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### **Transformation for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific: review of emerging regional trends and agenda-setting**

## **Transformation for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific: review of emerging regional trends and agenda-setting**

### **Note by the secretariat**

#### *Summary*

In the draft outcome document of the United Nations summit for the adoption of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, the General Assembly recognized the interlinkages and integrated nature of the sustainable development goals and reaffirmed its political commitment to address the persistent challenges related to sustainable development for all, in particular in developing countries. The 2030 agenda for sustainable development, which was adopted in September 2015, emphasizes the strategic role of the regional commissions for effective implementation of the sustainable development goals by promoting a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, forging a regional voice on the global agenda, facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships, and supporting South-South cooperation. Regional road maps could be facilitated by regional commissions to address means of implementation, strengthen institutional frameworks and capacity for integration of the dimensions of sustainable development and establish platforms for policy dialogue and the exchange of best practices. Supported by a well-defined research agenda, the road map can provide important guidance to member States in the implementation of the 2030 agenda.

In support of the regional implementation of the sustainable development agenda, the secretariat, in the present document, provides an overview of emerging and persistent trends and issues in areas of critical importance to the Asian and Pacific region, particularly with regard to environmental sustainability, climate change mitigation and adaptation, energy security and the sustainable use of energy, water resource management and sustainable urban development. It also presents issues for discussion and identifies forward-looking strategies to support the regional implementation of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. In its continued commitment in supporting dialogues among member States, the secretariat also outlines priority actions on regional agenda-setting vis-à-vis the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.

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## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction.....	2
II. Regional overview .....	3
III. Actions taken by the secretariat .....	8
IV. Current efforts and ongoing initiatives by the secretariat .....	8
A. Environment and development policy .....	8
B. Energy security and the sustainable use of energy .....	12
C. Water resources and sanitation .....	13
D. A sustainable urban future .....	14
E. Facilitating regional agenda-setting on sustainable development .....	17
V. Issues for consideration.....	18
A. Programme direction .....	18
B. Regional agenda-setting.....	19

### **I. Introduction**

1. Cognizant that the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals is coming to a close, the report of the Secretary-General delivered at the seventieth session of the General Assembly emphasized the importance of mainstreaming the three dimensions of sustainable development — economic, social and environmental — throughout the work of the United Nations system. Heeding the call of the Secretary-General to better support the Member States in the Asia-Pacific region in their pursuit of sustainable development, the secretariat recognizes its role in providing a regional dimension to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. In that context, the ongoing efforts of the secretariat are aimed at providing an enabling regional environment in which the 2030 agenda is at the core of the discussion pertaining to sustainable development.

2. The secretariat is of the view that future development strategies should foster an allocation of resources and investments that maximizes synergies and minimizes trade-offs among the objectives of economic growth, inclusive social progress and environmental protection for all stakeholders. The current challenge is to develop holistic approaches that integrate the various dimensions of sustainable development while addressing specific needs of the member States of ESCAP. With this in mind, the secretariat is organizing regional dialogues to develop frameworks required to support countries in the region in taking the necessary steps towards achieving the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

3. The secretariat reaffirms its commitment to encourage a regional voice for the 2030 agenda for sustainable development by continuing to facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships and support South-South cooperation. In this context, the secretariat, in consultation with member States, proposes to develop a regional road map that aims to strengthen the regional voice on common priorities and partnerships for sustainable development. The objective of the road map would be to provide the means

of implementation of the integrated dimensions of sustainable development with a strong emphasis on science, technology and innovation and developing innovative ways to mobilize resources through trade, technology and finance. It would take into account stakeholders' roles and partnerships, and linkages between national, subregional, regional and global processes and commitments, and include effective accountability and monitoring frameworks based on the sharing of experiences and best practices. To help guide member States in the implementation of the 2030 agenda, the secretariat also plans to establish a platform for policy dialogue and exchange of best practices.

4. In support of the regional implementation of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, the present document contains an overview of emerging and persistent issues related to sustainable development and, in particular, in relation to the main areas of work of ESCAP, namely energy security, water resource management, sustainable urban development and environmental sustainability. Understanding natural resource, environmental and development issues in the region is essential for tackling the challenges that will arise while implementing a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

5. In addition, the present document provides highlights of activities undertaken by the secretariat in response to the persistent and developing economic, social and environmental challenges in the region. Relevant issues for consideration for programmatic planning are also given and specific guidance on the secretariat's future work is sought in section V.

## **II. Regional overview**

6. The economies of Asia and the Pacific are endowed with diverse natural and environmental resources, which have helped catalyse economic growth. As a result of the high rate of regional economic growth, many of the developing countries are starting to catch up to developed countries in terms of living standards. With the population of the region reaching 4.3 billion in 2014, comprising 60 per cent of the world population, and per capita income steadily on the rise, the region's demand for primary resources is expected to increase. Cognizant of the slow rate of renewability of resources, such as groundwater, and other environmental threats, such as exploitation of ecosystems and its associated services, the region's ecological and planetary boundaries will reach their tipping points if business-as-usual patterns continue.

7. To ensure that the development gains in the region, particularly with regard to the achievements of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals, are sustained beyond 2015, it is imperative to recognize the strong connection between economic development and the planetary boundaries. Growing scientific evidence, in particular as indicated in reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), shows that human-induced economic and social activities and choices have caused a radical change in the global climate, impairing biological diversity and ecosystems and affecting basic human needs – water, food and energy. Available scientific evidence demonstrates the vulnerability of the planet's boundaries to shocks brought on by diminishing natural and environmental resources. The environmental changes observed in many parts of the region may further induce climate change impacts, which could potentially undermine long-term development goals.

