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**Review of the progress and remaining challenges
in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and
Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific**

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Note by the Secretariat**

Summary

The present report contains a summary of the regional review of progress in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific, highlighting achievements, remaining challenges and priority areas for action in realizing gender equality and women's empowerment. The report is based on responses received from member States to the regional intergovernmental survey administered by ESCAP, as well as on the Beijing+20 national review reports submitted by member States to ESCAP.

From their Asia-Pacific Beijing+20 regional survey and their national review reports, ESCAP member States identified progress in: strengthening and adopting gender equality policies, legislation and action plans; eliminating violence against women and girls; and promoting the leadership and political participation of women as particular areas of achievement. The key regional challenge mirrored an area of achievement, namely weaknesses in normative frameworks and institutional mechanisms for gender equality and women's empowerment.

In relation to the 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action, ESCAP member States identified both gains and persistent impediments to equality with respect to economic status, education, health, power, human rights, media participation and portrayal, and the environment.

The priority areas for action to advance achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment in Asia and the Pacific, as identified by the ESCAP member States, are: (a) women's engagement in public and political life; (b) women's economic empowerment; and (c) elimination of violence against women and girls.

In order to realize gains in support of gender equality and women's empowerment, the ESCAP member States further identified the need for: (a) comprehensive normative frameworks; (b) gender consciousness; (c) gender capacity; (d) cooperation and partnership; (e) resources; and (f) accountability.

* E/ESCAP/GEWE/L.1.

** The late issuance of the present document is due to late receipt, by ESCAP, of responses from several member States to the Asia-Pacific Beijing+20 regional survey and of the national review reports. It is a summary of the full regional report — "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific: Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" — which will be issued as an ESCAP publication in early 2015.

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I. Introduction

1. In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,¹ which were subsequently endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly.

2. Every five years since 1995, progress in achieving the strategic objectives of the Platform for Action is reviewed by the Commission on the Status of Women, which is a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council. There have been three reviews to date — 2000, 2005 and 2010 — with each review resulting in an outcome document that reinforces global commitment to the empowerment of women and girls, and that outlines priority actions for the coming five years.

¹ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution I, annexes I and II.

3. The fourth review will occur in 2015, marking the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In its resolution 2013/18, the Economic and Social Council called upon all States to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Platform for Action. In addition, the resolution of the Economic and Social Council encouraged “the regional commissions to undertake regional reviews so that the outcomes of intergovernmental processes at the regional level can feed into the 2015 review”² overseen by the Commission on the Status of Women.

4. In accordance with this mandate, in 2014 ESCAP, in cooperation with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), undertook a regional review of progress in implementation of the Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific.

5. Analytical review of regional progress in implementation of the Platform for Action was undertaken through administration of a regional survey and submission, by ESCAP member States, of national review reports. ESCAP received 40 regional survey submissions³ and 32 national review reports.⁴ The analytical review encompassed ESCAP member States geographically located in the Asia and Pacific region. The analytical review also benefitted from inputs from civil society.

6. The present document contains a summary of the identified achievements and challenges of ESCAP member States in relation to gender equality and women’s empowerment, including in relation to the 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action. It also outlines the key means of implementation of the Platform for Action, along with member States’ delineated priorities for strengthening implementation and achieving gender equality.

II. Overview of achievements in implementation of the Platform for Action

7. In Asia and the Pacific, overall, three categories of regional achievement in implementation of the Platform for Action were identified by member States:⁵ (a) strengthening gender equality in national governments and governance; (b) addressing violence against women and girls; and (c) promoting the leadership and political participation of women.

² See resolution 2013/18 of the Economic and Social Council, para. 4.

³ Replies to the Beijing+20 regional survey were received from: Australia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; China; Cook Islands; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; French Polynesia; Hong Kong, China; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Kiribati; Kyrgyzstan; Macao, China; Maldives; Marshall Islands; Micronesia (Federated States of); Mongolia; Myanmar; Nauru; Nepal; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Russian Federation; Samoa; Solomon Islands; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Turkey; Tuvalu; Uzbekistan; and Vanuatu.

