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**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific****Seventy-second session**

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**Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing  
and Pacific Island Developing Countries: development  
issues relevant to Pacific island developing countries****Support of the Commission for the implementation of  
the Sustainable Development Goals in the Pacific****Note by the secretariat\*\****Summary*

The present document highlights areas in which the secretariat can support Pacific island member States in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, guided by the mandate of the regional commissions as established in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and within the context of existing regional processes in the Pacific, particularly the Framework for Pacific Regionalism.

A key message of the Pacific leaders regarding those three agreements is that their implementation should be done in a manner that is integrated, promotes sustainability and enhances ownership by the Pacific. The Pacific has a well-established regional institutional architecture which provides an effective platform to extend support to countries for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Pacific not only has unique structural challenges with respect to economic development but also a unique environmental, cultural and social context. The need to contextualize the Goals in the regional, subregional and national contexts is critical.

The Commission may wish to review the present report and provide the secretariat with guidance on its recommendations and on any other matters concerning support for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Pacific small island developing States.

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\* E/ESCAP/72/L.1.

\*\* The present document was submitted late owing to the need to reflect the most recent events in the Pacific and the deliberations on the Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

## **I. Introduction**

1. Pacific small island developing States have long been recognized as a special case for sustainable development due to their small size, geographic dispersion and isolation from one another and from major markets, limited resource bases and resulting narrow range of export earners, capacity limitations, and susceptibility to climate impacts and natural disasters. Some are now facing an existential threat from climate change.

2. The Sustainable Development Goals were launched as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which mandated that follow-up and review at the regional and subregional levels could, as appropriate, provide useful opportunities for peer learning, including through voluntary reviews, sharing of best practices and discussion on shared targets. It welcomed in that respect the cooperation of regional and subregional commissions and organizations. It also called for inclusive regional processes drawing on national-level reviews and contributing to follow-up and review at the global level, including at the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

3. In resolution 71/4 of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on the implementation of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, the Commission requested the secretariat to work in collaboration with the relevant United Nations bodies and agencies, regional and subregional organizations and non-governmental organizations to assist Pacific islands members and associate members, upon request, to (a) enhance national capacities and institutions; (b) enhance the Pacific voice and representation in regional and global processes; and (c) ensure the realization of a transformational strategy for the sustainable development of small island developing States by strengthening the role of the Commission in monitoring the follow-up to the Samoa Pathway and the evolving post-2015 development agenda.

4. The present document highlights areas in which the secretariat can support Pacific small island developing States in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, guided by the mandate of the regional commissions under the 2030 Agenda, the role of the regional commissions in the implementation of the Samoa Pathway and Commission resolution 71/4, and within the context of existing regional processes in the Pacific endorsed by leaders in the region.

## **II. The unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals**

5. In committing to the Sustainable Development Goals, and after noting that only 2 of the 14 Pacific island countries in the Pacific Islands Forum had managed to achieve all seven substantive Millennium Development Goals, the Pacific Islands Forum leaders, in 2015, at the Summit of the Pacific Islands Forum, agreed that the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals should be given special attention when implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. On the positive side, approximately 10 million Pacific Islanders have experienced better economic circumstances overall compared to five decades ago, and progress has been made in health and education. The majority of the Pacific islands have achieved universal

primary education, although gender disparities persist, and many students still finish school without basic literacy and numeracy skills.<sup>1</sup>

6. The most notable of the unfinished businesses is the poor performance under Millennium Development Goal 1 (Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger). Increasing numbers of Pacific island countries are struggling to meet their basic needs. The proportion of the poor falling below the basic needs poverty line varies widely across the Pacific island countries, from 13 per cent in Vanuatu to 35 per cent in Fiji and 39 per cent in Papua New Guinea. While the proportion of poor people has declined in Fiji and Vanuatu over the previous 10 years, it has increased in Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu and remained generally at the same level in the rest of the region. Many Pacific island countries struggle to deliver basic services, particularly in rural and remote areas, including outer islands. A large proportion of Pacific Islanders lack access to safe drinking water, sanitation and reliable sources of energy and other opportunities. Thus, multidimensional human poverty is significantly higher than income poverty in many Pacific island countries.<sup>2</sup>

7. Economic growth, a key objective of economic cooperation, has been highly volatile in the Pacific, with an average annual growth rate of 1.8 per cent between 2000 and 2014.<sup>3</sup> Even when growth rates have been relatively high, such as in resource-rich Papua New Guinea, there has been limited success in translating this “prosperity” into higher incomes and improved livelihoods for the majority of the population.

8. The other areas of underperformance include gender equality, which remains a serious concern, with Pacific women still facing very high levels of gender violence and the lowest-in-the-world rate of representation in parliament. In health, non-communicable diseases are now at alarming levels and becoming the main cause of premature deaths in the Pacific. With regards to the environment, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu did not meet the target of reducing biodiversity loss, which can be linked in part to the detrimental impacts of resource extraction.<sup>4</sup> All Pacific island countries have integrated the principles of sustainable development into their national plans in one form or another, but realizing these principles through effective environmental governance have proven to be a challenge.