8. To ensure that the basic human needs of water, food and energy are constantly met in Asia and the Pacific, it is important to understand the regional situation in terms of resource availability, access and utilization, as well as resource constraints. A strong understanding of the situation is essential to develop and implement the necessary courses of actions.

9. Specifically, rapid economic development in the region has resulted in accelerated regional urbanization, which has resulted in intensified demand for basic necessities, such as water, food and energy. Consequently, the water and energy sectors are experiencing substantial demand and supply pressure. The impacts of the growing population, specifically in the urban areas, and the expanding economies also affect the food, infrastructure, communication and transportation sectors.

10. In Asia and the Pacific, the urban population is estimated to be 2.05 billion. The share of urban dwellers in the region has been rising over the last 25 years as a result of natural population growth, rural to urban migration and the reclassification of rural areas into urban areas. An estimated 120,000 people are migrating to cities on a daily basis. By 2050, the proportion of people living in urban areas is likely to rise to 63 per cent, up from 47.7 per cent in 2014.

11. Though urbanization is seen as a sign of economic development, according to UN-Habitat, an estimated 850 million urban dwellers were living in slums or in slum-like conditions globally in 2012; of that amount, more than 500 million of them resided in urban centres in Asia and the Pacific. This problem is prominent in low-income economies in the region, where nearly two thirds of the urban dwellers live in slums.<sup>1</sup> Urbanization and the emergence of megacities, areas with populations of 10 million people or more, is one of the persistent issues related to sustainable urban development in Asia and the Pacific, and therefore is a priority that should be addressed in the 2030 agenda. Of the 28 global megacities, 17 are in the region. By 2025, the number of megacities in Asia and the Pacific is expected to reach 23, out of 37 worldwide.<sup>2</sup>

12. While the region has the lowest per capita endowment of water, it withdraws the world's largest proportion.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the challenges of access, depletion, pollution, sanitation and disasters in Asia and the Pacific continue to increase, sometimes with multiple challenges within a country. These water-related challenges present different components of water security. A country experiencing rapid economic growth and urbanization coupled with a combination of those water-related challenges is highly vulnerable to water scarcity, which may impede the country's efforts to advance its development agenda. Such water scarcity reduces availability of water for irrigation, which affects food security. Water scarcity also affects 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.<sup>4</sup>

13. The Millennium Development Goals target of halving the proportion of persons without access to safe drinking water by 2015 has already been met in the region. However, the target of halving the proportion of persons

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2014* (ST/ESCAP/2704).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> E/ESCAP/CED(3)/1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

without access to basic sanitation by 2015 is behind schedule. In 1990, 826 million people in the region were without such access. In 2012, the figure dropped to 293 million. Over the same period, the number of people living in rural areas without access to basic sanitation fell from 1.7 billion to 1.2 billion, while the number in urban areas rose from 380 million to 480 million. In addition, between 85 per cent and 90 per cent of all wastewater generated in developing countries is discharged directly into surface water bodies without any treatment. Poor sanitation and wastewater management in developing countries leads to the contamination of fresh water sources. It is also a major cause of diseases and affects the health of ecosystems.<sup>5</sup>

14. While access to water sources and sanitation will continue to play an important role as the growth of the population and the economy spurs greater demand for water for agriculture, industry and private use, climate change will strongly exacerbate the levels of water stress in the region, driving strong river flow variations, rainfall variability and an increased occurrence of flood and drought events, with implications on the infrastructure, agricultural and health and social systems.<sup>6</sup> In some areas, the changing climate has accelerated demand for safe water and precipitated conflicts over water resources. Taking this into account, it is very important to balance different water uses and to manage their economic, social and environmental impacts.<sup>7</sup>

15. Looking at the energy part of the resource nexus, energy poverty remains a prevalent issue in the region. In 2012, 14.6 per cent of the population did not have access to electricity and 1.9 billion people still relied on traditional fuels for cooking and heating. Lack of access to modern energy sources limits the ability to participate in productive activities and exploit development opportunities. In addition, pollution resulting from using traditional sources of energy leads to deterioration of the environment.

16. Because of the vast geographical, demographical, developmental and social differences in the region, the disparity among countries in the per capita utilization rate between the highest and the lowest gross domestic product (GDP), total primary energy supply (TPES), electricity production and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions exceeds 100 times. This demonstrates the potential for improvement and regional collaboration.<sup>8</sup> There is a decreasing trend in the intensity of energy, carbon and electricity, increased efficiency and economic restructuring. The share of variable renewable energy (VRE) in electricity

<sup>5</sup> Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Asian Development Bank and United Nations Development Programme, *Making it happen: Technology, finance and statistics for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific -Asia-Pacific Regional MDGs Report 2014/15*, (Bangkok, 2015). Available from [www.unescap.org/resources/making-it-happen-technology-finance-and-statistics-sustainable-development-asia-and; E/ESCAP/CED\(3\)/1](http://www.unescap.org/resources/making-it-happen-technology-finance-and-statistics-sustainable-development-asia-and; E/ESCAP/CED(3)/1).

