

THE UNITED NATIONS REGIONAL COMMISSIONS  
AND THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
MOVING TO DELIVER ON A TRANSFORMATIVE AND AMBITIOUS AGENDA



United Nations





### **The regional dimension: an imperative for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

*Providing a vital bridge between global frameworks and national development agendas in relation to the integration, implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda; informing global and national policymaking and normative agenda-setting through regional experiences and perspectives; supporting South-South cooperation and the rise of middle-income countries (MICs), including through enhanced regional cooperation, efforts to deepen regional integration efforts, and exchange of experiences, good practices and effective public policies among countries of similar circumstances and beyond; promoting partnerships and policy coherence, including at the subregional level and in support of countries in special situations, such as least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), small island developing States (SIDS) and countries in conflict; fostering a progressive agenda and guiding transformational change, adding new substance and innovative ideas to the new development paradigm; reconciling a diversity of interests and articulating a development vision that reflects multiple realities; building and increasing resilience to crises through greater capacity to innovate, share common interests, pool resources, coordinate and build on synergies and complementarities; factoring in the realities of interaction among various spheres and stakeholders, be they political, humanitarian or development-related, and devising solutions anchored in such realities.*

### **The regional commissions and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: what do we offer?**

**Forging regional voices on the global agenda.** The regional commissions are uniquely positioned as carriers of the United Nations development agenda in the regions. With their convening power and proximity to Member States, they serve as inclusive regional intergovernmental platforms for deliberating and adapting universal norms and global frameworks to regional and country contexts, and as a dynamic and effective nexus between the global and national levels. These platforms promote policy coherence and dialogue with a broad range of stakeholders, with a holistic multisectoral approach, and are often the means of devising common strategies to address collective challenges, as well as to share knowledge, experiences, good practice and lessons learned. Regional commissions also provide greater voice to subregions and countries in special situations, including LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS and countries in conflict. This is vital in differentiating responsibilities, targeting responses, ensuring inclusion and promoting shared prosperity within and among the regions in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

*In line with their long established tradition and renewed mandates, the regional commissions were critical in shaping regional positions and bringing concerted regional voices and perspectives to global deliberations and negotiations leading to the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and the United Nations summit for the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The establishment of the regional forums on sustainable development (RFSD) in most regions in response to the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) constitutes a critical step in further fostering regional voices on the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development, and providing a clear link with the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.*

**Promoting a balanced integration for sustainable development.** The regional commissions provide unique forums for developing integrated approaches among countries that share similar economic, social, environmental and cultural realities. They also serve as regional knowledge-brokers and multidisciplinary knowledge hubs contributing to regional cooperation and institution-building. Their programme of work has been adapted over the years to support implementation of a sustainable development agenda covering the economic, social and environmental dimensions. Through internal horizontal work, they are increasingly harnessing their accumulated expertise in all these areas to provide integrated and multidisciplinary analysis, policy advice and technical assistance to their member countries. They have spearheaded policy agendas on cross-cutting issues such as equality, inclusion and social justice with a rights-based approach; financing for development; investment, trade and technology; structural change and sustainable production and consumption patterns; natural resources governance; climate change adaptation and mitigation; and sustainable cities and urban development. Because the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are interdisciplinary by nature, enhancing such collaboration will be critical for implementing the Goals and



adapting them to national contexts. The convening power of the regional commissions at the thematic and sectoral level, mainly through their **subsidiary bodies and intergovernmental meetings**, brings together policymakers and stakeholders for cross-fertilization of ideas and knowledge, often giving rise to innovative solutions to development issues. Moreover, the regional commissions have been increasing their collaboration with specialized agencies of the United Nations to leverage and inject this multidisciplinary expertise in specific sectors, often leading to multisectoral policy advice and actions.

*The Rio+20 conference reaffirmed the unique positioning of the regional commissions and reinforced their crucial role within the global development architecture in support of sustainable development. The Rio+20 outcome specifically emphasized and strengthened the role of the regional commissions in helping to balance the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development.*<sup>1</sup>

**Supporting South-South cooperation and sustaining the rise of middle-income countries (MICs).** Regional commissions are increasingly being called upon to play an active role in helping to meet the needs of member States for upstream policy advice; to identify and meet the changing needs of countries in transition to middle-income status; and to enhance knowledge-sharing and mutual support between countries facing similar development challenges. The learning, research and capacity-building institutions of the regional commissions are playing an important role in this knowledge-sharing and brokerage, including in the area of technology transfer in the regions. As an integral part of their mandate, the regional commissions support integration across different regions in a variety of areas, including: infrastructure, trade, norms and standards, food security, macroeconomic coordination, water resources management and energy. These efforts are crucial for creating an enabling environment for development and for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

*The Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation (December 2009) reaffirmed the critical role of the regional commissions in supporting and promoting South-South cooperation, notably through their support for regional cooperation and institution-building.*<sup>2</sup>