9. Not all the causes of economic difficulties in the Pacific islands can be explained by geographic vulnerability and their small size. Constraints also arise from weak governance,<sup>5</sup> structural constraints relating to limited

<sup>1</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *2015 Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report* (Suva, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *The State of Human Development in the Pacific: A Report on Vulnerability and Exclusion in a Time of Rapid Change* (Suva, 2014). Available from [www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/The%20State%20of%20Human%20Development%20in%20the%20Pacific\(LORes\).pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/The%20State%20of%20Human%20Development%20in%20the%20Pacific(LORes).pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Estimation is based on ESCAP Statistical database. Available from [www.unescap.org/stat/data/](http://www.unescap.org/stat/data/) (accessed 15 March 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *2015 Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report* (Suva, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Satish Chand, “Economic Growth in Forum Island Countries: Lessons of the Past Decade and Opportunities Ahead”, Crawford School of Economics and Government Working Papers, (Canberra, Australian National University, 2006). Available from [www.eaber.org/sites/default/files/documents/Crawford\\_Chand\\_2006.pdf](http://www.eaber.org/sites/default/files/documents/Crawford_Chand_2006.pdf). And Teuea Toatu, “Unravelling the Pacific paradox” (Canberra, Australian National University, 2001). Available from <https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/40327/3/1702Teuea.pdf>.

skilled human capacity<sup>6</sup> and even cultural norms.<sup>7</sup> Important unfinished business is related to Millennium Development Goal 8 (Develop a global partnership for development), which includes development assistance, trade and investment, physical and social connectivity, debt and the special case and vulnerabilities of small island developing States. These areas are critical for a subregion like the Pacific with great distances and diversity.

### III. Pacific approach to regionalism

10. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and regional organizations under the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific represent the well-established subregional institutional architecture in the Pacific, with support from both Pacific island member States and major development partners.

11. The Framework for Pacific Regionalism is the new regional cooperation and integration agenda of the Pacific Islands Forum. It reinforces Pacific priorities contained in the Samoa Pathway and the 2030 Agenda. The higher or principal objectives of the Framework are:

- (a) Sustainable development that combines economic, social and cultural development in ways that improve livelihoods and well-being and use the environment sustainably;
- (b) Economic growth that is inclusive and equitable;
- (c) Strengthened governance and legal, financial and administrative systems;
- (d) Security that ensures stable and safe human, environmental and political conditions for all.

A limited number of regional priorities are selected each year to ensure a focused approach towards the achievement of the Framework's principal objectives. The 2015 Framework priorities selected for discussion in the present document, due to their particular interest to Pacific small island developing States and the existence of wider regional consensus, are climate change and disaster risk reduction, fisheries, and information and communications technology (ICT).

12. At the 46th Pacific Islands Forum in 2015, Pacific leaders endorsed the Hiri Declaration on Strengthening Connections to Enhance Pacific Regionalism. The declaration called for a unified approach and increased efforts to address a number of subregional development challenges. It urged effective action to promote regional connectivity in three core areas, namely institutional, physical and people-to-people connectivity (including gender, youth and disability).

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<sup>6</sup> Asian Development Bank and Commonwealth Secretariat, *Toward a new Pacific regionalism* (2005). Available from [www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/28797/pacific-regionalism-vol2.pdf](http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/28797/pacific-regionalism-vol2.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> In July 2014, Pacific leaders endorsed the Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme Nadi Accord, which declared that culture, religion and tradition can never be “an excuse for abuse”.

## IV. Sustainable development priorities in the Pacific

13. The sustainable development priorities in the Pacific have been well articulated by Pacific island member States. These include the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals as well as persistent and emerging challenges which were not reflected in the Goals.

### A. Climate change and disaster risk reduction

14. Climate change, notably sea level rise, is the single most critical concern for Pacific small island developing States. With the ocean comprising over 99 per cent of their sovereign territory, and populations concentrated in coastal or low-lying areas, Pacific countries are recognized as being among the most exposed and vulnerable countries in the world. Indeed, a sea level rise of as little as half a metre, along with natural sea level variation and more frequent and severe storm surges, will result in more serious inundation and threaten the livelihoods, infrastructure, health and security of communities. For atoll states like Kiribati, the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu, which are less than one metre above sea level in most places, the threat is existential and population displacement inevitable. But even before such anticipated devastation, their populations would have long endured increasingly violent storms, life-threatening vector-borne and water-borne diseases, and degraded and unusable land and sea.

15. Climate change will have profound development impacts, especially for fisheries, tourism, agriculture, biodiversity, food security, fresh water resources, infrastructure and health. These impacts will be amplified in Pacific small island developing States due to the small size, fragile nature and narrow resource base of their economies. Small island developing States face enormous difficulties in accessing financing mechanisms for climate change adaptation. Many Pacific small island developing States complain of the complicated procedures that have to be followed, as well as a general lack of capacity to secure finance.