<sup>6</sup> UN-Water, "Special Regional Session: Achieving water security for Asia and the Pacific through sustainable water management - Session report, 15 January 2015", 2015 UN-Water Annual International Zaragoza Conference, Water and Sustainable Development: From Vision to Action. Available from [www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/waterandsustainabledevelopment2015/pdf/sesiones/Regional\\_Session\\_Asia%20and%20Pacific.pdf](http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/waterandsustainabledevelopment2015/pdf/sesiones/Regional_Session_Asia%20and%20Pacific.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Regional Trends Report on Energy for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific 2015* (ST/ESCAP/2723). Available from [www.unescap.org/resources/regional-trends-report-energy-sustainable-development-asia-and-pacific-2015-edition](http://www.unescap.org/resources/regional-trends-report-energy-sustainable-development-asia-and-pacific-2015-edition).

production shows a growing trend, which requires electric grids to evolve to efficiently accommodate new VRE generation capacity.<sup>9</sup>

17. In the power generation sector, renewable energy shares of electricity production in Asia and the Pacific increased from 666 terawatt-hours in 1990 to 1,869 terawatt-hours in 2012. The difference between those two figures represents 17 per cent of the 2012 electricity mix. It is expected that cumulative power plant capacity additions between 2014 and 2025 will be dominated by renewables.<sup>10</sup>

18. Despite the shift to renewable energy across the region, coal remains the major energy source in many countries and is mainly used for electricity production. As such, coal combustion has been the main cause of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the energy sector in Asia and the Pacific.

19. Increased energy consumption in the region intensifies air pollution problems more specifically in urban areas.<sup>11</sup> Despite a considerable reduction since 1990, the region still accounted for more than 70 per cent of global ozone depletion potential emissions in 2012. At present, the region has the highest concentration of particulate matter (dust) in urban areas.<sup>12</sup>

20. Asia and the Pacific is the most disaster-prone region in the world. Between 1994 and 2013, more than 40 per cent of the world's reported natural disasters occurred in the region. The South-East Asia subregion was the hardest hit by natural disasters, recording 527 incidents and 354,293 deaths between 2004 and 2013, with the predominate amount occurring in Indonesia and the Philippines. During the same period, 285 incidences of natural disasters occurred in China.<sup>13</sup>

21. The frequent occurrence of natural disasters in Asia and the Pacific is one of the many factors that undermine the stability of the natural resource endowments in the region. These events threaten progress made towards curbing the degree of natural degradation and exacerbate the effects of persistent issues, such as flooding, in many urban zones.

22. In response to the current environment and development-related challenges in the region, particularly in the area of energy, the Commission in its resolution 70/9 endorsed the outcome of the first Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, which was held in Vladivostok, Russian Federation from 27 to 30 May 2013. In the outcome document of the Forum, the Ministerial Declaration on Regional Cooperation for Enhanced Energy Security and the Sustainable Use of Energy in Asia and the Pacific: Shaping the Future of Sustainable Energy in Asia and the Pacific, the enhancement of the role of ESCAP and its regional offices, within their established mandates to support member and associate members in addressing energy issues in the context of sustainable development, was encouraged. In further support of the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All 2014-2024, the Forum's plan of action calls for enhanced energy security from regional to household levels, an energy future of equity, diversification in which access for all is

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> E/ESCAP/CED(3)/1.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2014* (ST/ESCAP/2704).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

secured, and an increase in the sharing of cleaner energies in the overall energy mix.

23. Regarding water resources, regional discussions focusing on the improvement of integrated water management to guarantee water security has been ongoing. Efforts to adopt the water-food-energy nexus approach has also been promoted in the region following the second Asia Pacific Water Summit, which was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on 19 and 20 May 2013. By recognizing the interlinkages of the three sectors, countries in the regions have the option to proactively plan in an integrated fashion given that population growth will inevitably boost demand for food, energy and water.<sup>14</sup>

24. In regards to other related issues that can peril development goals in the region, particularly natural disasters, member States agreed at the inaugural and second Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development in 2014 and 2015, respectively, that building resilience to disasters is critical in view of the effects of disasters on reversing sustainable development gains. Countries in the region were urged to take action in the area of disaster preparedness and invest more to enhance resilience and reduce the tremendous losses. For such actions to be effective, environment and development efforts must take into account the importance of information and communications technologies (ICT) in disaster risk reduction and management.<sup>15</sup>

25. In support of inclusive, balanced and sustained economic growth, wherein planetary boundaries and human rights are respected, it is imperative that countries in the region recognize the urgency of pursuing development paradigms, which takes into account the three dimensions of sustainable development. Examples of ongoing national strategies that include these dimensions are the sufficiency economy of Thailand, the “3R” (reduce, reuse and recycling) model of Japan, and the guiding philosophy of the Gross National Happiness model of Bhutan. Other examples are efforts by Georgia to promote connectivity and cooperation through the Silk Road and the approach of Vanuatu to incorporate the traditional and informal economy into its national sustainable development plan.<sup>16</sup>

26. To address current and emerging environmental issues confronting Asia and the Pacific, the secretariat remains committed to promoting and implementing strategic initiatives and partnerships that respond to the problems identified above. The adoption of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development in September 2015 puts the region in a strategic position to be at the forefront in the implementation of the sustainable development goals. The main tenet of these Goals, which will come into effect in January 2016, is ensuring the protection of the planet and its natural resources to end poverty and hunger while inequalities among countries are reduced, leading to peaceful, just and inclusive societies where human rights, gender equality and empowerment of women and girls are promoted.<sup>17</sup> Within this context and

<sup>14</sup> UN-Water, “Special Regional Session: Achieving water security for Asia and the Pacific through sustainable water management - Session report, 15 January 2015”, 2015 UN-Water Annual International Zaragoza Conference, Water and Sustainable Development: From Vision to Action. Available from [www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/waterandsustainabledevelopment2015/pdf/sesiones/Regional\\_Session\\_Asia%20and%20Pacific.pdf](http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/waterandsustainabledevelopment2015/pdf/sesiones/Regional_Session_Asia%20and%20Pacific.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> E/ESCAP/FSD(2)/3.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> A/69/L.85.

taking into account the different levels of development and capacities of member States in the region, ESCAP is promoting initiatives that not only create a paradigm shift towards sustainable development but also advance a transformative shift. ESCAP is forging a regional voice on the global agenda by facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships to develop a region-specific road map that will address the means of implementation, strengthen institutional frameworks and capacity for integration of the three dimensions and lead to the establishment of a platform for policy dialogue and the exchange of best practices, supported by a well-defined research agenda.