⁴ National review reports were submitted to ESCAP and UN-Women by: Afghanistan; Armenia; Australia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; China; Fiji; Georgia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Kazakhstan; Kiribati; Kyrgyzstan; Marshall Islands; Mongolia; Nauru; Nepal; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Russian Federation; Samoa; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Tajikistan; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Turkey; Tuvalu; Uzbekistan; and Vanuatu.

⁵ The phrase “member States” is used to refer to the ESCAP members and associate members that replied to the Asia-Pacific Beijing+20 regional survey (40) and/or submitted Beijing+20 national review reports (32).

Strengthened governance and government institutions

8. In terms of governance, and notably institutional frameworks for achieving gender equality, member States highlighted: (a) the adoption of gender equality-related policies, legislation, action plans and strategies, along with accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;⁶ (b) the establishment and/or strengthened status and mandates of national women's machineries; (c) the increase in awareness of and commitment to gender equality across government entities; and (d) the expansion of gender mainstreaming across the government sector, including the introduction of gender-responsive budgeting.

Eliminating violence against women and girls

9. Member States from the five ESCAP subregions highlighted achievements in eliminating violence against women and girls, including: the introduction of legislation; strengthened law enforcement capacity; establishment of government entities tasked to address the elimination of violence against women and girls; prevention programmes; awareness-raising and mobilization of communities; and implementation of targeted campaigns addressing such issues as human trafficking and sorcery.

Women's political participation and leadership

10. With respect to the third region-wide achievement — being greater political participation and leadership by women — member States reported that women have occupied, and continue to occupy, senior government and non-government positions, from heads of Government and Supreme Court judges to serving on national boards, special taskforces and peace-negotiating bodies. Member States also noted the positive impacts of special temporary measures, such as quotas, in increasing the representation of women among political party candidates and parliamentarians.

Other achievements

11. At the subregional level,⁷ member States in the Pacific, in East and North-East Asia and in South and South-West Asia stressed achievements in women's economic empowerment; achievements related to: (a) the revision of legislation; (b) the introduction of flexible working arrangements; (c) the delineation of minimum wages; (d) the provision of childcare services; and (e) greater access to financial services, including credit.

12. Successes in the area of education were emphasized by member States from both South-East Asia and South and South-West Asia, with such observations as increased female literacy levels; improved school performance among girls; greater numbers of women continuing to tertiary

⁶ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, No. 20378.

⁷ The five ESCAP subregions are East and North-East Asia (China; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Hong Kong, China; Japan; Macao, China; Mongolia; Republic of Korea); North and Central Asia (Armenia; Azerbaijan; Georgia; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Russian Federation; Tajikistan; Turkmenistan; Uzbekistan); the Pacific (American Samoa; Australia; Cook Islands; Fiji; French Polynesia; Guam; Kiribati; Marshall Islands; Micronesia; Nauru; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Niue; Northern Mariana Islands; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Samoa; Solomon Islands; Tonga; Tuvalu; Vanuatu); South-East Asia (Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; Indonesia; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Myanmar; Philippines; Singapore; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Viet Nam); and South and South-West Asia (Afghanistan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Maldives; Nepal; Pakistan; Sri Lanka; Turkey).

education; gender parity in primary school enrolments; and girls increasingly studying traditionally male-dominated subjects.

13. For some member States located in the Pacific, in South-East Asia and in South and South-West Asia, achievements in relation to women's and girls' health, and particularly maternal health, were highlighted; evidenced by, for example, the reduction in maternal mortality rates and the construction of maternity facilities in hospitals. Member States further highlighted provision of health services to women and girls with HIV.

14. Progress in implementation of the women, peace and security agenda was, in turn, highlighted by member States in the Pacific and in North and Central Asia.

