



# Economic and Social Council

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## Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Committee on Environment and Development

### Fifth session

Bangkok, 21–23 November 2018

## Report of the Committee on Environment and Development on its fifth session

### I. Matters calling for action by the Commission or brought to its attention

1. The Committee on Environment and Development at its fifth session recommends that the activities under the subprogramme on environment and development continue to be based upon and contribute to the achievement of the objectives and priority areas identified in the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, 2017, and the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

2. The Committee puts forward for consideration by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) the suggestion to create a platform for resource efficiency.

### II. Proceedings

#### A. Environmental challenges in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda item 2)

3. The Committee had before it the note by the secretariat on key environmental issues, trends and challenges in the Asia-Pacific region (ESCAP/CED/2018/1).

4. Representatives of the following members and associate members of the Commission made statements: Bangladesh; China; Georgia; India; Indonesia; Japan; Nepal; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; and Sri Lanka.

5. The representative of the Economic Commission for Europe also made a statement.

6. The Committee benefited from a presentation and a panel discussion on environmental challenges in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The panellists discussed the key environmental and development challenges in the Asia-Pacific region, including the unsustainable use of natural resources, dwindling ecosystems services, the increase in pollution and waste, and the effects of climate change, as well as the strong relationship between such issues and rapid, unplanned urbanization. The panellists stressed how more sustainable approaches to urban planning, including land use planning, could be an entry point to addressing environmental challenges at the city level. Discussants called for greater investment in and new approaches to tackling plastic pollution, underscoring the need to better leverage the environmental contributions of informal economic actors in cities. Attention was also drawn to the alarming findings of the recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on the 1.5 degrees target, which called for urgent and accelerated climate actions to meet the commitments of the Paris Agreement.

7. The Committee noted the significant environmental challenges confronting the region, including marine pollution, water pollution, air pollution, land degradation, loss of biodiversity, unsustainable management of natural resources, inefficient management of waste and climate change-induced disasters. The Committee noted that those environmental challenges posed serious economic costs and negatively impacted human health and livelihoods as well as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Member States shared their experiences addressing environmental challenges through various actions, such as a shift in the economic development paradigm, stronger environmental governance to balance business activities with environmental concerns, the mobilization of additional financing to support the implementation of nationally determined contributions and mainstreaming ecosystem conservation in policymaking. One representative emphasized the importance of voluntary instruments, national standards systems, green procurement and economic instruments such as environmental funds to internalize externalities in addressing the environmental challenges. Progress in addressing the air-pollution challenge by launching the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership under the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation was mentioned, with a request to ESCAP for further support.

8. The Committee encouraged ESCAP to continue working in the priority areas identified in the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, 2017, including sustainable consumption and production as well as sustainable urbanization. Member States also emphasized the need for greater regional cooperation to tackle marine plastic debris to address pollution, including in coastal settlements. One representative, referencing the outcomes of the seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, called for adequate monitoring and enhanced regional cooperation for the implementation of those outcomes.

**B. Benefits of and opportunities for addressing emerging environmental challenges through regional cooperation**  
(Agenda item 3)

9. The Committee had before it the note by the secretariat on the benefits of environmental action, including through enhanced regional cooperation (ESCAP/CED/2018/2).

10. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; Japan; Kazakhstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Mongolia; Republic of Korea; Sri Lanka; and Viet Nam.

11. The representative of the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme also made a statement.

12. The Committee benefited from a presentation and a panel discussion on the benefits of environmental action for resource-efficient and climate-resilient development and improved livelihoods. The importance of mainstreaming biodiversity, scaling up nature-based solutions and holistic accounting of ecosystem services was highlighted. The panellists also discussed the role of women in the fisheries market in the Pacific, emphasizing that empowering women and their contributions to climate action benefited the wider community. The benefits of organic agriculture for ecology, social equality, health and income generation were also outlined. Panellists emphasized the importance of regional and transboundary cooperation. Good practices in that area included the expansion of regional and transboundary management of land and sea in the Pacific and the experience in Central Asia of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, which was a comprehensive regional platform for engaging governments and development partners in restoring the Aral Sea and securing wider socioeconomic benefits. The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (1992) was also mentioned as a useful legal framework for cooperation and as a support for member States in exploring the water-food-energy ecosystems nexus.

