

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**  
Committee on Environment and Development**Seventh session**

Bangkok and online, 29 November–1 December 2022

Item 2 of the provisional agenda\*

**Review of the implementation of the Ministerial  
Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia  
and the Pacific, 2017****Review of the implementation of the Ministerial  
Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia  
and the Pacific, 2017****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The present document contains an overview of progress on the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, 2017, and the role of regional collaboration in advancing progress on environment and development challenges in the region. It draws on stakeholder perspectives shared in the preparatory process for the seventh session of the Committee on Environment and Development and shares conclusions regarding possible actions for advancing progress through multilateral action.

The Committee may wish to consider the conclusions with a view to recommending actions for strengthening multilateral action for the implementation of the outcomes of the seventh session of the Committee.

**I. Background**

1. The Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific was held from 5 to 8 September 2017. At the Conference, members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) adopted the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, 2017.<sup>1</sup>

2. The Ministerial Declaration recognizes themes of common interest to member States to promote environment and development; identifies areas of common work; and requests the secretariat to support the implementation of the Declaration in specific ways.

\* ESCAP/CED/2022/L.1.

<sup>1</sup> See ESCAP/74/10/Add.1.

3. The present document contains a review of the support provided by the secretariat and progress in the areas of action identified in the Ministerial Declaration. Given the increasing urgency of action and the complexity of environment and development challenges facing the region, attention is focused on regional cooperation and reinvigorated multilateralism as critical paths for advancing progress.

4. The present document draws on expert and stakeholder perspectives shared during the preparatory process for the seventh session of the Committee on Environment and Development, at the ministerial level, including a survey that gathered perspectives regarding priorities and actions to address environment and development challenges in Asia and the Pacific and an expert group meeting.<sup>2</sup> The survey provided a snapshot of government and other expert views from 31 members and associate members of the Commission. It covered: (a) main areas of concern in environment and development; (b) progress in addressing environment and development challenges in Asia and the Pacific since 2017, when the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific took place; and (c) needs and potentials for reinvigorating multilateral cooperation on environment and development in the Asia-Pacific region.

## **II. Survey for the Committee on Environment and Development**

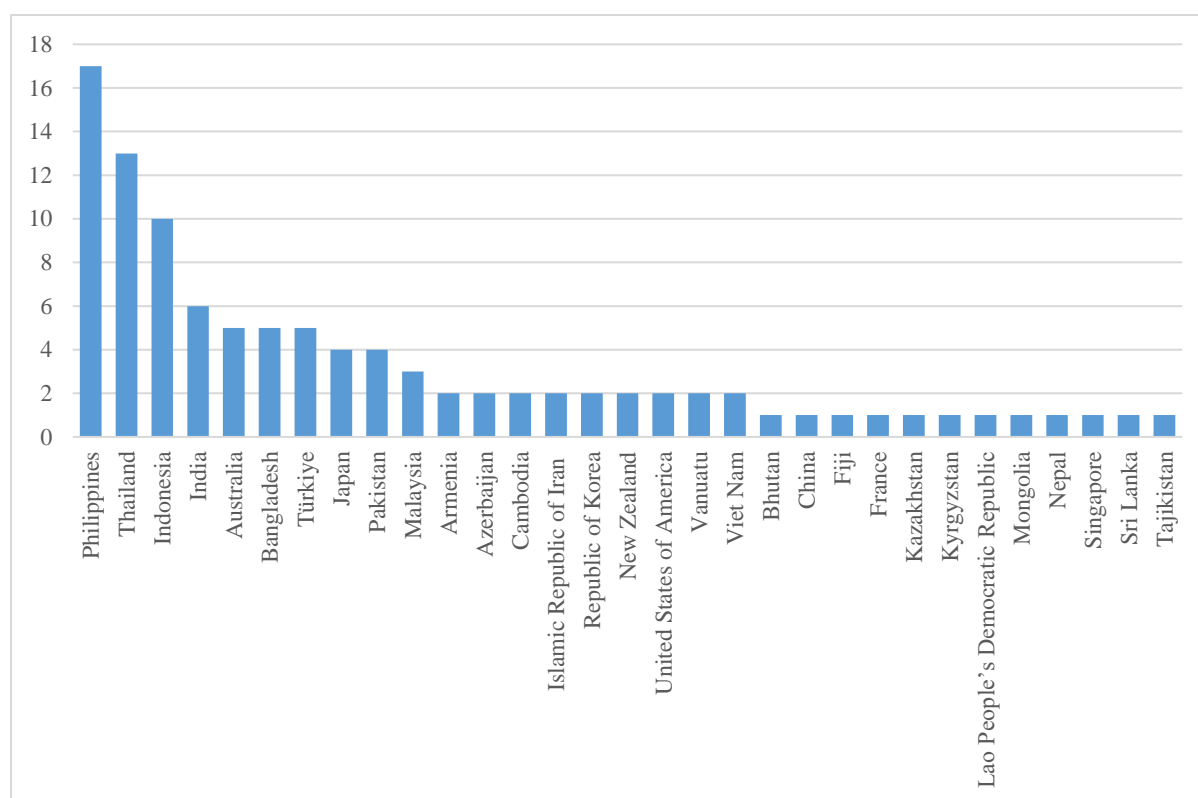
5. In preparation for the seventh session of the Committee on Environment and Development, the secretariat conducted a survey to understand regional perceptions on progress and concerns, and potential paths for reinvigorating multilateralism on environment and development challenges facing the region.

6. The emphasis of the survey was on collecting responses from governments and experts rather than the public, and it was targeted to government officials responding in their official or expert capacity or both, and to experts from stakeholder organizations and development partners. One hundred and two responses were received from 31 members and associate members of the Commission, with a heavy weighting of responses from the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia (figure I). More than one quarter of respondents were government officials, including eight official responses from seven national Governments – Azerbaijan, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Türkiye (figure II).