16. The Pacific islands are highly susceptible to natural disasters, particularly tropical cyclones. These frequently cause major disruption to people's lives through food crop destruction and loss of infrastructure, and subsequent finance recovery and reconstruction efforts, as well as putting enormous pressure on government systems to respond. According to the World Risk Index – a composite measure of a country's exposure to natural hazards and of its ability to cope with them – the Pacific islands rank high for the risk of suffering a disaster. Among 171 countries, 4 Pacific island countries are ranked among the first 15 countries at the highest risk of experiencing a natural disaster (the highest ranked is Vanuatu).<sup>8</sup> Damage and loss is a better measure of countries' vulnerability to natural disasters. The Pacific islands' damage and loss averaged 2.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) from 1980 to 2014, which, according to the International Monetary Fund, is higher than in other peer and non-small states.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> United Nations University, Institute for Environment and Human Security and Alliance Development Works, *World Risk Report 2014* (Bonn, 2014). Available from <http://i.unu.edu/media/ehs.unu.edu/news/4070/11895.pdf>. The report systematically considers a country's vulnerability and its exposure to natural hazards to determine a ranking of countries around the world based on their disaster risk.

<sup>9</sup> Ezequiel Cabezon and others, "Enhancing macroeconomic resilience to natural disasters and climate change in the small states of the Pacific", IMF Working Paper, No. WP/15/125 (Washington, D.C., International Monetary Fund, 2015). Available from [www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2015/wp15125.pdf](http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2015/wp15125.pdf).

The estimated damage and loss caused by Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu stands at \$467 million or 61 per cent of its GDP, and the initial estimate in Fiji post-Cyclone Winston in February 2016 stands at \$500 million or 7.5 per cent of its GDP.

## **B. Oceans and fisheries**

17. The Pacific Ocean is the largest of the world's oceans, covering roughly one third of the earth's surface. It represents an economy worth an annual \$3 billion to \$6 billion and meets 20 per cent of the protein needs of 3 billion people.<sup>10</sup> Pacific small island developing States are highly dependent on their coastal fisheries for food security, employment and livelihoods. National fish consumption in the Pacific is three to four times the global average, representing 50-90 per cent of the animal protein consumed by many island populations. In addition, fish exports represent more than 50 per cent of all exports in half the States of the region and are still large in other countries that fall short of this threshold.<sup>11</sup> Pacific leaders have long been committed to an ocean stewardship role for the Pacific, as exemplified in the 2014 Palau Declaration on the Ocean: Life and Future – Charting a Course to Sustainability.

18. Offshore fisheries management has benefited from regional cooperation in building regional solidarity to deal with the foreign fishing fleets that fish in Pacific exclusive economic zones. Earnings from fisheries remain disproportionately low (representing a small percentage of the value of the landed catch), partly due to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing but also as a result of low licence fees negotiated with distant water fishing nations. In this respect, the Pacific Island Forum leaders have highlighted the importance of the Vessel Day Scheme as a successful market tool for leveraging the solidarity of the Pacific islands and their ownership of the tuna resources for improved returns, noting the five-fold increase over the past six years. But several species, in particular big-eye tuna, are now under significant pressure, and thus conservation management and surveillance are important.

19. Deep-sea mining is emerging as another oceans issue; the Pacific region is playing host to the first global commercial venture into deep-sea mining in Papua New Guinea. There is considerable uncertainty over the likely impacts of deep-sea mining on marine biodiversity, food security and livelihoods. Regulation of both fisheries and deep-sea mining faces resource and capacity limitations as well as governance challenges in Pacific small island developing States, including difficulty in fulfilling their stewardship responsibilities over such a massive ocean area. In 2014, Forum leaders in Palau recognized the risks of extractive industries to the health and productivity of the ocean and called for effective environmental assessments and the application of the precautionary principle where necessary.

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<sup>10</sup> Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture, 2012* (Rome, 2012). Available from [www.fao.org/docrep/016/i2727e/i2727e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/i2727e/i2727e.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Robert Gillet, *Pacific Perspectives 2014: Pacific Perspectives on Fisheries and Sustainable Development* (Suva, ESCAP, 2014). Available from [www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Pacific\\_Perspectives\\_%202014\\_0.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Pacific_Perspectives_%202014_0.pdf).

### C. Gender equality and women's empowerment

20. Pacific leaders continue to prioritize gender equality and the empowerment of women. Of particular concern is the serious economic marginalization of women, their very low levels of participation in decision-making positions and leadership, and the high rates of gender-based violence. Unequal access to employment, the gender wage gap, negligible property rights and the heavy burden of unpaid care work within the household economy expose women to higher risks of poverty. In 2012, the Women's Economic Opportunity Index placed seven Pacific island countries (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Vanuatu) at the bottom of global rankings with respect to women's access to property and finance and political participation.<sup>12</sup> In Fiji, the cost of domestic violence to the national economy was calculated to be 6.6 per cent of GDP in 2011. The World Bank has suggested that this economic loss is likely to be mirrored in other Pacific small island developing States such as Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, which experience similarly high rates of domestic violence. Reducing gender-based violence across the region has therefore become not only a moral imperative but also an economic necessity.<sup>13</sup>

21. In the wake of the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration of 2012, gender equality and mainstreaming are steadily gaining traction in national policy and programming in the region. This is reflected in the support for temporary special measures to improve women's representation in governance and decision-making at all levels (such as reserving 10 per cent of parliamentary seats for women in Samoa, which, after the recent elections, is going to be enforced, which would mean five women in the new parliament, the highest number of women in the history of the country), and the development of national legislation to curb gender-based violence.