III. Overview of challenges in implementing the Platform for Action

15. Alongside achievements, member States identified overall challenges in realizing gender equality and women's empowerment.

Normative frameworks and institutional mechanisms

16. Across the Asia-Pacific region, member States highlighted institutional-related obstacles pertaining to: (a) policy and legislative "gaps"; (b) resistance to the adoption of gender equality-related policies and legislation; (c) inadequate communication, coordination and capacity impeding the mainstreaming of gender across the government sector; (d) insufficient technical and financial resources, especially for the national women's machineries; (e) lack of understanding of, and appreciation for, gender equality among politicians, policymakers and public servants; and (f) the broadening and strengthening of application of gender-responsive budgeting.

17. Member States also noted challenges related to: (a) the enforcement of existing legislation; (b) the implementation of strategies and action plans; and (c) the monitoring and evaluation of initiatives. Enforcement, implementation and monitoring challenges were, in turn, linked to the absence of, or limited, sex-disaggregated data, gender indicators, gender statistics, official knowledge management systems and processes for the exchange of data and information between government entities.

Sociocultural norms

18. Related to institutional challenges, member States from the Pacific and from South and South-West Asia identified a need to address patriarchy and specifically the associated discriminatory, prejudicial and confining "mindsets", attitudes, values, beliefs and perceptions.

Violence against women and girls and women's leadership and decision-making authority

19. Addressing the obstacle of patriarchy is connected to tackling sector-specific issues of gender equality, including in violence against women and girls and women's leadership and political participation. While both of these issues were listed under "achievements", member States from the Pacific, South and South-West Asia and North and Central Asia registered violence against women and girls and women's leadership and political participation as challenges to the realization of gender equality.

Women's economic empowerment

20. Member States from the Pacific, South-East Asia and South and South-West Asia subregions enumerated impediments to women's economic empowerment. Surmounting poverty, addressing legislative "gaps", eradicating horizontal and vertical occupational segregation, erasing the gender pay gap, increasing women's labour force participation, realizing "balance" between professional and personal responsibilities, and valuing the unpaid care work done by women are examples of the challenges cited by member States.

Women's and girls' health

21. Linked to women's and girls' economic status is their health. Member States from the Pacific, South-East Asia and South and South-West Asia identified health issues as a challenge to achieving gender equality goals. Member States expressed particular concern about: (a) maternal morbidity and mortality; (b) high adolescent fertility rates; (c) malnutrition; and (d) the deleterious effects of non-communicable diseases.

Armed conflict

22. With respect to conflict, member States from the Pacific, South-East Asia and South and South-West Asia subregions made reference to the "women, peace and security" agenda, noting that armed conflict, insurgencies, coups, political uncertainty and instability have undermined peace and the security of women and girls (and men and boys), and have weakened State accountability for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Environment

23. Climate change, natural disasters from earthquakes to typhoons, and environmental degradation were listed as undermining the human security and safety of women and girls. Environmental issues were linked, by member States, to reductions in the paid employment of women, to destruction of women's sources of income generation and to women's impeded access to natural resources, including water.

Diverse needs and interests

24. One further challenge reported by member States concerned equitable consideration and response to the needs and interests of the diversity of women and girls. Disparities were noted, for example, between indigenous and non-indigenous women and between rural and urban women in relation to such issues as poverty, employment, violence and access to services, including health and education services.

IV. The Platform for Action: 12 critical areas of concern

25. In relation to the 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action, member States described actions taken with resulting gains and continuing hurdles to be overcome.

A. Women and poverty

26. Member States reported that poverty among women and girls remains an area of concern. Across the Asia-Pacific region, the reported proportion of female populations, at the national level, living in poverty ranged from a low

of 1.7 per cent to a high of 70 per cent. In their observations of poverty among women and girls, member States referenced the particular vulnerability of female-headed households and of sole parent households, of which the majority are women.