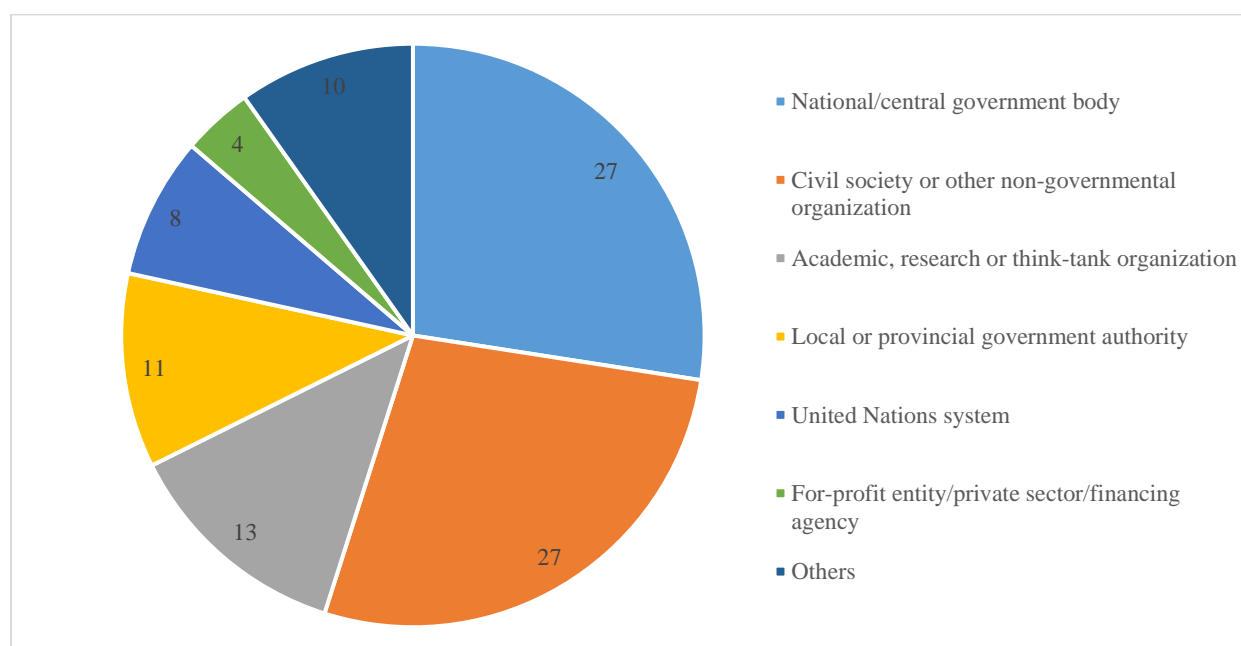
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<sup>2</sup> For additional information on the preparatory process, see [www.unescap.org/events/2022/ced7](http://www.unescap.org/events/2022/ced7).

**Figure I**  
**Number of responses received by country**



**Figure II**  
**Types of survey respondents**  
(Percentage of responses)



### III. Assessing progress

#### A. Themes of common interest

7. In paragraph 18 of the Ministerial Declaration, members and associate members of the Commission resolved to take action in specific areas of common interest. These included: climate change; conservation and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems; efficiency of natural resources management; sustainable urban planning and spatial development towards the creation of environmentally sustainable cities; enhancing food security while protecting natural resources and ecosystems, and increasing resource productivity; enhancing sustainable livelihoods, access to resources and ecosystem services for all, in particular women and vulnerable groups of people; and promoting the green economy and the sustainable use of oceans and seas.

8. The period since 2017 has seen marked changes in support for climate action and for strengthening stewardship of natural resources. The impacts of climate change and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic more recently have led to greater awareness of and political support for environmental action. Bold initiatives from member States include continued establishment of mega marine protected areas in the Pacific<sup>3</sup> and ambitious projects on landscape restoration and forest planting.<sup>4</sup> Global processes such as the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and the United Nations Food Systems Summit have provided important platforms for national and stakeholder responses.

9. Climate action is an important priority for the region. At the time of publishing the present document, 40 ESCAP member States in the Asia-Pacific region had established carbon neutrality pledges, and a review by ESCAP of nationally determined contributions in the region showed that 37 member States had submitted updated nationally determined contributions and 7 had submitted a second update. A significant number of ESCAP member States in the Asia-Pacific region are supporting and participating in initiatives that emerged at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including an initiative for phasing out coal, the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance,<sup>5</sup> the Global

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the Government of Niue declared 100 per cent of its territorial waters, an area approximately the size of Norway, as a maritime conservation area, and in 2017 the Government of the Cook Islands set up a marine protected area which covers 1.9 million m<sup>2</sup>, following other Pacific island countries such as Kiribati and Palau in previous years.

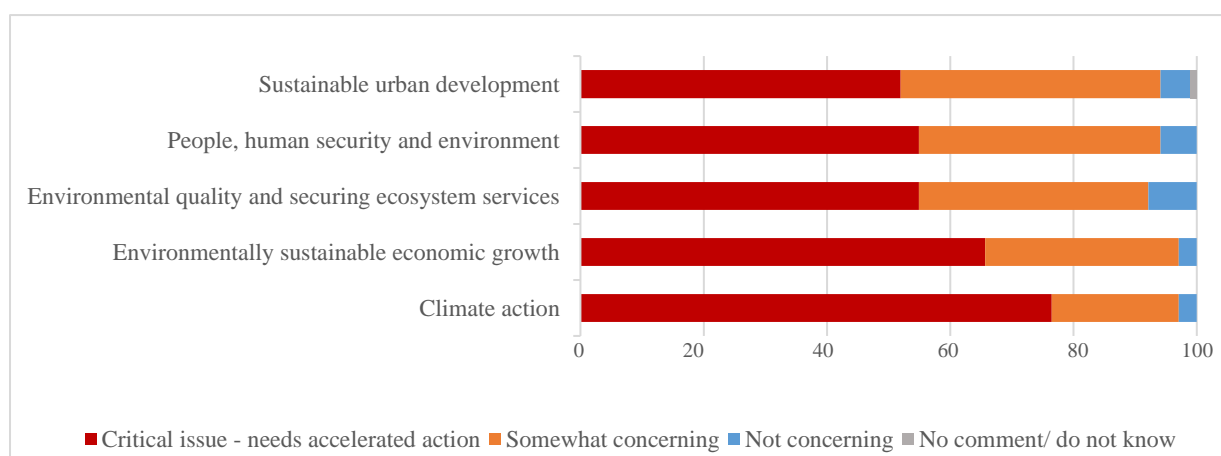
<sup>4</sup> For example, the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami programme in Pakistan was launched in 2019, and by June 2021, had planted 1 billion trees, and during the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Government of Mongolia announced its commitment to plant 1 billion trees by 2030.