13. The Committee took note of actions by member States to strengthen national planning processes in support of promoting the environment and sustainable development. Such actions included references to national planning frameworks aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals; a national strategy on natural resources and the environment; a strategic environmental assessment and integrated spatial planning; a sustainability outlook which applied a systems approach to synergize actions across the Sustainable Development Goals and to address international and national commitments; and the integration of the concepts of ecological civilization and sustainable development into constitutions.

14. The Committee was informed about policies and actions in the area of sustainable consumption and production, including the adoption of regulatory policy instruments, research on waste to energy and a sound international cycle of waste, the development of green credit and green bonds, partnerships with small businesses and the creation of plastic-use guidelines for the public sector. With respect to natural resources conservation and environmental protection, the success reported by one member State in increasing forest cover, among other areas of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, was noted, together with the establishment of core targets for environmental protection. In the area of climate change, research and assessment on climate vulnerability could increase understanding of the value of climate resilience, and the important role of specific financial allocations and programmes established for climate adaptation and mitigation was noted. A paradigm shift towards business-led technological innovation and other efforts were also mentioned. In relation to water resource management, active support for the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes as a mechanism for transboundary water resources management and actions to reduce pressure on groundwater sources and promote rainwater harvesting were mentioned. However, several challenges remained, including budget limitations, human resources constraints, unsustainable practices in

agriculture and industry, lack of coordination, poverty and lack of focus in national development strategies on environmental issues.

15. The Committee underlined the benefits of regional cooperation in several areas, including sustainable consumption and production, ecotourism, transboundary air pollution, ocean governance and natural disasters. It was pointed out that regional forums enabled networking, research and technical support and that international cooperation frameworks promoted connectivity and collaboration. The United Nations, development partners, non-governmental organizations and donors were called upon to further support national strategies and means of implementation.

16. The South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme shared its interest and willingness to work with ESCAP and with member States.

**C. Solutions to accelerate progress with respect to the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**  
(Agenda item 4)

17. The Committee had before it the note by the secretariat on solutions to accelerate progress with respect to the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/CED/2018/3) and the information document on enabling sustainable food systems through mechanization solutions for production and processing (ESCAP/CED/2018/INF/1).

18. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; Georgia; Japan; Kazakhstan; Nepal; Philippines; and Sri Lanka.

19. The representative of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme made a statement.

20. The representative of the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme also made a statement.

21. The Committee benefited from a presentation and a panel discussion focusing on the innovative and technical solutions being developed and applied throughout the Asia-Pacific region to harness the benefits of actions to address environmental externalities, including circular economy and nature-based approaches. The panellists presented specific tools to operationalize the means of implementation and to capitalize on the opportunities identified in previous sessions. Options for achieving healthy oceans and pathways towards the sustainable cities of the future were discussed. Given the increasing recognition of the importance of food systems in achieving sustainable development, participants reviewed solutions for making food systems more environmentally sustainable. The panellists highlighted the need for waste recycling, nature-based solutions and the empowerment of local governments and discussed financing initiatives for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

22. Several representatives informed the Committee about measures in their countries for addressing the environmental dimension of sustainable development. The Committee noted the need for strengthening adaptive capacities, reflecting natural capital and environmental services in national accounting, implementing joint actions and partnerships for addressing environmental challenges, scaling up projects for waste management, and promoting green and equitable development and a rule-based governance

system, as well as mobilizing funds from international sources to complement national Government funds.

23. The Committee took note of the benefits of regional cooperation in addressing various environmental challenges in the region, including those of a transboundary character. The Committee encouraged ESCAP and other development partners to extend further collaboration and technical support to translate policies into action, to build capacities in evidence-based decision-making on natural resources, sharing good practices and learning, to develop and utilize environmentally friendly technologies, to develop national and local water strategies, to access funding and to build capacity at the local level. Moreover, the Committee noted the need for implementing joint actions and multi-stakeholder partnerships for addressing environmental challenges and mobilizing funds from international sources to complement national government resources.