### **III. Actions taken by the secretariat**

27. The secretariat, in line with its programme of work, is undertaking capacity-building activities, implementing pilot projects, building partnerships, facilitating the sharing of best practices, promoting inclusive growth in Asia and the Pacific in tandem with supporting decision-making on sustainable development. The assistance extended by the secretariat to member States is oriented towards providing the policy support needed to deal with environmental and developmental challenges, as well as sectoral challenges pertaining to energy, water and sanitation, and creating sustainable cities and human settlements. Recognition of the regional dimension of the new mandates with respect to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development provides important guidance to the secretariat in its work, including a number of thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues for effective implementation of the proposed sustainable development goals in relation to the framework for action for the Goals and follow-up that are directly relevant to the work of ESCAP.

28. The secretariat recognizes that regional cooperation is essential for addressing the environment and development challenges facing the region. To support member States in the development of national and regional-level partnerships, the secretariat plans to facilitate various levels of implementation of the 2030 agenda. Specifically, in response to member country requests and to support global processes, such as the newly established High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the secretariat has been organizing meetings for Governments and other stakeholders to support regional agenda-setting and to identify regional perspectives and platforms for access to information, knowledge and experiences and to provide a platform for documentation, dissemination and exchange of sustainable development best practices and lessons learned.

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

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

29. Under the overarching theme of sustainable development, the secretariat has been implementing and supporting the decisions of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific as well as implementing the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, while keeping in mind the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. Upon request, the secretariat also has been assisting member States in the form of capacity-building activities, advisory missions, research and analytical work, as well as through the development of policymaking and decision support tools. Key areas of such assistance include support to the development of a regional road map to harness the potential of better integration of the three dimensions of



sustainable development, understand the fundamental principles of integration, support-follow-up and review processes, and strengthen regional platforms.

30. The secretariat actively promotes the balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and promotes and follows-up on the political commitments of member States. It also advocates multi-stakeholder engagement and support for more efficient and effective capacity-building and programme development and implementation. The secretariat is also engaged in providing an enabling environment for regional agreements and institutional arrangements with other United Nations entities and external organizations. These efforts are fully complemented by support to member States to exchange information, best practices and lessons learned, including through South-South cooperation. Specifically, the secretariat's actions and initiatives are manifested through analytical work, capacity development, technical assistance, outreach and partnerships as well as through intergovernmental initiatives, as presented below.

31. The theme of the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and Pacific 2015-Part II*, was "Balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development: from integration to implementation." In the study, the need for a people-centered and planet-sensitive development agenda was emphasized. The study provided a conceptual framework, outlines for normative shifts in policy stance, strategies and policy options and perspectives on institutional frameworks to support the integration.<sup>18</sup> Member States concurred that the regional cooperation suggested in the theme study would be critical to maximize the opportunities that are presented by a transformation to sustainable development.

32. The secretariat is developing a flagship report entitled, "Transformations for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific", to be published online by end of 2015. This publication will be part of the *State of the Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific* report series. The objective of this year's edition is to support the implementation of a transformative development agenda by policymakers and other stakeholders. The report will highlight the fundamental changes needed in order to deliver the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and the actions required to realize them. It particularly focuses on the environmental dimension, but does not overlook the important linkages with the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations University and the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies are co-publishers of the report, allowing the secretariat to tap into a wider knowledge network across the region. As part of the report's outreach, the secretariat has also developed a website for the report with multimedia materials highlighting various themes from stakeholder perspectives.

33. Green business has been an integral part of the green growth strategy, which suggests a way to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development. With green growth as the adopted strategy for sustainable development by the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, the secretariat partnered with the ESCAP Business Advisory Council to produce the *Guidebook on Green Business: Policies and Best Practices for a Green Economy in the Context of Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development*, as part of the Greening of

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<sup>18</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.II.F.7.

Economic Growth Series, which focuses on ecological sustainability of economic development. The guidebook will be launched by November 2015. The subsequent publication in the series focuses on the tools and approaches for the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

34. To address the major policy issues highlighted at the Conference and in the Regional Implementation Plan for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2006-2010, the secretariat, together with the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Korea, established the Seoul Initiative on Environmentally Sustainable Economic Growth (Green Growth). The Initiative aims to increase green growth-related policies to be adopted by member States, which promote sustainable development. As part of the initiative, the Seoul Initiative Network on Green Growth was launched to promote green growth principles and improve the capacity of policymakers through annual policy forums, leadership training, and pilot projects. In the past decade, more than 300 officials attended the Network's programmes, and a total of 25 pilot projects were implemented in fifteen countries. At the seventy-first session of the Commission, the Government of the Republic of Korea committed to make contributions to the Initiative for another five years, from 2016 to 2020.