### D. Non-communicable diseases

22. Non-communicable diseases have been described by Pacific leaders as a human, social and economic crisis of epidemic proportions. As much as 75 per cent of all adult deaths in the region are attributable to non-communicable diseases, and the majority of these fatalities occur within the ranks of the economically active age groups. In Tonga, for example, almost half of all deaths from cardiovascular disease are among men below the age of 64.<sup>14</sup> This has severe implications for labour supply and productivity, household income security, poverty levels and social protection. The crisis is also inflicting huge economic costs on Pacific small island developing States. Across the region, these costs are claiming sizeable portions of national health budgets, and in some countries that portion exceeds 50 per cent.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Women's Economic Opportunity 2012: A Global Index and Ranking* (2012). Available from [www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=WEO\\_full\\_report\\_final.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=weoindex2012](http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=WEO_full_report_final.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=weoindex2012).

<sup>13</sup> Aleta Moriarty, "The Pacific islands cannot afford the human and economic cost of violence against women", 25 November 2012. Available from [www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2012/11/25/the-human-and-economic-cost-the-pacific-cannot-afford](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2012/11/25/the-human-and-economic-cost-the-pacific-cannot-afford).

<sup>14</sup> World Bank, *The Economic Costs of Non-Communicable Disease in the Pacific Islands: A Rapid Stocktake of the Situation in Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu*, (World Bank, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> World Health Organization Media Centre, "Noncommunicable diseases fact sheet". Available from [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs355/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs355/en/) (accessed 9 March 2016).

This trend is likely to continue in the future if the risk factors driving non-communicable diseases (in particular unhealthy lifestyles and diets) are not addressed as a matter of urgency. Ironically, the increasing estrangement of Pacific islanders from their healthy traditional food sources in preference for processed food, including fast food that is heavy in salt, fats and/or sugar, is one of the negative social impacts of global trade, resulting in a heightened propensity to non-communicable diseases.

## **E. Sustainable energy**

23. Despite the central importance of energy security, it is estimated that 70 per cent of Pacific island households are without modern electricity services. The Pacific small island developing States also belong to the region most dependent on imported petroleum fuels for energy in the world (95 per cent, compared to the global average of 34 per cent),<sup>16</sup> especially for their transport sectors but also to meet household and commercial electricity needs. For most, petroleum represents the largest single import expenditure and, when oil prices are high, it exceeds or approximates the total value of exports. The region's heavy dependence on imported fuel is another constraint, particularly since the transport sector is a substantial energy user. In order to improve access and affordability, as well as reduce the heavy carbon footprint, there is an urgent need to improve energy efficiency as well as promote the use of renewable energy.

24. Pacific leaders have recognized the crippling effect of heavy reliance on imported fuel and, to this end, most Pacific small island developing States have adopted ambitious goals for replacing a high percentage of diesel-fuelled electricity generation with renewable energy. The transition to renewable energy is not without its own challenges and constraints, which include, in particular, the high initial costs of renewable energy technology, ensuring the technology is appropriate for tropical small island conditions, capacity issues and difficulties accessing international finance and investment.<sup>17</sup>

## **F. Persons with disabilities**

25. The exclusion or marginalization of persons with disabilities is a major challenge to social integration across the Pacific. A range of discriminatory barriers denies them equality of opportunity, education, employment and income and limits their access to the physical environment, transport, ICT, health and other public services. Ultimately, these barriers result in higher poverty levels, deprive national economies of a significant pool of creativity and skills, and impoverish communities in other non-material ways.

26. Disability issues have increasingly been addressed by Pacific island countries, driven by a shared commitment to building more inclusive, barrier-free and just societies. At the 2009 Forum, Pacific leaders stressed the need for more attention to be directed to the region's most disadvantaged group – people with disabilities – who are among the poorest and most vulnerable in

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Johnston, "Pacific perspectives on the challenges to energy security and the sustainable use of energy", paper prepared for the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific as input to the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, Vladivostok, Russian Federation, May 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Report on the summary of outcomes and proceedings from the Niue Pacific Climate Change Roundtable Meeting, 14 to 17 March 2011 (Alofi, 2011). Available from [www.pacificdisaster.net/pdnadmin/data/original/PCCR\\_NIU\\_2011\\_Report\\_summary.pdf](http://www.pacificdisaster.net/pdnadmin/data/original/PCCR_NIU_2011_Report_summary.pdf).



the world. In 2010, Forum leaders again acknowledged the hardships created by barriers and the vulnerabilities faced by persons with disabilities and emphasized the need for disability-inclusive development in all government programs as the way forward. This regional consensus has strengthened over the past decade as Pacific countries have endorsed a number of critical regional and global instruments and commitments. These include the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (2003), the Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability 2010-2015, the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in the Asia-Pacific Region (2012), and the ratification or signing of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by all Pacific island states.

## **V. Means of implementation**

27. The means by which small island developing States can achieve sustainable development, and for which innovative partnerships are needed, are in the areas of financing, trade, capacity-building, technology transfer, data and statistics, and the institutional support provided to small island developing States through the United Nations system. While these are not new modalities, qualitative improvements in the way they support sustainable development can help to ensure transformational change.