27. To address poverty among women and girls, member States reported application of macroeconomic policies that specifically address the needs of women and girls living in poverty. Gender-responsive social protection emerged as the most common poverty-response measure, followed by employment and livelihood schemes, gender-responsive budgeting and then gender-responsive taxation.

B. Education and training of women

28. Member States documented gains in the area of education and training. For instance, gender parity exists in relation to net primary school enrolment and attendance rates for girls and boys across the region.

29. Across Asia and the Pacific, gender parity in net enrolment and attendance rates is less common at the secondary school level, than at the primary school level, and more so at the tertiary level; some countries have higher female, than male, rates, while others have higher male, than female, rates. Less than 50 per cent of girls (and boys), of applicable age, in some countries in the ESCAP region are enrolled in secondary school.

30. Moreover, it should be noted that while gender parity is increasingly evident in literacy rates across the region, in four member States (all from the South and South-West Asia subregion), less than half of the female population aged 15 years and older are literate, whereas only one member State has a male literacy rate of less than 50 per cent.

31. In progressing gains at the primary school level and in literacy rates, member States highlighted the existence of national policies that mandate equal access of women and men, girls and boys to education, with common reference to free and compulsory education of 12 years' duration.

32. Yet, while normative frameworks provide for equality between women and men, and girls and boys, in education, disparities remain. Challenges to realizing policy and legislative intentions were identified by member States in relation to quality of education, resources, access and "subject streaming". A lack of trained teachers and of trained female teachers was noted, along with the need for greater resources for school infrastructure and transportation. Member States also highlighted the need to eliminate "subject streaming" and sociocultural norms and values that result in premature termination of education for girls.

C. Women and health

33. Member States reported gains in policies and legislation mandating provision of a range of health services to women and girls. The policies and plans solely address the health needs of women and girls or apply to entire populations but contain objectives and measures related to the health of women and girls. In addition, the policies, plans and programmes addressing the health-related needs and interests of women and girls vary in comprehensiveness, coverage and implementation.

34. Member States identified persistent challenges to women's and girls' health and well-being, such as partial implementation of policies and programmes, insufficient resources, lack of specialized services, access

barriers and health sectors that are not entirely gender sensitive. Thus, while women, on average, live longer lives than men, they continue to die during childbirth, have unmet health-related needs, such as in relation to sexual and reproductive health and HIV services, and do not universally enjoy the ability to choose, or access, health services.

35. Among the reported challenges, and while progress was noted, maternal health was highlighted as a particular area of concern, with women continuing to die for pregnancy- and childbirth-related reasons. Factors contributing to high maternal mortality rates, according to member States, include low female literacy rates, poverty, and limited access to both health professionals and health facilities. Additionally, there is a perceived need for greater investment in antenatal care and provision of skilled birth attendants, given the negative correlation with maternal morbidity and mortality.

D. Violence against women (and girls)

36. Member States noted progress in the adoption of measures to eliminate violence against women and girls; measures encompassing the adoption of policies and legislation, the implementation of action plans and the provision of services. Family protection acts, family safety acts and domestic violence acts, along with criminal, civil and family codes, legislate against violence against women and girls in the Asia-Pacific region.

37. Variably covering physical, sexual, psychological, domestic and economic violence, legislation across the region that criminalizes violence against women and girls reportedly contains provisions for protection orders, police safety orders, prison sentences and/or “corrective labour”. Legislation criminalizing all forms of violence against women and girls does not, however, exist in every country in Asia and the Pacific and there are reported challenges to the full and effective implementation of the legislation.

38. In terms of service provision, and as reported, health and legal services are the most common form of assistance available to survivors of violence, followed by provision of shelters or safe houses, and then livelihood support. In relation to women with disabilities, approximately two thirds of member States provide services targeting the prevention of violence against women with disabilities and one third provide targeted services to women with disabilities who experience violence.

39. As observed by member States, existing normative frameworks, programmes and public campaigns to eliminate violence against women and

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