<sup>5</sup> The following ESCAP member States in the Asia-Pacific region are signatories, including Azerbaijan, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Maldives, Nepal, New Zealand, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam.

Methane Pledge,<sup>6</sup> the Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration on Forests and Land Use,<sup>7</sup> the declaration on accelerating the transition to 100 per cent zero emission cars and vans,<sup>8</sup> the Adaptation Research Alliance and the Glasgow-Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the global goal on adaptation.<sup>9</sup>

10. However, the review provided by the secretariat on environment and development challenges in the region shows that there is continuing cause for concern.<sup>10</sup> A slight majority of respondents perceived improvements across policy areas that broadly encompassed the themes of common interest agreed in 2017, namely climate action; environmentally sustainable economic growth; environmental quality and securing ecosystem services; people, human security and environment; and sustainable urban development. At the same time the majority also perceived that the situation with respect to these five environment and development policy areas was grave and required accelerated attention (figure III).

Figure III  
**Level of concern in key environment and development areas**  
 (Percentage of responses)



<sup>6</sup> Four ESCAP member States that joined the initiative are among the global top methane emitters. See Global Methane Pledge, “Fast action on methane to keep a 1.5°C future within reach”, available at [www.globalmethanepledge.org/#about](http://www.globalmethanepledge.org/#about) (accessed on 19 September 2022).

<sup>7</sup> The Declaration was signed by 30 ESCAP member States in the Asia-Pacific region. See the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties, “Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration on Forests and Land Use”, 2 November 2021.

<sup>8</sup> United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Department for Transport, *COP26 Declaration on Accelerating the Transition to 100% Zero Emission Cars and Vans*, policy paper (London, 2022). Available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/cop26-declaration-zero-emission-cars-and-vans/cop26-declaration-on-accelerating-the-transition-to-100-zero-emission-cars-and-vans](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cop26-declaration-zero-emission-cars-and-vans/cop26-declaration-on-accelerating-the-transition-to-100-zero-emission-cars-and-vans). The Declaration was supported by seven ESCAP member States.

<sup>9</sup> See FCCC/PA/CMA/2021/10/Add.3, decision 7/CMA.3.

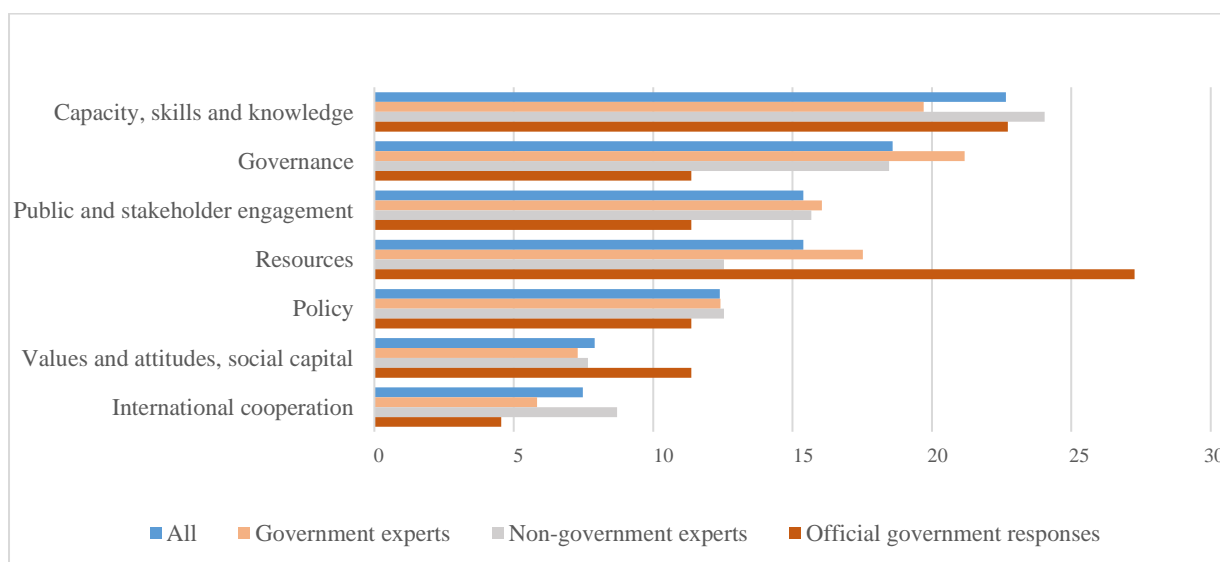
<sup>10</sup> ESCAP/CED/2022/2.

11. The survey for the Committee elicited views on changes in the performance of governments across all stages of the policy cycle and on governance capacity with respect to environment and development challenges in the region.<sup>11</sup>

12. Progress overall was not highly rated in any area. Respondents perceived the greatest progress in relation to public awareness and civic engagement, and communication with and engagement of stakeholders. Improvements in policy formulation and agenda setting were also noted. The least progress was assessed for accountability measures; evaluation and monitoring; implementation; budgeting and financing; and the role of financing entities.

13. The survey elicited views on the barriers to progress (figure IV). While official government responses identified a lack of resources as the most important barrier, other groups of respondents identified the most important barriers as the lack of capacity, skills and knowledge, and governance, and stakeholder engagement.

Figure IV  
**Barriers to progress on environment and development challenges**  
 (Percentage of responses)



14. Representatives of national and local governments who responded to the survey shared good practices. In 2020–2021, progress was made in India towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The overall score for India on the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) Sustainable Development Goal India Index and Dashboard improved to 66 in 2020–2021 from 60 in 2019–2020 and 57 in 2018–2019. Domestically, there were important advances in renewable energy. The Climate Action Tracker<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The survey assessed perceptions of the degree of change observed in overall trends and in the following stages of the policy cycle: agenda and target setting; policy formulation; policy/programme adoption; policy/programme implementation; and evaluation and monitoring. Perceptions of change in performance in key areas of environment and development governance were also assessed: public awareness and civic engagement; communication with and engagement of stakeholders; the role of financing entities; ability to respond to crisis situations; ability to tackle complexity; and collaboration across sectors (within Government).