### **A. Information and communications technology**

28. The importance of ICT development for Pacific small island developing States lies in its capacity to overcome the tyranny of distance and isolation. In the early 2000s, several Pacific island governments<sup>18</sup> opened up their telecommunications markets, resulting in a major expansion in ICT connectivity.<sup>19</sup> By 2015, 10 Pacific island countries had access to high-speed and high-bandwidth capacity submarine cables, which replaced or complemented satellite access. Despite progress, Pacific islands have a long way to go to catch up to other regions of the world. In 2013, only 2.68 people for every 100 in the Pacific had a connection to broadband internet, compared to 6 per 100 people in middle-income countries, 8 in the Caribbean and 27 for high-income countries. The same low numbers were evident for internet subscribers and were even worse with respect to mobile telephone users; the Pacific region ranked lowest compared to all regions, including sub-Saharan Africa, and compared to low-income countries. An estimated 40 per cent of the population, mostly in rural areas, remains unconnected. In most Pacific island countries, extending access beyond urban centres requires major investment.

### **B. Infrastructure financing**

29. The financing needs of the Pacific islands for sustainable development are largely due to their high cost structure, even though the Pacific islands are the highest per capita aid recipients. Domestic resources are available to finance major development projects in some of the larger island countries, but most rely on donor grants and foreign concessional financing. Access to timely and appropriate financing for infrastructure development and climate adaptation priorities has been a major challenge.

<sup>18</sup> Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu, followed later by other Pacific islands.

<sup>19</sup> Increase in teledensity (fixed line/mobile) and internet subscriptions per 100 people.

### **C. Regional trade and transportation issues**

30. Pacific small island developing States have pursued trade negotiations over the past 15 years, with a view to promoting gradual trade integration in support of sustainable development and economic cooperation in order to foster growth, investment and employment in the region. For example, the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement entered into force in 2007, and Pacific island governments are currently negotiating with Australia and New Zealand on the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus. Generally, Pacific small island developing States seek a trade agreement with more developed countries that extends beyond trade in goods and includes services, labour market access and a medium-term development cooperation arrangement.

31. Supply-side constraints remain an underlying challenge for the Pacific small island developing States to fully benefit from improved market access. Many factors contribute to these constraints, including small scattered markets, the high cost of factors of production, isolation from major markets, high transport costs, a narrow-based manufacturing sector and, particularly for agricultural and tourism exports, the impact of frequent natural disasters. Measures are being pursued to alleviate these challenges, including through improvement in the business environment and the development of necessary supply chain capacities to increase exports of goods and services. Pacific island countries also face additional challenges in regulating imports, including issues relating to labelling, substandard products and poor nutrition information, all of which require national standards and their enforcement, not least because of the fast-growing imports of cheap unhealthy food that are contributing to the Pacific epidemic of non-communicable diseases.

32. In Pacific small island developing States, maritime transport is the single most important form of transportation, facilitating over 90 per cent of regional trade and supporting approximately 29,800 jobs, including informal trade where women play a major role. In addition, for thousands of outer island dwellers, maritime transport is an indispensable means of travelling to main islands where health care, employment, education and other social services are more readily available. Unfortunately, infrequent shipping services, especially for outer islands, are a major obstacle to the marketing of produce, particularly perishable food like fish products.

### **D. Data and statistics**

33. With 17 Sustainable Development Goals, 169 associated targets and 235 indicators, small and capacity-constrained Pacific island countries have concerns over the breadth and complexity of the Goals and the challenging task of monitoring the indicators. The challenge then is to identify priority indicators and make the 2030 Agenda achievable for Pacific island countries. At the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in 2015 before the launch of the 2030 Agenda and the Goals, Pacific leaders agreed to select global Goal indicators which are relevant to the Pacific context and to use them to measure and report progress on the Goals, the Samoa Pathway and the higher objectives of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism.

## **VI. Supporting the Pacific to implement the Sustainable Development Goals**

34. The Samoa Pathway and the 2030 Agenda offer Pacific small island developing States a fresh lens, a discernible shift in emphasis and ultimately

a more strategic and integrated approach to building more resilient economies and societies and achieving the overarching goal of sustainable development. Inclusive and equitable growth is a key aspect of the more balanced and integrated approach advocated by the Samoa Pathway and required for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. This requires, inter alia, expanding access to opportunities for productive and decent work, education, health, food, water and sanitation, land, credit and information, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged (youth, women and persons with disabilities). It is therefore about reducing inequalities (including gender inequalities), raising basic standards of living and fostering equitable social development and inclusion. The push for social protection responds to a growing need in Pacific small island developing States and illustrates a nuanced but important endorsement of redistributive principles.

35. There are unique regional and national contexts in the Pacific which need to be taken into account for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Pacific has not only unique structural challenges with respect to economic development but also a unique environmental, cultural and social context. The need to contextualize the Goals in the regional, subregional and national contexts is critical. The Samoa Pathway and the 2030 Agenda place greater emphasis on a more balanced and coherent relationship between the three dimensions of sustainable development, recognizing their interdependence and interlinkages through the adoption of an accelerated integrated approach. In so doing, they demonstrate a clear commitment to inclusiveness, sustainability, and redistributive or social justice, the Rio Principles, and respect for all human rights, including the right to development and an adequate standard of living.

