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Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE Region

**Second session**

Geneva, 1-2 March 2018

Report of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE region on its second session

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## I. Attendance

1. The second session of the Regional Forum was held at the International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG), Geneva, starting on 1 March 2018 at 10 a.m. and concluding on 2 March 2018 at 1 p.m. The session was chaired by H.E. Ambassador Michael Gerber, Special Envoy for Global Sustainable Development of Switzerland.
2. The session was attended by representatives of the following 51 UNECE member States: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.
3. The following non-member State of UNECE attended: Iran (Islamic Republic of).
4. The European Union (EU) was represented by the Permanent Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, the EU SWITCH to Green Facility, the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.
5. Representatives of the following United Nations departments, funds and programmes, specialized agencies, related organizations, conventions and initiatives attended the meeting: Convention on Biological Diversity, Environment Management Group, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, International Telecommunication Union, International Trade Centre, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN-Water, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Group, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Office at Geneva, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Office for Project Services, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, United Nations SDG Action Campaign, United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, United Nations Volunteers, World Bank Group, World Health Organization and World Meteorological Organization.

6. Representatives of the following intergovernmental and regional organizations also took part in the session: Council of Europe, Council of Europe Development Bank, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Eurasian Economic Commission, International Energy Agency Clean Coal Centre, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development, Nordic Council of Ministers, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus (REC Caucasus), Union for the Mediterranean and United Cities and Local Governments.

7. Representatives of 110 non-governmental organizations as well as representatives of other organizations and independent experts also participated. A complete list of participants can be found on the website of the Regional Forum.[1]

## II. Opening and adoption of the agenda (Agenda item 1)

Documentation: Annotated provisional agenda for the second session of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE Region (ECE/RFSD/2018/1)

8. The Regional Forum adopted the annotated provisional agenda.

9. In his opening remarks, the Chair emphasized that the Regional Forum served as a regional space to share policy solutions, best practices and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Interaction among participants was essential to achieve practical value-added and peer learning. Some of the challenges faced by the countries of the UNECE region were different, but many were also similar. Therefore, the Regional Forum presented an opportunity to find common ground for ways forward.

10. The President of the Economic and Social Council pointed to new economic and technological opportunities as well as to rising inequalities in many countries that were undermining social cohesion and participation. Crucial international frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda, directly addressed these pressing global challenges. There was a need to work together multilaterally to achieve the goals set in these frameworks. The Economic and Social Council and its system, including the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), had a key role in this regard.

11. Addressing participants through a video message, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations welcomed the engagement of the middle-income and advanced countries of the UNECE region in the Regional Forum, which reflected the universal character of the 2030 Agenda. The Regional Forum provided an opportunity for exchange on different approaches and for addressing transboundary issues among a variety of partners. The close collaboration among UNECE and the other regional United Nations entities in organizing the Regional Forum was in the spirit of current efforts to reposition the United Nations Development System.

12. The UNECE Executive Secretary expressed her satisfaction with the increased interest in the Regional Forum. She underscored that the topics of the round tables were core areas of expertise of UNECE. These areas were also insufficiently covered by the United Nations Development System. UNECE was ready to contribute its expertise and convening power to help fill these gaps. UNECE was very pleased with the cooperation with the other members of the United Nations family in the region. Working towards an even greater impact as the United Nations system and fully utilizing the potential for collaboration among member States, civil society, international organizations, the private sector and academia was essential for progress.

13. The Chair of the Regional UNDG Team for Europe and Central Asia pointed out that SDG progress in the region had been accelerated through participation, streamlined policy planning, innovation, alternative SDG financing and a more defined role for the private sector. Also much-needed reviews of statistical capacities and systems had taken place. Yet, many countries in the region were facing complex challenges. Joint work and coordination within the regional United Nations system in Europe and Central Asia was recognized as a model of cooperation. Inter-agency Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) missions were an example of partnership-based approaches, which directly addressed the needs of the host country.