<sup>12</sup> See <https://climateactiontracker.org/> (accessed on 20 September 2022).

has recognized India as the only country among the Group of 20 having policies in line with limiting global warming to 2°C.

15. In the Philippines, COVID-19 constraints provided an opportunity to strengthen policy coherence and pursue green recovery pathways, with integrated strategies for public health, the environment and the economy. The Government has adopted a sustainable finance road map for green projects across the country. Climate change expenditure tagging for national and local government institutions uses a common policy-based typology and guidelines based on the national climate change action plan, 2011–2028.<sup>13</sup> In 2019, the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission issued sustainability reporting guidelines for publicly listed companies to help to measure and monitor their contributions towards achieving sustainability targets, including the Sustainable Development Goals, national priorities embodied in the Philippine Development Plan, 2017–2022, and the country’s long-term vision, entitled “AmBisyon Natin 2040”, subject to penalty for non-submission. In 2020, almost all companies submitted their sustainability reports. Guidelines have been issued on green and sustainability bonds, adopting relevant standards of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and supporting \$3.40 billion in bonds issued by Philippine companies to finance projects on renewable energy, green buildings, clean transportation, energy efficiency and pollution prevention and control.<sup>14</sup>

16. The Government of Azerbaijan has established an action plan for 2019–2020 to reduce the negative impact of plastic packaging waste on the environment. A commission for coordinating activities in the field of water resources management and a state board were established in 2020, and the strategy, “Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development”, features five main priorities that include a clean environment and green growth. The Government of Pakistan has started numerous projects to improve the state of the environment of the country and prevent the adverse impacts of climate change. The Living Indus initiative, the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami programme, the Recharge Pakistan programme, the Clean Green Pakistan Index, the national electric vehicle policy and the transition to clean energy were said to be among the best examples of government action. The Government of Türkiye is strengthening climate action, having established a new department to further develop responses to climate challenges. The “Low Carbon Cities 2030 Challenge” is a programme of the Ministry of Water and Environment in Malaysia that invites local authorities to voluntarily submit annual carbon emission reports to the government. The Sepang Municipal Council reported to the City of Cyberjaya that carbon emissions were reduced through initiatives implemented in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders.

## **B. Agreement to work together**

17. In his report entitled “Our Common Agenda”, the Secretary-General urged inclusive, networked and coordinated multilateralism, including on a healthy environment, as a global public good. Concerning the importance of multilateral action, the General Assembly, in its resolution 76/6, recognized that the collective well-being, safety and security of our nations and peoples

<sup>13</sup> In the 2021 fiscal year, 41 national government institutions submitted climate-tagged budgets amounting to 181 billion pesos of climate programmes and investments.

<sup>14</sup> The Green Bond Standards of ASEAN and sustainability bond standards were developed in the ASEAN Capital Markets Forum, based on the Green Bond Principles and the Sustainability-Linked Bond Principles of the International Capital Market Association.

are deeply intertwined, which requires us to work urgently and together, across borders to address global risks and challenges, find viable solutions and accelerate the implementation of agreed frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the Paris Agreement.

18. In paragraph 19 of the Ministerial Declaration, members and associate members decided to work together towards: transferring and using environmentally sound technologies and elaborating resource-efficient policies and practices, including through technical assistance, in particular in countries with special needs; promoting regional efforts and cooperation to improve the environment, livelihood, health and well-being of people who live in areas affected by sand and dust storms; promoting effective development cooperation at all levels; enhancing capacities; facilitating technical support by member States that are advanced in affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy; and promoting regional dialogue to discuss environmental issues, including those that have transboundary impacts.

19. The present section contains a review of regional cooperation on environment and development challenges. Regional agreements that address environment and development challenges in the ESCAP context include resolutions on sustainable development, climate action, oceans and air pollution, and promote the mainstreaming of environmental sustainability in COVID-19 recovery strategies.<sup>15</sup>

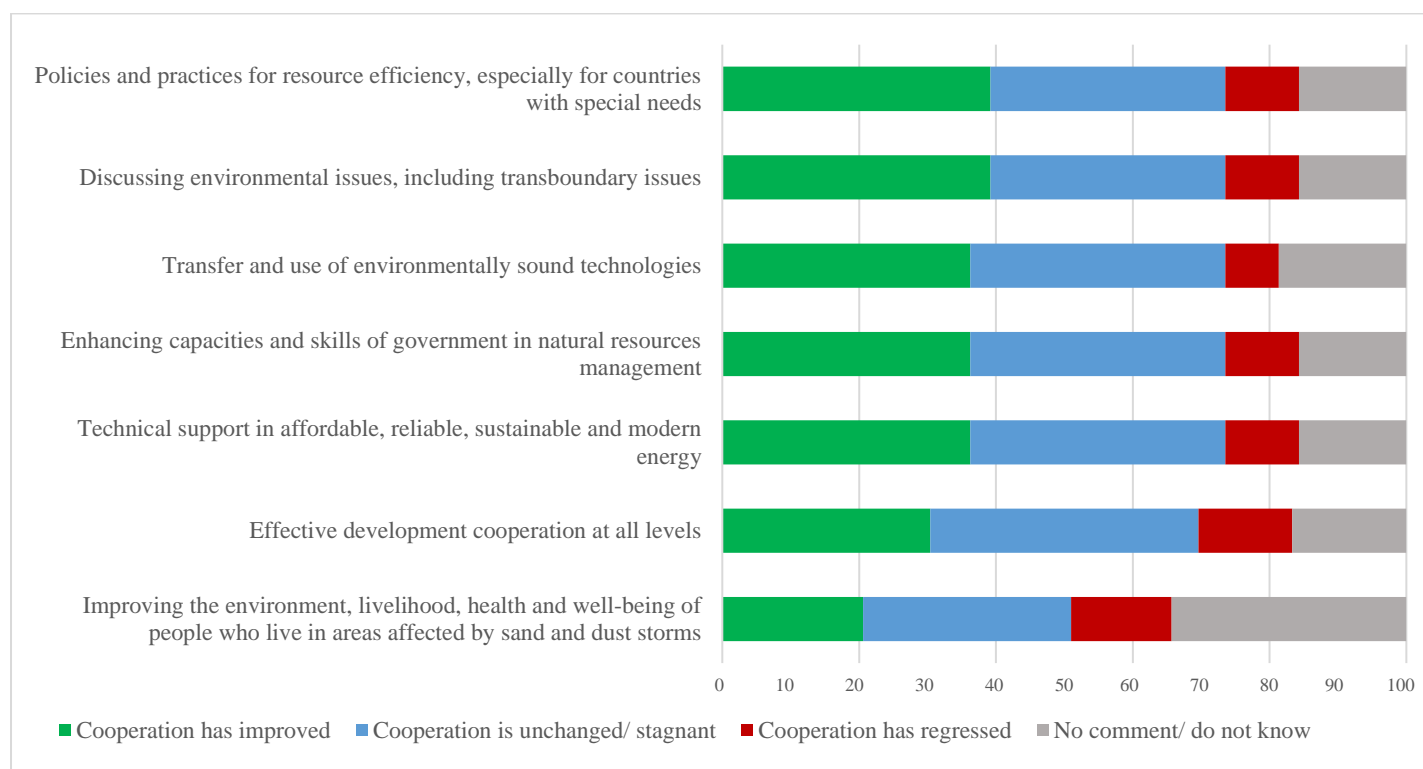
20. Through the survey, the Committee sought expert views on progress on cooperation, noting the areas of joint action targeted by the Ministerial Declaration. Perceptions of progress on cooperation were fairly evenly spread across those who thought cooperation was improving and those who thought cooperation was stagnant or regressing across all environment and development areas identified as priorities for cooperation in the Ministerial Declaration. Progress on improving the livelihoods of those living in areas affected by sand and dust storms was assessed least positively, overall (figure V).