36. The ESCAP secretariat is committed to supporting its small island developing States members, in particular in their response to Commission resolution 71/4. The need to accelerate an integrated approach for sustainable development is clear, as is the need to tackle the chronic structural constraints and capacity gaps that persist, as a first step towards achieving a development transformation that is firmly grounded in the principles of sustainability and inclusion.

#### **A. Enhancing national capacities and institutions**

37. The secretariat supports national capacity development in accordance with its mandate, and particularly its normative function, and is mindful of the role of United Nations programmes at the national level as defined through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework process. The Samoa Pathway called upon the United Nations system to, inter alia, continue to support small island developing States in their efforts to implement national sustainable development strategies. National sustainable development strategies have been a persistent challenge for Pacific small island developing States, which have struggled to formulate and implement their development policies in a more strategic, coordinated and integrated way. This is an area that the secretariat has actively supported since the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, with current activities focusing on integrated planning for sustainable development, including linking national planning priorities to budgetary processes and fiscal policies. Improving policy implementation not only requires timely data to inform decisions, but also sound policy, planning and budgeting processes, supported by rigorous and inclusive decision-making processes to facilitate coordination across government and

operationalize a more integrated approach. The secretariat also seeks to expand work in Fiji and Samoa on mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into fiscal policies to other countries in the subregion.

38. The Pacific small island developing States have already embarked on a system of peer reviews to identify areas of national policy, planning, budgeting and aid management that need improvement. Completed under the auspices of the Cairns Compact on Strengthening Development Coordination in the Pacific, these reviews highlighted many systemic weaknesses that have hampered policy implementation and reduced the effectiveness of development spending. A partnership is being developed between the secretariat and the Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre of the International Monetary Fund to assist members in integrating sustainable development into their fiscal policies. ESCAP has also supported the preparation and review of national sustainable development strategies in the Pacific through cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and other organizations. The National Development Strategy Partnership Group, a registered small island developing States partnership, provides a mechanism for joint or collaborative delivery of assistance, and ESCAP is currently providing the lead on behalf of the Partnership Group to help Kiribati develop its new national plan. Similar assistance has been requested by Tuvalu for the tailoring of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Samoa Pathway in its new national plan, and other requests for support are expected.

39. A key target under the Sustainable Development Goals is to build resilience and the adaptive capacity of climate-vulnerable communities.<sup>20</sup> Climate change will present challenges to the Pacific, resulting in a number of migration scenarios, from temporary local displacement, owing to rapid onset events, such as disasters, to the possible need for permanent resettlement in other countries.<sup>21</sup> The European Union-funded project Enhancing the Capacity of Pacific Island Countries to Manage the Impacts of Climate Change on Migration, which is being implemented by the secretariat in the target countries Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu, supports these countries by providing relevant information, developing appropriate policies and providing opportunities for dialogue on complex issues related to local planning (including land-use planning), migration policies and international law concerning displaced persons. These have important implications for the ongoing discussions with regard to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change under the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts.

40. In the wake of Cyclone Pam, the secretariat helped support the recovery efforts of Tuvalu and Vanuatu by assisting with a post-disaster needs assessment, providing satellite images for response planning, conducting community surveys and extending advice on trust funds and climate disaster financing. Similar support is being planned in response to the devastation caused by Cyclone Winston in Fiji. Support was also provided through the United Nations Resident Coordinator, which has included the use of personnel and secretariat facilities for response coordination meetings and for hosting an increased number of United Nations humanitarian personnel.

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<sup>20</sup> See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal>.

<sup>21</sup> The recent devastation caused by Cyclone Pam demonstrates clearly that, for many of the small atolls completely inundated by the sea, adaptation to climate change may include migration either internally or internationally.

41. The Samoa Pathway recognizes the transformational role of energy, which is being prioritized by the Pacific as well. The secretariat places high priority on the availability of reliable data and information on energy security in the Pacific. As a result, the secretariat supports the strengthening of the Pacific Regional Data Repository for Sustainable Energy for All, which is hosted by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. The secretariat also provides assistance to Pacific small island developing States in examining the viability of and expanding renewable energy sources, including biogas, through support from the Government of Kazakhstan.

42. Science, technology and innovation are essential enablers for and drivers of sustainable development. Technology is largely transferred to small island developing States through trade and investment, but it is also necessary to foster an environment that provides incentives for domestic innovation and entrepreneurship that builds on local knowledge. Of particular importance is the need to improve access to information and communication technologies by improving ICT infrastructure, training, regulatory frameworks, and public and private sector involvement. The secretariat's work in integration, including through the promotion of the national sustainable development strategy approach in national planning and budgeting processes, provides the platform through which improvements in science, technology and innovation can be mainstreamed in the Pacific's sustainable development agenda, which could include a focus on the science-policy interface.