35. Pursuant to Commission resolution 61/9 in which guidance was given on the implementation of the recommendations of the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, the secretariat continues to enhance the knowledge and capacity of policymakers and other key stakeholders in the development and application of green growth strategies through blended learning (online and onsite). From January 2014 to September 2015, a total of 12 online e-learning sessions were conducted, educating 337 participants from 36 member States. To date, online courses have been translated and offered in three languages, English, Russian and Arabic. With a vision of expanding the range and scope of the existing e-learning facility by refocusing it towards sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, the secretariat is currently working on developing a new knowledge platform with an upgraded operating system, new flagship and sector-based courses and a virtual community of practice.

36. In support of the outcomes of the inaugural Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, which was held in Pattaya, Thailand, from 19 to 21 May 2014, the secretariat remains committed to building its capacity to respond to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. A 2014 internal capacity-building workshop on the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development is being followed up by capacity-building workshops on civil society engagement and systems thinking and its application to sustainable development policy. The secretariat is also exploring the potential for the application of big data analysis for sustainable development priorities and responses with partners and experts.

37. The secretariat is building its capacity to support climate change mitigation and adaptation, with a focus on climate finance. It is designing a capacity development research-focused project to build the knowledge base and expertise in supporting members States on innovative and evidence-based policies to facilitate finance channeling and diversification for climate change mitigation and adaptation. The capacity development project is a pre-cursor to a three-year development account funded project to be launched in 2016.

38. Cognizant of the value of regional cooperation and collaborative partnerships in delivering technical assistance to member States, the

secretariat continues to undertake outreach programmes and form partnerships. In concurrence with Commission 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”, the secretariat continues to support implementation of the Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative with a focus on Central Asia and small island developing States. To date, 14 countries from Asia and Europe have joined the Green Bridge Charter together with the Finland Water Forum. Two Green Bridge Conferences were held, in 2013 and 2014, and a road map on further promotion of the Green Bridge Partnership Programme over the period 2014-2016 was adopted in June 2014. A subregional e-learning centre for green growth and sustainable development was established in July 2015 in partnership with the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation, an international organization with a mandate to advance environmental cooperation and sustainable development in Central Asia. In addition, a trust fund agreement was established in December 2014 to follow up on the pledges made at the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, which was held in Apia from 1 to 4 September 2014. The trust fund supports community-managed sanitation and biogas renewable energy approaches for poverty reduction in nine small island developing States. The funding facilitates the replication of a successfully applied pro-poor green business model for a community managed sanitation and biogas energy system in Samoa in 2010-2011 by the Youth with a Mission programme with technical assistance from the secretariat through funding extended by the Korean International Cooperation Agency.

39. The secretariat has reaffirmed its support for joint implementation of priorities for sustainable development within the Green Bridge Partnership Programme by signing a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Energy of Kazakhstan in July 2015. The partnership focuses on joint technical assistance for capacity development, advisory services, awareness-raising, outreach and dissemination. It also provides platforms for information and technology sharing based on requests from countries in Central Asia and small island developing States.

40. In cooperation with IPCC, the secretariat organized the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report Outreach Event in Bangkok on 17 and 18 August 2015, bringing together policymakers, technical experts and civil society representatives to share the outcomes of the report and to build capacity to support the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is scheduled to be held in Paris from 30 November to 11 December 2015. This meeting was part of a series of IPCC events held around the world to highlight the findings of the report. More than 130 participants from the region participated. Representatives from the media also participated in a half-day media training on climate change.

41. During seventieth session of the Commission, the secretariat organized the Ministerial Panel on Asia-Pacific Perspectives on Sustainable Development and Development Financing and the Regional Consultation on Accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Through these meetings, member States were able to provide the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development with a solid regional voice on sustainable development. These initiatives serve as valuable cases of how to effectively implement balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

42. The secretariat has demonstrated its strong commitment to dealing with environment and development policy-related issues in Asia and the Pacific through its response to requests of member States as well as the region's capacity-building and research needs.

## **B. Energy security and the sustainable use of energy<sup>19</sup>**

43. Pursuant to Commission resolution 67/2, ESCAP, with support of the Russian Federation, organized the first Asian and Pacific Energy Forum in May 2013. This event was the first ministerial conference convened by the United Nations with a focus on energy. The Forum provided a platform for consensus-building towards a regional framework for energy cooperation, which manifested in the Ministerial Declaration and Plan of Action on Regional Cooperation for Enhanced Energy Security and the Sustainable Use of Energy in Asia and the Pacific. The Commission, in its resolution 70/9, endorsed the outcomes of the Forum, including the establishment of a review and assessment mechanism, and setting in motion preparations for the second Asian and Pacific Energy Forum 2018 to be hosted by Tonga. The outcomes endorsed by the member States are aligned to the goals of the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) initiative. In response to the member States' endorsement, the secretariat developed the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum Implementation Support Mechanism, a solution-driven structure with expected outputs in the form of multilateral policy initiatives and solutions that consist of three pillars: data and policy information portal, dialogue, and analysis and reports.

44. As part of the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum Implementation Support Mechanism, the secretariat published the "Regional trends report on energy for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific 2015", which was launched at the seventy-first session of the Commission. The report serves as the channel through which the secretariat provides analysis on key challenges identified by member States.

45. In support of the Ministerial Declaration and Plan of Action on Regional Cooperation for Enhanced Energy Security and the Sustainable Use of Energy in Asia and the Pacific, the secretariat developed an energy data and policy information portal, which provides interactive energy data visualizations, enabling rapid analysis and access to national energy policies. With the ability to simultaneously view data and policy information, the platform provides a unique analytical tool for the Forum's activities, as well as enables member States and stakeholders' access to centralize information for the region. The portal is available at [www.asiapacificenergy.org](http://www.asiapacificenergy.org).