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<sup>15</sup> For more information on such resolutions, see ESCAP/CED/2022/2.



Figure V  
**Perception of progress on cooperation in areas identified in the Ministerial Declaration**  
 (Percentage of responses)



21. While advances in subregional cooperation since 2017 can be identified across all subregions, South-East Asia and the Pacific are the most dynamic in terms of multilateral action to protect the environmental commons, through the roles of the ASEAN secretariat and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat with specialized bodies that focus on environmental protection and climate resilience. In North-East Asia, the United Nations system plays an important role in bringing countries together, with a focus on scientific collaboration, monitoring and exchange of experiences in the areas of air pollution, biodiversity and nature conservation, marine protected areas, low carbon cities, and desertification and land degradation.

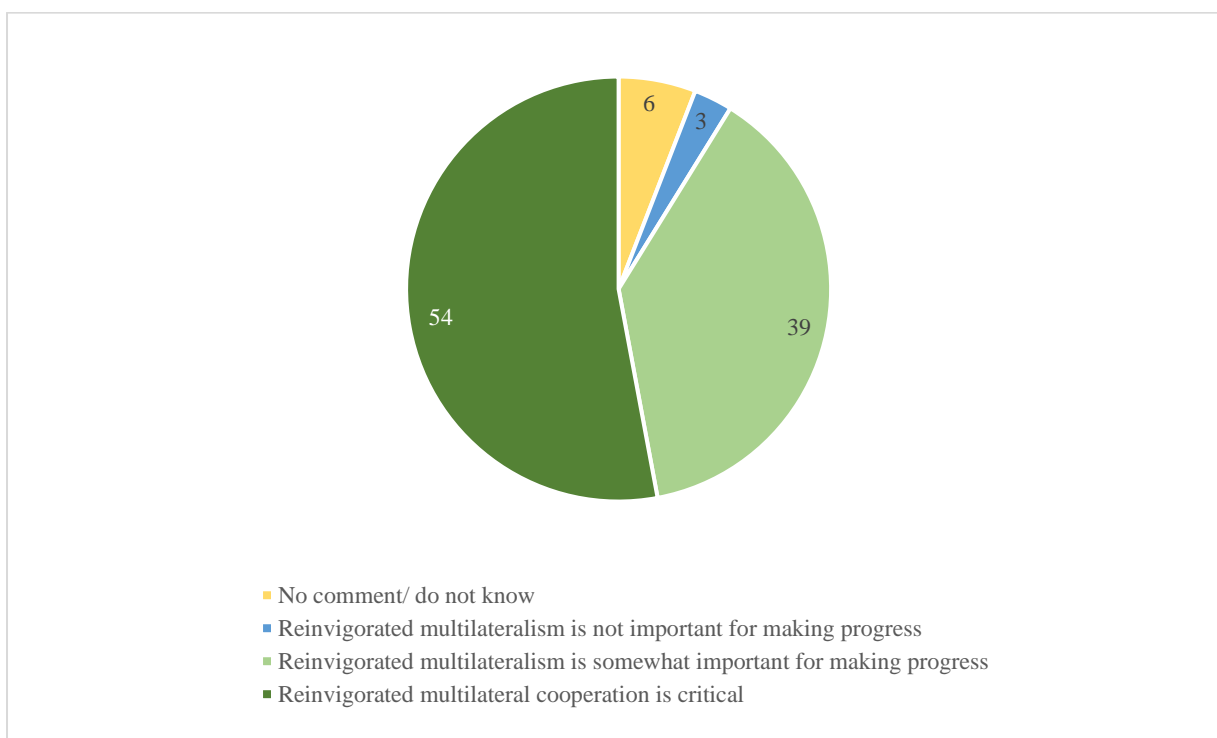
22. Experts participating in the preparatory process for the seventh session of the Committee have commented on the challenges of regional collaboration on environment and development. It was pointed out that pandemic response measures have led to growing pressures to extract natural resources, and this has increased the potential for public-private partnerships to lead to negative environmental outcomes, highlighting the need for increased vigilance and risk mitigation measures in this regard. Multilateral and aid systems were called on to step up to the challenge of managing both emerging and predicted crises on multiple fronts and to invest in becoming fit for purpose, given the scale of the development challenges facing the region.