43. With regard to physical connectivity and trade, the Samoa Pathway prioritizes social equity, health, resilience, affordability and environmental impact with respect to sustainable transport; the need for special and differential treatment and effective participation in respect of trade; and the need for connectivity and ICT to be appropriate, reliable, affordable and environmentally sound. The secretariat of the Commission will coordinate with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community to explore and consult on identifying sustainable transport solutions in the Pacific and also liaise with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to finalize an assessment of broader trade integration for the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau through the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement.

44. Practical measures to promote gender equality and social inclusion include projects on gender-responsive budgeting, gender and disability statistics, women entrepreneurs, and e-government and women's empowerment; national consultations on inequality and social protection in the context of the 2030 Agenda; a benchmarking study on Sustainable Development Goal 5 in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Asian Development Bank; and the development and implementation of gender-inclusive national disability policy and legal frameworks aligned to international standards, in particular the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

45. The ESCAP secretariat, in partnership with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the Pacific Disability Forum, continues to provide advisory and technical assistance services in the Pacific and is working with key government and non-government stakeholders to undertake national policy reviews, legislative analysis and reviews, legislative drafting, and the production of more accessible disability materials, including in the vernacular and in audio format for persons with hearing impairments. It has also provided training for legislative drafters from 12 Pacific countries on the

requirements for legislative implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

46. Most Pacific countries now have a national disability policy, and a growing number of countries are requesting Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities-compliant legislation, following the lead of the Marshall Islands, whose Convention-aligned Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2015, will come into force later this year. Ongoing secretariat work in this area is helping to strengthen disability governance, reduce discrimination and inequality, and enhance inclusive and equitable development. As the work advances, there is significant potential for promoting South-South cooperation within the Pacific region, both in respect of technical assistance at the national level and the development of regional model legislative guidelines.

## **B. Enhancing the Pacific voice and representation**

47. The secretariat seeks to reflect the concerns and interests of Pacific island developing States in the proceedings and outcomes of Asia-Pacific and global intergovernmental processes. A high-level policy exchange with Pacific leaders on the Samoa Pathway was convened by the secretariat on 27 May 2015 as part of the seventy-first session of the Commission. The event was successful in attracting eight Pacific leaders, the highest number of leaders at any Commission session, and in giving the Pacific the voice amplification it needs to be heard on its priorities and concerns.

48. In addition, a key Asia-Pacific regional meeting through which the Pacific voice is heard on sustainable development is the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. The third session of the Forum will consider the proposal regarding a regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda. The Pacific has contributed to the road map, and it is expected to be finalized with further consultations with the subregions. The secretariat will also work towards ensuring that the outcomes of regional processes on financing for development reflect the needs of Pacific island member States.

49. While much attention was generated on the issue of climate change migration at the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris, with the support of the secretariat, 2016 is shaping up as “the year of migration”. A number of key global events are focusing on the issue, and the secretariat will actively support them on behalf of Pacific island member States. In particular, the twenty-second session of the Conference of the Parties in Marrakech, Morocco, will emphasize loss and damage issues, which include climate-induced migration and displacement. Prior to that, in September, the General Assembly will be preceded by a summit on migration. The secretariat will continue to support the Pacific voice at these events through its work on climate change migration, and through a project funded by the Government of Kazakhstan, which is dedicated to supporting the voice of Pacific small island developing States on climate change and access to renewable energy solutions.

50. As mandated by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which was held in July 2015, the secretariat will advance work on the implementation of the financing for development agenda in the Asia and Pacific region. In this regard, an Asia-Pacific follow-up dialogue is scheduled for March 2016 to deliberate on thematic aspects of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, including

tax cooperation and inclusive finance with a particular focus on the countries with special needs.

51. Following the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Apia in 2014, the Pacific continues to play an important leading role in global and regional intergovernmental processes. This includes the hosting by Tonga of the second Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, which will be held in 2018. It will be the first intergovernmental meeting for the Asia-Pacific region organized by ESCAP to be held in the Pacific, thereby signalling the importance of energy security in the Pacific and the scope for increased cooperation across Asia and the Pacific for the Sustainable Development Goal on energy.

52. In 2017, Fiji will host the United Nations Conference on Oceans and Seas to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. This presents an important opportunity to address the fragmentation in ocean governance and strengthen the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in support of sustainable development. The secretariat stands ready to support this important process and recognizes the importance of applied research on oceans and seas, including the impacts of climate change, and the importance of the science-policy interface for sustainable development. The secretariat could undertake analytical work on the gaps in ocean governance and applied research in support of Goal 14 in the Pacific.

53. The secretariat advocates greater cooperation and integration within the Pacific subregion. In that context, it is actively exploring, with Pacific subregional organizations and relevant United Nations agencies, how such support for connectivity can best be enhanced, including in the areas of sustainable inter-island shipping, ICT, trade integration, renewable energy, climate change and disaster risk reduction, oceans and fisheries, persons with disabilities, gender and non-communicable diseases.