46. Energy is one of areas included under the Working Group on the Development of Seamless Connectivity as mandated by the Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific in 2014. During 2014-2015, the Working Group took stock of existing energy connectivity initiatives in the region covering gas, oil and electricity. The finding of the study is contained in the Working Group paper,

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<sup>19</sup> The Commission in its resolution 71/1 called for the creation of the Committee on Energy to help address specific energy security and sustainable energy utilization issues in the region. As such, the Committee on Energy will first convene in the biennium 2016-2017. With this pending transition, current energy trends and emerging issues are reported to the Committee on Environment and Development, keeping in mind that guidance from the Committee will be noted as information in preparation for the first session of the Committee on Energy.

which will be submitted to the second Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific, to be held in 2016.

47. In its commitment to capacity development, the secretariat developed a policy dialogue on “Pro-Poor Public-Private Partnership (5P) for rural development: Widening access to energy services for the rural poor in Asia and the Pacific through community mobilization”, with the aim to widen access to energy services. This fostered community engagement through the development of a power plant. As a result, the initiative has positioned energy as a critical input towards community development in rural areas through higher levels of ownership and engagement. Specifically, it has helped (a) identify business opportunities in the community, (b) provide productive use of energy and (c) boost participation of the private sector in the development and financing of the power plant. The three projects, which are being implemented in Indonesia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Nepal, will form the basis to develop policy frameworks necessary to upscale such pilot projects.

48. The secretariat is supporting an enabling mechanism for intergovernmental dialogues by holding annual high-level policy dialogues on energy. These dialogues, which focus on identifying solutions to key challenges and establishing working-level groups to support the implementation of policy solutions, have been attended by policymakers and relevant stakeholders, including those from research institutions, members of the private sector and representatives of civil society organizations. The 2015 session of the policy dialogue will be held in Bangkok on 24 and 25 November 2015.

49. ESCAP is partnered with the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme to serve as the Asia-Pacific hub of the global network of the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) initiative to facilitate and coordinate the implementation at the regional level. The hub supports countries in conducting rapid assessments, building constructive policy dialogues, and catalysing investments and mobilizing bilateral and global funds for clean energy development. The hub is fostering subregional and regional cooperation in energy access, energy efficiency, and renewable energy development as part of its effort towards achieving energy security and sustainable energy development. Within this partnership framework, the secretariat initiated the Asian Energy Highway framework and the Pacific Regional Data Repository for SE4All, and developed the Pro-Poor Public-Private Partnership model. In addition, the secretariat is facilitating regional promotion of sustainable energy policies, projects and good practices developed at the subregional and country levels, and supports SE4ALL-related national actions by the Governments.

### **C. Water resources and sanitation**

50. The secretariat has provided substantive analysis on the perspectives of water resources management to the *United Nations World Water Development Report 2015*. Part of the substantive inputs from the secretariat has covered issues related to securing water resources triggered by accelerating urbanization, exploitation of groundwater and stress on ecological systems. The report was launched in the presence of the Prime Minister of Thailand at the World Water Day commemoration in March 2015.

51. The Asia-Pacific region is behind schedule in achieving the Millennium Development Goal related to basic sanitation. To help the region get back on track, the secretariat has worked jointly with UN-Habitat to

develop a policy guidance manual on wastewater management at the community level in South-East Asia. This policy manual, which focuses on using a decentralized approach for wastewater treatment in an affordable and practical manner, has been used at national workshops in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam.

52. As requested by the Commission in its resolution 69/8, the secretariat is working closely with member countries and other United Nations agencies, as well as donors, to ensure the promotion of effective policy frameworks, better use of technology and innovation in water management, sharing of regional and subregional best practices, and capacity development on integrated water resources management, and build resilience in Asia and the Pacific to water-related risks and disasters.

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

53. The secretariat has been supporting member States in achieving inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban development, including through technical cooperation and support for regional knowledge-sharing and norm-setting on key urban development issues. Some of the major activities undertaken in this regard are highlighted below.

54. In line with its commitment to analytical work to support member States, the secretariat is launching two key publications in 2015. In partnership with UN-Habitat, *The State of Asian and Pacific Cities 2015* will be launched in October 2015. The report provides analyses of key urbanization trends and issues across the region, including updated data made available from *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*. *The State of Asian and Pacific Cities 2015* highlights the need to find greater balance between urban growth, sustainability and quality of life. It calls for more innovative and sustainable urban planning to enable cities to effectively deal with urban development challenges. It is also a timely reference and information source for urban planners and those engaged in formulating policies and implementing programmes for inclusive and sustainable urban development.

55. In collaboration with UN-Habitat and the Rockefeller Foundation, the secretariat prepared the *Quick Guide for Policy Makers on Pro-Poor Urban Climate Resilience in Asia and the Pacific 2014*. The Guide, which documents pro-poor urban climate change adaptation practices from across the region was launched at the first Asia-Pacific Forum on Urban Resilience and Adaptation, which was held in Bangkok from 11 to 13 February 2015.<sup>20</sup>

56. For the seventy-first session of the Commission, the secretariat developed a note entitled "Towards a sustainable, inclusive and resilient urban future for Asia and the Pacific" which highlighted challenges and opportunities for the region and included a set of recommendations for consideration.<sup>21</sup>

57. With the aim to enhance the capacity of policymakers and key urban stakeholders and help them better formulate and apply policies for eco-efficient resource management and sustainable and resilient urban infrastructure, including urban water infrastructure, the secretariat has carried out a number

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<sup>20</sup> Available from [www.unescap.org/resources/quick-guide-policy-makers-pro-poor-urban-climate-resilience-asia-and-pacific-0](http://www.unescap.org/resources/quick-guide-policy-makers-pro-poor-urban-climate-resilience-asia-and-pacific-0).