23. Survey respondents called for strengthening cooperation at the subregional level and for supporting local government. Themes highlighted included healthy urban cities; healthy and resilient landscapes; strengthened environmental management; and attention to sustainable consumption and production. Several responses pointed to the role of civil society and the public in enhancing cooperation impact, supporting strengthened public collective action and providing a platform for listening to people's voices. Meaningful

contributions of civil society movements are perceived to be constrained by declining civic space.

24. However, survey respondents underlined the need for reinvigorated multilateralism – taking a closer look at developing multilateral responses that are inclusive, networked and effective, in line with “Our Common Agenda”. More than 80 per cent of survey respondents indicated that reinvigorating multilateralism was essential or somewhat important for accelerating progress (figure VI).

Figure VI  
**Importance of reinvigorating multilateralism**  
 (Percentage of responses)



**C. Progress on support to members and associate members**

25. The Ministerial Declaration requests the Executive Secretary to support members and associate members, including regarding extending cooperation; facilitating regional networks; collecting and disseminating information and development of analytical products; and providing technical assistance. Cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the wider United Nations system was emphasized.

26. The present section contains a review of the response of the Executive Secretary to these requests. An internal evaluation of the ESCAP subprogramme on environment and development provides important reflections on the support provided.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The evaluation covered the period 2018 to 2021 and was based on stakeholder interviews and review of the programmatic and project outputs. See Office of Internal Oversight Services, Inspection and Evaluation Division, “Evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific: subprogramme 4 – environment and development” (IED-22-010), 15 July 2022.

27. The secretariat has emphasized an integrated environment and development approach, and subregional offices and regional institutions provide support for environment and development challenges.

28. **Holistic delivery on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.** Between 2017 and 2021, the subprogramme worked to create a multi-stakeholder regional architecture within the One United Nations initiative for the follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with regional accountability mechanisms for the interlinked Sustainable Development Goals, and a particular role in tracking progress on the environment-related Goals. The subprogramme facilitated a regional agreement to adopt the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific and established the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development as the regional platform for sustainable development. This supported cross-fertilization and helped to strengthen the regional profile of work on climate, oceans, environmental governance and waste. The subprogramme provided broad technical support to different aspects of voluntary national reviews.<sup>17</sup>

29. **Strengthening regional cooperation.** Support has included: progress on consolidating the role of the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation; regional dialogue towards establishing a regional programme on air pollution; a regional ocean programme and platform for dialogue that contributes to the development of global-level ocean governance; a regional platform for sustainable urbanization (Penang Platform for Sustainable Urbanization); the development of the ASEAN Resources Panel to support its member States to sustainably manage their natural resources; and the initial steps towards establishing a working group on the right to access environmental information, public participation in environmental decision-making and access to justice in the context of ASEAN; and the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on the Blue Economy. Additional work on specific transboundary issues has been identified as an area of further attention.

30. **Creation of regional public goods to support member States.** The Sustainable Development Goals Help Desk has promoted an integrated, whole-of-society approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda, encompassing knowledge management, a series of learning events, a platform for e-learning courses (both specially developed and developed by partners) and communities of practice. The Sustainable Development Goals Help Desk is a prominent platform for the United Nations system and stakeholder organizations to share and access information. An external evaluation concluded that the project trialled many innovations in both method and content and reached a wide audience and many contributors, providing free, flexible and accessible knowledge and skills.<sup>18</sup> Other platforms for professional development include an annual executive training programme aimed at senior-level government officials and an annual mayors academy.

<sup>17</sup> ESCAP, "ESCAP's support for voluntary national review". Available at [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27093ESCAP\\_VNR\\_Offer\\_October\\_2020.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27093ESCAP_VNR_Offer_October_2020.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> See <https://sdghelpdesk.unescap.org/>. More than 3,000 policymakers and stakeholders have been assisted through advisory services, on-site learning events (seminars and workshops), e-learning courses and technical advice. The Help Desk had more than 55,000 visits from more than 180 partners (United Nations and non-United Nations), and there were more than 3,000 participants in e-learning, with five out of eight courses having completion rates that exceed industry standards for such courses. Its community of practice has more than 1,250 members.

31. **Pilot projects and policy dialogue on green growth.** The Seoul Initiative Network on Green Growth includes more than 47 member States, and it has supported 44 pilot projects in 22 countries since its inception. More than 1,700 government officials from 38 countries have participated in the annual policy consultation forums of the Seoul Initiative Network on Green Growth Policy hosted by the Government of the Republic of Korea.

32. **Targeted technical assistance to municipalities.** Assistance has been provided in the areas of waste management, urban air pollution action planning, forecasting sustainable urbanization and innovation (with the establishment of city innovation labs), and building urban resilience after COVID-19. More than 450 people have been trained in the management of plastic waste, and artificial intelligence and remote sensing technologies have been deployed to track plastic outflows to the ocean. Technical assistance has been provided for the development of the national environmental policy in Bhutan. A regional initiative on crop residue management has yielded positive results in terms of farmer income, soil enhancement and reduced carbon emissions in pilot countries, and it is being expanded to other countries.<sup>19</sup> The Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization provides sustained support to the region, including through the Asian and Pacific Network for Testing of Agricultural Machinery.<sup>20</sup>

33. **Analytical and knowledge outputs.** The secretariat prepared regional climate emissions projections and analyses for the nationally determined contributions. The analyses provided evidence that climate ambitions fall far short of what is needed to deliver on the Paris Agreement and underlined the important role of gender mainstreaming in climate responses.<sup>21</sup> A climate action readiness tool is available to support national planning. Foresight has been applied to environment and development challenges in the region,<sup>22</sup> and guidance and e-learning materials on applying behavioural science to support environmental policy have been developed.<sup>23</sup>

34. **Guidelines and tools.** Voluntary local review guidelines have supported city reporting in the region, and guidelines and tools were developed as a joint effort across institutions. Several tools have been made available to support government efforts on engaging stakeholders, including a stakeholder engagement assessment tool, multi-stakeholder partnership guidelines and a methodological guide for accelerating the achievement of Sustainable

<sup>19</sup> See ESCAP/CED/2022/INF/2.

<sup>20</sup> The Asian and Pacific Network for Testing of Agricultural Machinery aims to promote harmonization of testing standards of agricultural machinery among participating countries to enhance the quality, performance, occupational safety and environmental dimensions of the machinery as well as to support more integrated trade in agricultural machinery.

