through national case studies were shared to promote regional

cooperation and stakeholders at the local level have built a broader network base for dealing with urban development. One tangible impact from the project is that the level of awareness and knowledge of the participants increased, which stands to serve as a catalyst for continuing momentum for municipal reforms and improving urban infrastructure.

65. With regard to extending analytical and normative support to member States, the secretariat has continued to work on the State of Asia-Pacific Cities 2014 report. Substantive chapters are being developed by experts on patterns of urbanization, urban economy, urban society, urban environment and urban management. The publication will also include a discussion of critical gaps in meeting regional urban challenges, as well as several emerging urban issues for future engagement.

#### **E. Facilitating regional agenda-setting on sustainable development**

66. In order to comprehensively review the Rio+20 outcome document and its implication to the Asia-Pacific region, as well as to facilitate dialogue among member States and other stakeholders on a range of the regional follow-up actions, ESCAP, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme and the Asian Development Bank, convened the Asian and Pacific Regional Implementation Meeting (RIM) on Rio + 20 Outcomes in Bangkok from 22 to 24 April 2013. The secretariat prepared an in-depth analysis which covered the main outcomes of Rio+20 and included issues for regional consideration.<sup>21</sup>

67. The RIM, among other issues, discussed the role of ESCAP as a regional platform in promoting sustainable development, as reflected by the Rio+20 outcome document and the needs of the region. Consequently, the Commission at its sixty-ninth session adopted two specific resolutions pertaining to regional follow-up to Rio+20, namely, resolution 69/4 on the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Dialogue: From the Millennium Development Goals to the United Nations Development Agenda beyond 2015, and resolution 69/9 on the implementation of the Green Bridge Partnership Programme towards voluntary follow-up to the Rio+20 outcome “The future we want”.

68. Pursuant to resolution 69/4, the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Dialogue: From the Millennium Development Goals to the United Nations Development Agenda beyond 2015 was convened by the Government of Thailand in Bangkok from 26 to 28 August 2013, with support from the secretariat. The Environment and Development Division played a key role in the meeting by preparing a background document entitled “Towards defining a transformative agenda for sustainable development”. The document aimed to facilitate the ministerial deliberation to collectively explore and identify the key challenges in the region that should be addressed at the policy level in the elaboration of the United Nations Development Agenda beyond 2015 based on the lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals framework.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the secretariat collaborated with a group of civil

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<sup>21</sup> The paper and the report on the meeting are available from <http://www.unescap.org/sustainable-development/forums/RIM2013/documents/RIM-RSDF-background-paper-0504.pdf> and [http://www.unescap.org/sustainable-development/forums/RIM2013/documents/EDD\\_UNCSD\\_RIM\\_3ER1.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sustainable-development/forums/RIM2013/documents/EDD_UNCSD_RIM_3ER1.pdf), respectively. A brief summary is also presented in a separate paper (E/ESCAP/CED(3)/3).

<sup>22</sup> Available from [http://apmd2013.unescap.org/documents/APMD2013\\_BackgroundNote.pdf](http://apmd2013.unescap.org/documents/APMD2013_BackgroundNote.pdf).

society organizations<sup>23</sup> in conducting the Asia-Pacific Civil Society Consultation on a Just and Transformative Post-2015 Development Framework on 23 and 24 August 2013 to facilitate their inputs to the Ministerial Dialogue.<sup>24</sup> The outcome of the Ministerial Dialogue is reported under a separate paper (E/ESCAP/CED(3)/3).

69. Pursuant to Resolution 69/9, the Government of Kazakhstan with support from the secretariat organized the first stakeholder meeting for operationalizing the Green Bridge Partnership Programme in Astana from 30 September to 1 October 2013.

70. Under General Assembly resolution 67/290 on the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, regional commissions were invited to contribute to the work of the forum, including through annual regional meetings. The establishment of the forum was set in the Rio+20 outcome document, in which it is stated that the forum could, among other things provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development, follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments, enhance integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner at all levels and have a focused, dynamic and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges.

71. In the resolution, the Assembly decided that the annual session of the high-level political forum, to be convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, would benefit from regional preparatory processes. By acknowledging the importance of the regional dimension of sustainable development, the regional commissions have been invited to contribute to the work of the forum, including through annual regional and subregional meetings, with the involvement of relevant regional entities, major groups and other relevant stakeholders, as appropriate. ESCAP will convene the first regional preparatory meeting for the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2014.

72. As mandated in Commission resolution 67/3 on the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, the seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (MCED-7) will be held in 2015. Operating at the highest level of regional dialogues, the MCED-7 would provide the region with an indispensable opportunity for a member States dialogue for regional agenda-setting on sustainable development.<sup>25</sup>

## V. Issues for consideration

73. In the context of the above, member States are invited to provide guidance to the secretariat with regard to the secretariat's work on regional agenda-setting and programmatic support, in particular the following:

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<sup>23</sup> The partners were IBON International, the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) and the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP).

<sup>24</sup> The outcome of the Ministerial Dialogue is reported under a separate paper, E/ESCAP/CED(3)/3.

<sup>25</sup> Preparations for MCED-7 are discussed in E/ESCAP/CED(3)/4.

**A. Programmatic direction**

74. Defining the broad programmatic direction of the work of the secretariat in the post-Rio period, particularly in the following fields: environmental sustainability; promoting access to energy services, energy efficiency and renewable energy; water resources management and sanitation; sustainable urban development, including guidance in implementing relevant resolutions adopted by the Commission at its sixty-ninth session.

75. Identifying priority actions for policy support, capacity-building needs and collaboration with member governments in the Asia-Pacific region for the design and implementation of green economy policies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

**B. Regional agenda-setting**

76. Defining the format, modality, timelines and other organizational details, as well as the substantive focus, of the regional and subregional meetings, the outcomes of which are expected to feed into the annual meetings of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

77. Identifying the modality for an effective engagement of major groups and other stakeholders in such regional and subregional meetings.

78. Identifying required regional cooperation and agenda-setting on thematic areas that would enhance the integration of the environmental, social and economic dimensions of development.

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