24. Member States shared the following ideas on regional cooperation and solutions to address environmental challenges: (a) the importance of promoting international trade in agricultural machinery with regard to the parameters of performance and safety and the development of regional testing codes for agricultural machinery; (b) the possibility of preparing a regional contingency plan to address transboundary pollution, including the contamination of foreign organisms through discharge of ballast water, leading to the loss of endemic ocean biodiversity; (c) the compilation of a study to assess the contribution and institutionalization of natural resources on growth; and (d) the creation of a platform through which ESCAP member countries could discuss innovative solutions to various environmental challenges, hosted by the secretariat and managed by the Environment and Development Division

25. Member States recommended that partnerships be strengthened with subregional organizations, such as the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme, the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia and the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation, for promoting nature-based solutions for biodiversity and ecosystems and services conservation and restoration.

26. The representative of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme stated that close collaboration of his agency with the Environment and Development Division of ESCAP was a good practice towards delivering the One United Nations initiative.

#### **D. Consideration of the future focus of the subprogramme**

(Agenda item 5)

27. The Committee had before it the information document on the preparation of the draft programme of work for 2020 (ESCAP/CED/2018/INF/2).

28. The secretariat presented the strategic planning process of ESCAP, including the preparation of part II of the programme budget for 2020 for areas related to environment, and highlighted achievements of the environment and development subprogramme since the fourth session of the Committee on Environment and Development.

29. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bhutan; Fiji; Indonesia; Japan; Kazakhstan; Malaysia; Philippines; and Thailand.

30. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations also made statements: South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme; Indian Centre for Plastics in the Environment; and United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific.

31. The Committee expressed its appreciation for the work carried out by the secretariat since the fourth session of the Committee and welcomed the preparation for the programme of work for 2020. The Committee called for continuous support from the secretariat through capacity-building, technical assistance, financial assistance, knowledge-sharing and enhancing access of countries to technology and innovation for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

32. To streamline various initiatives on resource efficiency in the region and to operationalize the outcomes of the seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, member States suggested the creation of a regional platform for resource efficiency facilitated by ESCAP in close collaboration with other United Nations agencies and relevant regional partners. Such a multi-stakeholder platform should promote the sharing of knowledge, good practices and data; strengthen capacity-building; promote analytical work; and provide technical assistance on resource efficiency.

33. With regard to the recommendation to create a regional platform for resource efficiency facilitated by ESCAP, one member State noted that the proposed platform should work within the existing mandates and budget for the subprogramme.

34. One member State expressed appreciation to the secretariat for organizing the first Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean and requested that the event be continued in the future. Another member State informed the Committee on the work of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, and encouraged more focus and information-sharing on Sustainable Development Goals 6 and 7 and their interlinkages with the broader environment, through the platform of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia.

35. One representative of an intergovernmental organization highlighted the environmental implications of nitrogen pollution and expressed willingness to work with ESCAP in that area. A representative from the research community highlighted the role of recycling in promoting resource efficiency, and noted that the organization would like to collaborate with the proposed platform on resource efficiency. Another organization representing local governments highlighted the role of local governments in the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, and requested ESCAP to support local governments in strengthening the evidence base for local action through the collection and harmonization of city-level data on climate action and sustainability.

**E. Consideration of draft resolutions, recommendations and decisions for submission to the Commission at its seventy-fifth session**  
(Agenda item 6)

36. In introducing the agenda item, the secretariat provided an overview of the process for adopting resolutions by the Commission and recalled the guidelines for draft resolutions, which were adopted by the Commission in its resolution 71/1.

37. Member States were invited to circulate, in advance, proposals and/or texts of draft resolutions for consideration by the Commission at its seventy-fifth session.

38. One representative informed the Committee of the intention of the Government to submit a resolution to the forthcoming Commission session.

**F. Other matters**  
(Agenda item 7)

39. No statements were made with regard to the agenda item.

**G. Adoption of the report of the Committee on its fifth session**  
(Agenda item 8)

40. The Committee adopted the present report on 23 November 2018.

**III. Organization**

**A. Opening, duration and organization of the session**

41. The Committee held its fifth session in Bangkok from 21 to 23 November 2018.

42. The session was opened by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Mr. Wijarn Simachaya, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand, and Mr. Peter Thomson, Special Envoy for the Ocean, also made statements.

**B. Attendance**

43. The session was attended by representatives of the following members and associate members of ESCAP: Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; China; Fiji; France; Georgia; India; Indonesia; Japan; Kazakhstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Macao, China; Malaysia; Maldives; Mongolia; Nepal; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Turkey; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and Viet Nam.

44. The representatives of the following Permanent Observer to ESCAP attended: Canada.

45. The representative of the following office of the United Nations Secretariat attended: Economic Commission for Europe.

46. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies and specialized agencies attended: International Labour Organization; United Nations Environment Programme; United Nations Human Settlements Programme; United Nations Industrial Development Organization; and World Health Organization.

47. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations attended: Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services; International Union for Conservation of Nature; South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme; and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

48. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations, civil society and other entities attended: Asian Institute of Technology; Global Shapers Community; Go Organics Co., Ltd; Green Climate Fund; Indian Centre for Plastics in the Environment; International Water Management Institute; Institute for Global Environmental Strategies; Jayapura Municipal Planning Board; Joint Foreign Chambers of Commerce in Thailand; Stockholm Environment Institute; Thailand Institute of Packaging and Recycling; The Council of Scientific and Technological Associations of Thailand; United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific; University of Sydney; and Women in Fisheries Network, Fiji.

**C. Election of officers**

49. The following officers were elected:

Chair: Mr. Sonam P. Wangdi (Bhutan)  
 Vice-Chairs: Ms. Diane Gail L. Maharjan (Philippines)  
 Mr. Oleg Shamanov (Russian Federation)

**D. Agenda**

50. The Committee adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session:
  - (a) Opening statements;
  - (b) Election of officers;
  - (c) Adoption of the agenda.
2. Environmental challenges in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
3. Benefits of and opportunities for addressing emerging environmental challenges through regional cooperation.
4. Solutions to accelerate progress with respect to the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
5. Consideration of the future focus of the subprogramme.
6. Consideration of draft resolutions, recommendations and decisions for submission to the Commission at its seventy-fifth session.
7. Other matters.
8. Adoption of the report of the Committee on its fifth session.

**E. Other events**

51. The following events were held in conjunction with the Committee session:

- (a) 19 November 2018: side event on closing the loop: unlocking an inclusive circular economy, co-hosted with the Stockholm Environment Institute Asia Centre and Kashtakari Panchayat;



- (b) 20 November 2018: side event on Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean, organized in close cooperation with custodian agencies of the Communities of Ocean Action and the Special Envoy for the Ocean;
- (c) 21 November 2018: side event on supporting the Science-Policy Interface for Biodiversity and Sustainable Development, co-hosted with the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services;
- (d) 21 November 2018: ceremony for the Asia Environmental Enforcement Awards 2018: Fighting Transboundary Environmental Crime, co-hosted with the United Nations Environment Programme and other partners;
- (e) 22 November 2018: side event on how water-energy-food nexus in cities contribute to mitigating climate change, co-hosted with the German Agency for International Cooperation;
- (f) 23 November 2018: side event on the subregional road map for implementing the global waste management goals towards addressing the Sustainable Development Goals in South Asia, co-hosted with the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies;
- (g) 23 November 2018: Expert Group Meeting on Urban Resilience for the Future of Asia Pacific Cities Report, co-hosted with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the European Commission and the Rockefeller Foundation;
- (h) 23 November 2018: side event on the benefits of enhanced transboundary water cooperation for ecosystems conservation, co-hosted with the secretariat of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and the Global Water Partnership;
- (i) 23 November 2018: side event on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: how participation leads to sustainable outcomes, co-hosted with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

**Annex**

**List of documents**

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Agenda item</i>
<i>General series</i>		
ESCAP/CED/2018/1	Key environmental issues, trends and challenges in the Asia-Pacific region	2
ESCAP/CED/2018/2	Benefits of environmental action, including through enhanced regional cooperation	3
ESCAP/CED/2018/3	Solutions to accelerate progress with respect to the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific	4
ESCAP/CED/2018/4	Report of the Committee on Environment and Development on its fifth session	
<i>Limited series</i>		
ESCAP/CED/2018/L.1	Annotated provisional agenda	1 (c)
ESCAP/CED/2018/L.2	Draft report	8
<i>Information series</i>		
ESCAP/CED/2018/INF/1	Enabling sustainable food systems through mechanization solutions for production and processing	4
ESCAP/CED/2018/INF/2	Preparation of the draft programme of work for 2020	5
<i>Information available online</i>		
<a href="http://www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-fifth-session">www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-fifth-session</a>	Information for participants	
<a href="http://www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-fifth-session">www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-fifth-session</a>	List of participants	
<a href="http://www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-fifth-session">www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-fifth-session</a>	Tentative programme	