III. High-level Policy Segment: Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies in the ECE region” (Agenda item 2)

14. The Chair of the Regional Forum moderated the High-level Policy Segment. The following high-level and other representatives intervened:

H.E. Mr. Gramoz RUÇI, Speaker of the Parliament, Albania

H.E. Mr. Tudor ULIANOVSKI, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Republic of Moldova

H.E. Ms. Marianna SHCHETKINA, Deputy Chair of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly, National Coordinator on Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, Belarus

H.E. Mr. Ashot HOVAKIMIAN, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Armenia

H.E. Mr. Aidin SHARSHEEV, Deputy Minister of Economy, Kyrgyzstan

H.E. Mr. Franc Matjaž ZUPANČIČ, State Secretary, Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, Slovenia

H.E. Mr. Andrius KRIVAS, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Lithuania

H.E. Mr. Zbigniew CZECH, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Poland

H.E. Mr. Didier CHAMBOVEY, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the World Trade Organization and the European Free Trade Association

Mr. Ivan IVANISEVIC, Director General for Multilateral Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Montenegro

Ms. Galit COHEN, Senior Deputy Director General, Planning and Sustainable Development, Ministry of Environmental Protection, Israel

Mr. Huseyn HUSEYNOV, Head of Department for Sustainable Development, Ministry of Economy, Secretary of National Coordination Council on Sustainable Development, Azerbaijan

Ms. Annika LINDBLOM, Counsellor, Ministry of the Environment, Secretary-General of the National Commission on Sustainable Development, Finland

Ms. Anne-Mareike VANSELOW, Desk Officer, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, Germany

15. The following high-level representative from an intergovernmental organization intervened:

H.E. Ms. Dragana FILIPOVIĆ, Ambassador, Permanent Observer of the Council of Europe to the United Nations Office at Geneva

16. Civil society organizations conveyed to the Regional Forum the outcome of a preparatory civil society consultation that took place on 28 February 2018. The civil society positions were presented by:

Ms. Anja Andrea FRYDENBERG PEDERSEN, YouAct – European Network on Sexual and Reproductive Rights

17. A keynote address on “Evidence-based policymaking for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda” was delivered by:

Mr. Peter MESSERLI, Professor of Sustainable Development, University of Bern, Co-Chair of the group of independent scientists drafting the UN Global Sustainable Development Report

18. The Chair’s summary, included in the annex, presents the main issues raised. Written statements are available on the website of the Regional Forum.<sup>1</sup>

#### IV. Introduction of the Peer Learning Segment (Agenda item 3)

19. The Secretary of the Regional Forum, Ms. Monika Linn, provided an overview of the round tables that constituted the Peer Learning Segment.

#### IV. Peer Learning Segment (Agenda item 4)

Documentation: Compilation of case studies (ECE/RFSD/2018/INF1)

20. To facilitate practical and targeted peer learning, the Peer Learning Segment was structured into two sets of five parallel round tables, covering the following SDGs under in-depth review at the HLPF in 2018: SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, and 15. Peer learning and interactive discussions were facilitated by presentations of case studies with practical solutions and specific approaches to achieve SDG progress in a certain area. Informal concept notes for all round tables and summaries of the case studies are available on the website of the Regional Forum.<sup>1</sup> The Chair's summary, included in the annex, contains a summary of the main challenges, policy responses and measures discussed at each round table.

(a) Round Tables – First Set:

(i) Sustainable Water-1: Making universal access to water and sanitation a reality in the UNECE region

Moderator: Mr. Oliver Schmall, Programme Manager, Water and Climate, European Centre for Environment and Health, WHO Regional Office for Europe

Rapporteur: Mr. Peter Kovacs, Head of River Basin Management and Water Protection Department, Ministry of Interior, Hungary and Chair of the UNECE Water Convention

Case studies presented or submitted by: France, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, European Environment and Health Youth Coalition

(ii) Sustainable Energy-1: Improving the efficiency of the energy system

Moderator: Mr. Scott Foster, Director, UNECE Sustainable Energy Division

Rapporteur: Ms. Antonela Solujic, Head of the Department for Energy Efficiency, Ministry of Mining and Energy, Serbia and Vice-Chair, UNECE Group of Experts on Energy Efficiency

Case studies presented or submitted by: Germany, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine

(iii) Sustainable Cities and Communities-1: Financing the transition to sustainable cities and communities: challenges and opportunities