<sup>21</sup> *Is 1.5°C Within Reach for the Asia-Pacific Region? Ambition and Potential of NDC Commitments of the Asia-Pacific Countries* (ST/ESCAP/2979).

<sup>22</sup> See *Asia-Pacific Futures in 2040: Raining Ambitions for a Health Environment* (ST/ESCAP/2983) and *The Future of Asian & Pacific Cities: Transformative Pathways towards Sustainable Urban Development* (United Nations publication, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Hitomi Rankine and Donya Khosravi, “Applying behavioural science to advance environmental sustainability: an overview for policymakers”, Environment and Development Division, ESCAP Working Paper Series (Bangkok, ESCAP, 2021).

Development Goal 14.<sup>24</sup> Strengthening policy coherence through integration and systems thinking is another area of focus with support to “learning by doing” and strengthened policy and planning through applying systems thinking at the national level.<sup>25</sup> The Sustainable Development Goal interlinkages analysis and visualization tool has made holistic planning approaches more accessible.

35. **Cooperation with United Nations partners.** Collaboration across the United Nations system has been considerably stepped up, although the evaluation of the subprogramme on environment and development noted that greater investment in cooperation is needed. In particular, cooperation with UNEP on climate action has been important. A consolidated support mechanism within the One United Nations initiative was established for voluntary national reviews, and it has facilitated the delivery of comprehensive reporting, including on environmental issues.

#### IV. Reinigorating multilateralism

36. The Commission’s work on transformative foresight produced scenarios for the future and a road map to a preferred future, documented in *Asia-Pacific Futures in 2040: Raising Ambitions for a Healthy Environment*. Workshops in 2020 brought together more than 100 government officials and representatives of civil society, academia, development partners and ESCAP. The results of those workshops were synthesized and deepened to define four alternative scenarios that provide clarity on the scale of ambition and actions that are needed.

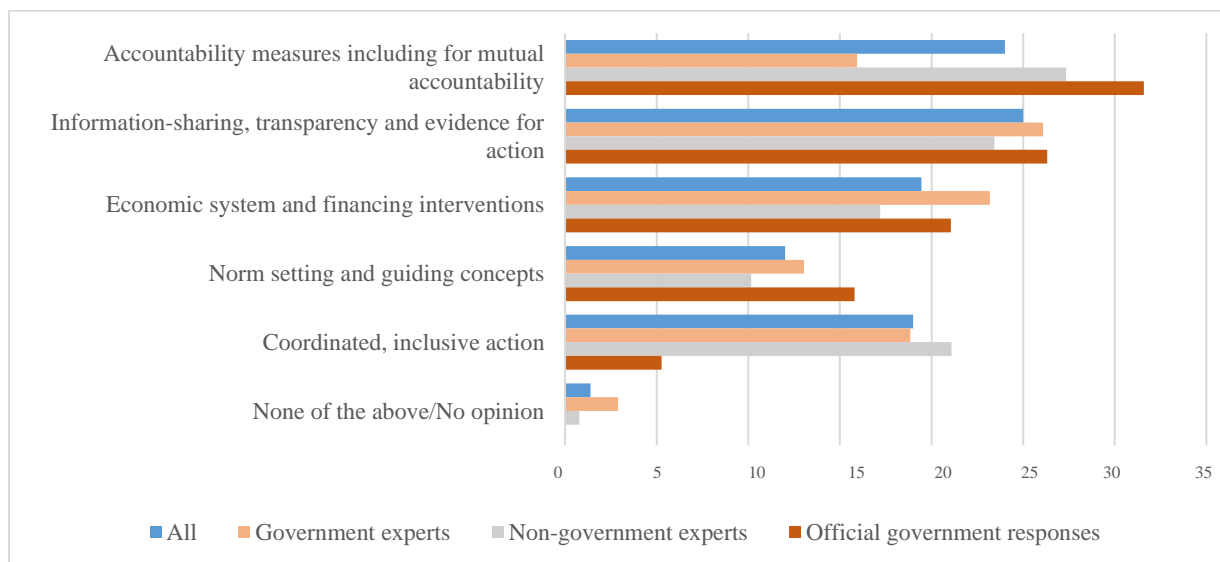
37. The road map to the preferred 2040 scenario, entitled “the Yangtze River Dolphin Returns”, opens opportunities for reinigorating multilateralism. Milestones are defined in four 5-year phases, including an initial period that would build infrastructure for change across multilateral actions in the region. Improved effectiveness in regional cooperation would raise trust and confidence and lead to greater ambitions for cooperation in subsequent periods. This infrastructure, as described in the report, would focus on measures for transparency, networking and solidarity.

38. Survey respondents identified priorities for reinigorating multilateralism that included accountability measures and information-sharing, transparency and evidence for action. Economic system and financing interventions and inclusive, coordinated networking followed closely behind. Different stakeholder groups prioritized different areas of action (figure VII).

<sup>24</sup> ESCAP, “SDG 14 accelerator: a methodological guide”. Available at [www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/SDG%2014\\_A%20Methodological%20Overview.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/SDG%2014_A%20Methodological%20Overview.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> ESCAP supported the application of systems analysis and stakeholder engagement in the industrial water policy of Bangladesh and in the production of *Sustainability Outlook of Mongolia* (ST/ESCAP/2838), which has contributed to establishing systems analysis as part of the planning process in Mongolia.

Figure VII  
**Priority areas to reinvigorate multilateral cooperation**  
 (Percentage of responses)



39. The secretariat welcomed proposals for reinvigorating multilateralism at the expert group meeting for the Committee on Environment and Development. The proposals included rethinking the roles of development partners in implementation to better support innovation and address the risks to environmental sustainability during an economy-focused COVID-19 recovery; promoting science-based action, including through better communication of policy-relevant scientific research and evidenced-based policy targets; leveraging existing private sector and financing networks, campaigns and alliances to increase the influence of the normative space and increase the focus on mobilizing diverse stakeholders – in particular business and the youth; and increasing the focus on integrating city-level interventions in multilateral responses.