### **Helping to create a solid follow-up and review architecture for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.**

Promoting national ownership by supporting national institutional mechanisms and development plans that take into account and put into practice the integrated nature of the new agenda and by providing options for the incorporation of the SDGs into national contexts, upon request by Member States. The regional commissions' valuable experience in tracking the Millennium Development Goals at the regional level will lay the foundation for a collaborative approach to follow-up and review of the SDGs that can strengthen countries' respective capabilities and add value to national information by identifying regional trends and gaps in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It was at the regional level, and through the regional commissions' collaborative approach to tracking the MDGs, that revealing findings were made which highlighted, for example, that the quality of the services delivered was just as important as the quantity, and which pointed to the need to unmask inequalities in the achievement of Millennium Development Goals and targets at the subregional and subnational levels. Regional analysis also revealed the importance of factoring in baseline conditions in the measurement of progress and achievements. These findings significantly enriched the debate that ensued on the SDGs. The United Nations regional commissions and their subsidiary bodies can play an important role in establishing an effective link between the national and global levels for follow-up and review of the agenda with the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders. Multi-stakeholder regional platforms, such as the regional forums on sustainable development, can be useful for identifying the best means of approaching follow-up and review for each region.

**Strengthening national capacity to harness the data revolution** in order to support data-driven and evidenced-based policymaking and decisions. The regional commissions have been supporting regional harmonization of statistics and national capacity development efforts to improve data and statistics collection, processing, comparability, dissemination and use for evidence-based policymaking at the national level, including by working with the regional conferences on statistics (which they support as technical secretariat or otherwise) and by providing capacity-building and technical assistance to national institutes of statistics. These actions are key to supporting member States in addressing the data revolution challenges related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The availability of good quality data —both traditional and non-traditional— is

<sup>1</sup> See United Nations, "The future we want", General Assembly resolution 66/288, para. 97.

<sup>2</sup> See United Nations, "Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation" General Assembly resolution 64/222, para. 10.



essential for a reliable follow-up and review framework for the SDGs and related national development plans and goals. By harnessing their experience and strong ties at the national level, the regional commissions can also help to analyse and identify efficient and cost-effective options for the incorporation and adaptation of the SDGs in national and regional contexts, enabling discussions to identify region-specific indicators and facilitating comparability of national indicators among countries. They can also provide policy advice and guidance for the development of methodologies for the integration of the different dimensions of sustainable development in national plans and programmes.

*The Rio+20 conference called upon the regional commissions, with the support of other entities in the United Nations system, to collect and compile national inputs on integrated and scientifically based information on sustainable development in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.*<sup>3</sup>

**Promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships and policy coherence.** In light of the increased role played by regional and subregional organizations and development banks in promoting development, the regional commissions have continued working closely with them, often within the framework of formal agreements based on shared strategic priorities and interests. In consultation with Member States and the guidance delivered through the outcome of Rio+20, many of the regional commissions' platforms have strengthened their engagement with civil society and the private sector at the regional level, including through the regional forums on sustainable development that have been established. The commissions have been analysing the experiences of public-private partnerships and looking at new ways to harness innovation and efficiency gains by all relevant actors to promote sustainable development. They have been supporting and promoting knowledge networks and partnerships with academia, think tanks and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for enhanced policy impact at the national level. This work is critical to achieve a better understanding of the efforts required to mobilize the means of implementation, be it financing, technology, trade or otherwise, for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**Coordinating the United Nations system at the regional level.** Strengthening the policy coherence of the United Nations system in the regions is another important role for the regional commissions. This is primarily carried out through the convening of the regional coordination mechanisms (RCMs) to foster inter-agency work and synergies. Mandated by the Economic and Social Council, in most regions these bodies bring together the United Nations system at the regional level, including regional commissions, the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and key non-United Nations partners, to identify top priorities and align United Nations system policy support for regional and subregional priorities and integration efforts and avoid duplication. There is potential to further strengthen the existing cooperation and synergies between all complementary parts of the United Nations regional development architecture, and to direct these efforts towards leveraging capacity in support of the national implementation of the SDGs and a stronger development impact by the United Nations system in the regions.

*In sum, in an increasingly interdependent world, regionalism has arisen as an effective strategy for countries to strengthen their respective capabilities to respond to the challenges and paradigm shifts of the current global context. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is bound to heighten this necessity. The United Nations regional commissions are an intrinsic part of the regional institutional landscape. They are also carriers of United Nations global values and norms towards the regions. Their assets and capacities have long been recognized and tapped by Member States and other stakeholders and partners in the regions and subregions. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offers a renewed opportunity to further strengthen and leverage what the regional commissions offer in this regard.*

<sup>3</sup> See United Nations, "The future we want", General Assembly resolution 66/288, para. 100.

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<http://www.regionalcommissions.org>  
Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)  
<http://www.uneca.org>  
Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)  
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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)  
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Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)  
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