54. Analytical work and publications are important tools for raising the voice and profile of the Pacific small island developing States. *The Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2016*, the flagship publication of ESCAP, which contains an update on issues of concern for the Pacific, will be launched in April 2016. In addition, the forthcoming *Review of Developments in Transport in Asia and the Pacific* highlights a number of issues specific to the Pacific, including the need for sustainable transport solutions that utilize renewable and energy efficient technologies and appropriate regulatory arrangements to promote necessary private sector investment, as well as increasing maritime safety. In 2016, as part the secretariat's efforts to promote regional economic cooperation and integration and the 2030 Agenda, two important reports will be published to highlight the issues and experiences of the Pacific subregion.

### **C. Monitoring and reporting on implementation**

55. Under the Samoa Pathway, the secretariat is tasked with monitoring and reporting, which is consistent with its mandated reporting role under the 2030 Agenda. It also has dedicated programmes in statistical capacity development that are aligned with national planning processes. In addition, the secretariat provides an intergovernmental platform; for example, at the September 2015 ESCAP meeting "Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals: Meeting to identify Asia-Pacific regional and subregional priorities", the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal

Indicators process, which was established to develop the Goal indicators, was clarified and an exchange among ESCAP member States on their priority issues for consideration as part of the global monitoring framework was facilitated. In particular, the secretariat, through its Subregional Office for the Pacific, assisted Pacific representatives (Fiji and Samoa) on the Inter-Agency and Expert Group in consulting and collating the views of Pacific small island developing States on the proposed indicators. In support of calls for a broader system of national accounting and measures beyond GDP, the secretariat is providing assistance, in conjunction with the Pacific Islands Forum, the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific and United Nations entities, in selecting Goal indicators that are relevant to the Pacific context. Further assistance will be provided for monitoring progress on the selected indicators for the Pacific reports on implementation of the Goals. Those reports could feed into the Asia-Pacific reports on the Goals to be produced under an Asian Development Bank/ESCAP/United Nations Development Programme partnership. The secretariat is an observer on the Pacific Statistics Steering Committee and was actively involved in the design of the 2015-2017 phase of the Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy. ESCAP will continue to work with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and other regional partners to improve statistical capacity in the Pacific.

56. The System of National Accounts does not include natural, social and human capital or any other measures that extend beyond GDP. The secretariat is implementing a project to help build national capacity to produce environment-relevant indicators (through the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting). The economic valuation of ecosystem services provided by terrestrial and marine-based resources is particularly relevant to the Pacific small island developing States due to their exceptionally rich natural capital (natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystem services) and the major economic losses generated by its misuse and degradation. As it is consistent with and integrated into the System of National Accounts, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting enables changes in natural capital to be analysed over time, together with its contribution to the economy and the impact of economic activities.

57. The secretariat also has experience with regional reporting on the Millennium Development Goals and conducts periodic reviews on the sustainable development programme of the small island developing States, which will be continued under the 2030 Agenda and the Samoa Pathway. In line with the call for equitable social development and inclusion contained in the Samoa Pathway, the secretariat also supports national reviews of human rights implementation by United Nations country teams, as part of the universal periodic review and the human rights treaty bodies reporting processes (in particular the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women). Among the key issues addressed are gender equality and the rights of persons with disabilities, as well as the challenges associated with non-communicable diseases, water and sanitation, environmental degradation and poverty.

## **VII. Conclusions: key issues for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Pacific**

58. The secretariat stands ready to assist the Pacific small island developing States and Pacific organizations in their efforts to align their work on the Samoa Pathway and the Framework for Pacific Regionalism with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. A key message of the



Pacific leaders regarding the implementation of the three agreements is that it should be done in a manner that is integrated, promotes sustainability and enhances ownership by the Pacific. While the development cooperation environment of the Pacific evolves and adapts to new circumstances with new aid modalities, the role of the secretariat in the Pacific must also evolve to ensure relevance and effectiveness. The value addition of the secretariat to Pacific small island developing States must be clearly based on robust analysis and innovative solutions that take a holistic and systemic approach to sustainable development in response to the priorities of Pacific leaders.

59. Pacific regional priorities have been clearly articulated through regional agreements, including the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. The secretariat will work through established mechanisms, such as working groups of the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the Pacific, to support and advocate for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Samoa Pathway. In line with its mandates and agreements with partners on the Goals (for example, the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Development Group) the secretariat will ensure the synergy and coordination of the Pacific's subregional process with ESCAP regional platforms and outcome documents (such as the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda) including in the reporting to the high-level political forum on sustainable development. The secretariat will also continue to work with subregional partners to deliver coordinated support to Pacific small island developing States on the mainstreaming and implementation of the Goals at the national level.

60. The secretariat recognizes the importance of applied research on oceans and seas, including the impacts of climate change, and the importance of the science-policy interface for sustainable development. In this regard, the secretariat is well placed to support the Government of Fiji in convening the Conference on Oceans and Seas in June 2017, to assist the Pacific small island developing States in their preparation and participation in this important global meeting, and to ensure that the high-level regional commitment to gender equality is reflected in both the Conference agenda and representation.

61. The secretariat is well placed to contribute to the sustainable development transformation in the Pacific, to help to build the resilience of Pacific small island developing States, and to reduce the dependence on the outside world for food, energy and aid flows that have besieged them for so long. ESCAP is committed to forging a genuine and durable partnership with Pacific small island developing States and to working with other United Nations agencies and partners to find solutions to their multiple and complex development problems.