<sup>21</sup> E/ESCAP/71/13.

of activities under the following projects: (a) Pilot Implementation of Low Carbon Green Growth Roadmap for Asia and the Pacific and (b) Application of Community-based Integrated Water Supply and Wastewater Treatment Systems to Improve Resilience to Climate Change. Activities related to these projects include pilot rainwater harvesting, storm water management, domestic wastewater treatment, and reuse and recycling systems, in Cebu City, Philippines, Bandung, Indonesia, Kathmandu, and Tagbilaran City, Philippines, together with capacity-building activities and national/local policy development documents for promoting ecoefficient urban water infrastructure.<sup>22</sup> Capacity development activities were also organized in Ulaanbaatar and Manila. The former focused on integrated energy-water resources management for green industries in cities in Mongolia and the latter were aimed at documenting designs and promoting green and resilient schools and low cost buildings.

58. The secretariat organized the Regional Policy Dialogue on Sustainable Urbanization in South Asia, which was held in New Delhi on 17 and 18 December 2014, with the Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia and in cooperation with the Ministry of Urban Development and the National Institute of Urban Affairs of India. The Policy Dialogue brought together more than 120 policymakers, representatives from academia, international organizations and civil society from seven countries in the region. The participants considered the pressing demands on infrastructure and the unfolding urban transformation and looked at ways to achieve sustainable and inclusive urban development and meeting the urgent need for accessible and affordable shelter, adequate livelihoods, healthy and safe environments, and good governance.

59. The ninth tranche of the Development Account project, Strengthening the Capacities of Member States in the Asia-Pacific Region to Mainstream Climate Change Concerns into National Urban-Related Policies, is aimed at providing technical assistance towards integrating national and local governments' climate change policies. Countries that will benefit from the project are those that initially identify shortcomings and gaps in terms of urban-national policy linkages and opportunities for capacity-building. The project will continue over the next three years to assist countries in setting policy, building capacity, developing financing and institutional support. Through regional coordination and workshops, beneficiary countries will be able to share best practices with regard to mainstreaming climate change urban issues at the national level. Priority target countries include Bangladesh, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam, with additional participating countries, to date, being Indonesia, Mongolia and Myanmar.

60. In partnership with Waste Concern (Bangladesh), a non-governmental organization, the secretariat is promoting pro-poor and sustainable solid waste management in secondary cities and small towns in the region with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Through this project, the secretariat has assisted Governments in developing strategies for solid waste management that are financially viable, environmentally sound and pro-poor. The project has established decentralized integrated resource recovery centres in eight cities with the objective to recover value from waste and provide livelihood opportunities to the urban poor. It is currently working with national Governments to develop mechanisms for replicating and upscaling the model associated with the project. It is also working with Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam to develop programmes

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<sup>22</sup> Available from [www.unescap.org/resources/managing-urban-water](http://www.unescap.org/resources/managing-urban-water).

linked with international climate financing, including nationally appropriate mitigation actions.

61. Based on experience, effective partnerships linking critical stakeholders, such as local communities, are needed to operate effective waste-to-resource facilities.<sup>23</sup> Without adequate attention to community needs, behaviors, preferences and constraints, critical stages of the waste-to-resource process will be undermined. Waste separation, collection and the payment of collection fees cannot be undertaken without the engagement of communities.<sup>24</sup> The secretariat's research has shown that the co-benefits associated with small-scale, decentralized and pro-poor solid waste management for sustainable development in developing countries are significant. These include green job creation, improved health, improved waste collection, cost savings from reduced need for landfilling and improved crop yields through the use of compost. In the case of composting projects in selected developing countries in Asia and the Pacific, it was calculated that these co-benefits can be as high as \$184.21 per ton of CO<sub>2</sub> eq reduced.<sup>25, 26</sup> Therefore, projects of these kinds should be actively promoted and supported by national and local governments, including through financial incentives, such as gate (tipping) fees, feed-in tariffs, tax exemptions or subsidies.

62. An urban nexus approach aimed at integrated planning and management processes of the key sectors of energy, water, and food security, is considered important for the long-term sustainable development of growing cities in Asia and the Pacific. The secretariat has been promoting integrated resource management in cities in the region in partnership with the German International Cooperation Agency and Local Governments for Sustainability and with funding from the Government of Germany. The project is assisting ten cities, in China, Indonesia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam, to develop nexus projects and has facilitated national and regional policy dialogues.

63. An urban nexus approach can help advance the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. By integrating policies and measures across critical resources, the nexus can enhance synergies and reduce trade-offs and ultimately support a transition to sustainability. As both the resource footprint of cities and ecosystem boundaries transcend urban administrative boundaries, greater coordination across actors and institutions is needed. Securing financing for relevant projects is a challenge. In many instances, municipalities have been given unfunded mandates, while their ability to raise revenues is limited. At the same time, national Governments

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<sup>23</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Valuing Waste, Transforming Cities* (forthcoming).

<sup>24</sup> D. Storey and others, "Designing effective partnerships for waste-to-resource initiatives: Lessons learned from developing countries", *Waste Management & Research* (forthcoming).

<sup>25</sup> Carbon dioxide equivalency is a quantity that describes, for a given mixture and amount of greenhouse gas, the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that would have the same global warming potential (GWP), when measured over a specified timescale (generally, 100 years).