40. The participants in expert consultations and the survey respondents called for multilateral organizations to scale up subregional cooperation in particular, and energize multilateral cooperation mechanisms in terms of their stakeholders, members and environmental issues addressed. The multilateral system could be made fit for purpose through strategic, creative and flexible approaches. The experts and survey respondents highlighted the considerable opportunities for making better linkages across different multilateral arrangements<sup>26</sup> and the need to effectively coordinate and synergize between regional environmental forums and those more broadly focused on development. It was proposed that better mechanisms for exchange should be created, such as international thematic platforms on specific environment and development themes with multi-stakeholder membership or on cooperation across sectors in the region.

<sup>26</sup> Examples of multilateral entities include the Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific, the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia, the Asia-Pacific Clean Air Partnership, the Asia Pacific Adaptation Network, the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia and the Action Plan for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Northwest Pacific Region.

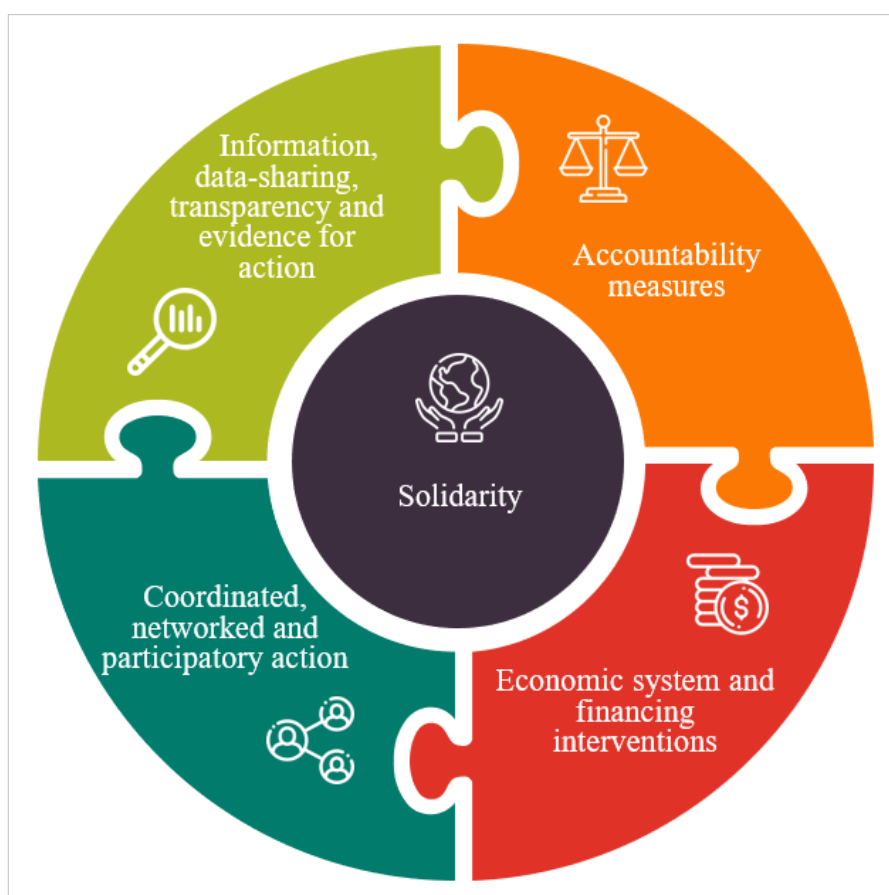
41. Solidarity, strengthening common ground and scaling up technical support and cooperation were points of particular concern. Stakeholders emphasized the need for multilateral cooperation to reward and enable responsible environmental stewardship, with particular reference to developing blue economy models and mechanisms that secure benefits for countries and territories at the front line in the Pacific. They highlighted the need for solidarity in addressing common challenges, including mutual points of vulnerability, environmental migration and just climate transition.

42. Solid accountability measures, including equal access in data- and information-sharing, were seen as potential catalysts for new resources and partnerships. Related to this, strong commitments, mutual accountability, a sustained process for follow-up and review to build action over time were advocated.

43. Survey respondents pointed out the need for multilateral cooperation with a focus on human and ecosystem health; nature, coastal and marine law enforcement; environmental governance; and public engagement to combat governance shortcomings and corruption as drivers of environmental degradation and overexploitation of natural resources. These perspectives provide important contributions to the development and strengthening of multilateral approaches in the region and can inform the work of the Committee in follow-up to the outcomes of the seventh session of the Committee.

44. Based on the transformative foresight process and feedback from the survey and the expert group meeting, a framework for action is proposed (figure VIII). Actions to reinvigorate multilateralism to protect the environmental commons include solidarity; information, data-sharing, transparency and evidence for action; accountability measures; economic system and financing interventions; and coordinated, networked and participatory action.

Figure VIII  
**Actions to reinvigorate multilateralism**



## V. Conclusions

45. There is an urgent need to advance progress on environment and development challenges in the region, including through government actions, regional cooperation initiatives and the support of development partners.

46. Expert stakeholders have underlined the need for reinvigorating multilateral cooperation so that such arrangements are fit for purpose. Strategic, creative, flexible and practical approaches are called for to strengthen and scale up subregional cooperation, increase solidarity and establish effective accountability measures.

47. The region's response to the environment and development challenges it faces, including through the implementation of the outcomes of the seventh session of the Committee, may be informed by five lines of action to reinvigorate multilateralism: solidarity; information, data-sharing, transparency and evidence for action; accountability measures; economic system and financing interventions; and coordinated, networked and participatory action.



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## **VI. Issues for consideration by the Committee**

48. The Committee may wish to take note of the assessment of progress made since 2017 with respect to country actions, regional cooperation and support provided by the secretariat in relation to environment and development challenges, and to comment on the information provided.

49. The Committee may also wish to take note of the initiatives shared by members and associate members, and to share additional perspectives and notable initiatives at national and local levels.

50. The Committee may further wish to support the observations regarding the need to reinvigorate multilateralism and to recommend government and other stakeholders to increase efforts to strengthen multilateral action in the context of the outcomes of the seventh session of the Committee.

51. The Committee may wish to request the secretariat to strengthen the focus on reinvigorating multilateralism to protect the environment in the context of the proposed outcomes of the seventh session of the Committee, and to support advancement in the region, reflecting the observations contained in the present document.

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