<sup>26</sup> Lorenzo Santucci and others, *Valuing the sustainable development co-benefits of climate change mitigation actions: The case of the waste sector and recommendations for the design of nationally appropriate mitigation actions (NAMAs)* (ESCAP, 2015). Available from [www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Valuing%20the%20Sustainable%20Dev%20Co-Benefits%20%28Final%29.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Valuing%20the%20Sustainable%20Dev%20Co-Benefits%20%28Final%29.pdf).



have a key role to play in developing mechanisms and programmes for capacity-building of local governments.<sup>27</sup>

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

64. Regional cooperation is critical to contextualize and implement the sustainable development goals through the sharing of knowledge and experience. To link the Asia-Pacific regional perspective on the priorities and goals for sustainable development into the global process of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to shape the future development path of the region, the secretariat organized the inaugural Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. As requested by the Commission in resolution 70/11, the secretariat convened the second session of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development back-to-back with the seventy-first session of Commission.

65. The inaugural Forum discussed the following: integration and transformation for sustainable development; shared prosperity within planetary boundaries; means of implementation, and the way forward for sustainable development, and included a special session on the rule of law in the development agenda. A major outcome of the Forum was the consensus among member States on the need to recognize the interdependence and balance the three dimensions of sustainability in national policymaking and to ensure that economic growth, social justice, and ecological sustainability objectives reinforce, rather than undermine, each other. The second Forum deliberated on the regional sustainable development challenges and opportunities, the perspectives on the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, and the critical attributes of the institutional structure and modalities needed for a regional mechanism for the implementation, follow up and review of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. Its outcome called for the development of a regional road map for implementing the 2030 agenda at the 2016 Forum session, and proposed that the form, function and modalities of the Forum after 2016 be decided at the third Forum in 2016 through an intergovernmental consultative process.

66. To ensure broad participation in the regional dialogue on sustainable development, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development 2015 process was supported by the development of an online platform for dialogue with multi-stakeholders, including civil society organizations and the business sector, to capture their important inputs, the voice of the unheard. The Stockholm Environment Institute provided funding to the secretariat to coordinate with the Asia Pacific Regional CSO-Engagement Mechanism to develop the online platform within “The world we want” process. The views of the Mechanism expressed at the Forum were taken into consideration at the Asia-Pacific Civil Society Forum on Sustainable Development, which preceded the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, which was held in 2014. The secretariat convened these events in collaboration with civil society partners, including the Asia Pacific Regional CSO-Engagement Mechanism, for both years and the United Nations Environment Programme in 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Report of the Fifth Regional Workshop on Integrated Resource Management in Asian Cities: The Urban Nexus, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 16-18 June 2015. Available from [www.unescap.org/events/fifth-regional-workshop-integrated-resource-management-asian-cities-urban-nexus](http://www.unescap.org/events/fifth-regional-workshop-integrated-resource-management-asian-cities-urban-nexus).

67. In response to Commission resolution 70/12, the secretariat, in partnership with the Government of Indonesia, is organizing the sixth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, which is scheduled to be held in October 2015 in Jakarta, back-to-back with the High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting to Habitat III for Asia-Pacific. The Forum is expected to provide an opportunity to review regional trends, identify priorities and develop recommendations from a regional perspective in the preparatory process for Habitat III. This Forum, which has been organized regularly since 1993 in partnership with a wide array of global and regional partners, has provided a multi-stakeholder perspective to complement and enrich intergovernmental deliberations at the high-level regional preparatory meetings. The outcomes of both meetings would serve as regional inputs to Habitat III.

68. In pursuit of resolution 67/3, the secretariat is supporting preparatory discussions for the seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific and has invited member States to reflect on the future role and function of the Ministerial Conference in relationship to new mandates given to the secretariat with respect to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.

## **V. Issues for consideration**

69. 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:

### **A. Programmatic direction**

70. Identifying regional priorities and areas for policy support, research and capacity-building needs and opportunities for multi-stakeholder and South-South cooperation in Asia and the Pacific, for design, development and implementation of a road map to guide policies in the context of the three dimensions of sustainable development and inclusive regional growth.

71. Defining the broad programmatic direction of the work of the secretariat given the mandates of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and steps to accomplish the proposed sustainable development goals, particularly in the following fields: environmental sustainability, including climate change adaptation and mitigation; promoting access to energy services, energy efficiency and renewable energy; water resources management and sanitation; and sustainable urban development, including guidance in implementing relevant resolutions adopted by the Commission at its seventy-first session.

72. Strengthening the secretariat's strategy on integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development by aligning the activities of the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture and the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization with the regional efforts to achieve the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. At present, the two centres' work is positioned under the secretariat's Subprogramme 1 – Macroeconomic policy and inclusive development and Subprogramme 2 – Trade and investment, respectively. In support of the 2030 agenda, their work will be more closely linked to Subprogramme 4 – Environment and development to holistically address natural resource management, including agriculture, forest, freshwater and marine resources management. With this background, the secretariat wishes to inform the Committee that the work programme components relating to the two centres will be moved from Subprogramme 1 and 2, respectively, to Subprogramme 4. Correspondingly,

a programme change in the secretariat's proposed strategic framework for 2016-2017 will be proposed at the seventy-second session of the Commission. It should be noted that despite such changes, the work focus of both institutions will stay unchanged. Linkages and collaboration with the macroeconomic policy and inclusive development, and trade and investment subprogrammes will be maintained through day-to-day interdivisional communications within the secretariat under the general oversight of the Executive Secretary.

**B. Regional agenda-setting**

73. In support of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, defining the format, modality, timelines and other organizational details, as well as the substantive focus, of the regional and subregional meetings, particularly the third Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, and the seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development.

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

75. 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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