Moderators: Mr. Marco Kamiya, Coordinator a.i., Urban Economy and Finance Branch, UN-Habitat and Ms. Krista Kampus, Senior Adviser and Head of the Sustainable Development Unit – Baltic 2030, Council of the Baltic Sea States

Rapporteur: Ms. Damegul Kabiyeva, Minister-Counselor, Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan

Case studies presented or submitted by: Council of Europe Development Bank, Belgium (region of Flanders), Czechia, Glasgow City Council, Italy

(iv) Sustainable Consumption and Production-1: Successful approaches to delivering on Sustainable Consumption and Production by 2030

Moderators: Mr. Marco Keiner, Director, UNECE Environment Division and Mr. Charles Arden-Clarke, Head, 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP) Secretariat, Economy Division, UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

Rapporteur: Mr. Andrea Innamorati, Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, Italy

Case studies presented or submitted by: Kazakhstan, Latvia, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland

(v) Sustainable Forests and Ecosystems-1: Sustainable Forest Management and the SDGs

Moderator: Mr. Thomas Haußmann, Senior Officer, Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Germany

Rapporteur: Mr. Christoph Dürr, International Forest Policy Adviser, Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), Switzerland

Case studies presented or submitted by: Austria, European Network Integrate, Finland, IKEA, Kazakhstan, Poland

(b) Round Tables – Second Set:

(i) Sustainable Water-2: Sharing water: balancing competing needs in a context of declining resources

Moderator: Mr. Stefan Uhlenbrook, Coordinator, World Water Assessment Programme

Rapporteur: Mr. Peter Kovacs, Head of River Basin Management and Water Protection Department, Ministry of Interior, Hungary and Chair of the UNECE Water Convention

Case studies presented or submitted by: Germany, Finland, Hungary, Serbia, Switzerland, World Business Council for Sustainable Development

(ii) Sustainable Energy-2: Transforming energy in support of the 2030 Agenda



Moderator: Mr. Ulrich Benterbusch, Deputy Director, Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy, Germany and Mr. Aleksandar Dukovski, Senior Energy Expert and Chair, UNECE Group of Experts on Energy Efficiency

Rapporteur: Ms. Iva Brkic, Energy Expert, Permanent Mission of Croatia

Case studies presented or submitted by: Centre for Promotion of Sustainable Development (Serbia), Czechia, Kazakhstan, Spain

(iii) Sustainable Cities and Communities-2: Promoting resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements

Moderator: Mr. Adam Banaszak, Committee of the Regions, European Union

Rapporteur: Mr. Franc Matjaž Zupančič, State Secretary, Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, Slovenia

Case studies presented or submitted by: Kyrgyzstan, Nordic Council of Ministers, Province of Potenza (Italy), REC Caucasus, Russian Federation, Serbia

(iv) Sustainable Consumption and Production-2: Towards a circular economy: innovation for sustainable value chains

Moderators: Mr. Charles Arden-Clarke, Head, 10YFP Secretariat, Economy Division, UNEP and Mr. Geoffrey Hamilton, Acting Director, UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Rapporteur: Mr. Andrea Innamorati, Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, Italy

Case studies presented or submitted by: Czech Republic, Italy, Montenegro, Netherlands, Nordic Council of Ministers, Republic of Moldova, Slovenia

(v) Sustainable Forests and Ecosystems-2: Biodiversity at the Heart of Sustainable Development – Toward Transformation and Resilience

Moderator: Ms. Cristiana Paşca Palmer, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Rapporteur: Mr. Christoph Dürr, International Forest Policy Adviser, Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), Switzerland

Case studies presented or submitted by: Georgia, Poland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

VI. Connecting the Dots: Sustainable Resource Management and Lifestyles in the Region (Agenda item 5)

21. The segment featured a reporting back from the round tables by the seven rapporteurs. The reporting back was followed by an interactive discussion on the linkages between the different SDGs and their operationalization for more integrated policy-making. The Chair's summary, included in the annex, contains a summary of the discussion and its main conclusions.

#### VII. Closing (Agenda item 6)

22. In her closing remarks, the UNECE Executive Secretary expressed her hope that the ideas and suggestions exchanged at the Regional Forum would spur action and accelerate the implementation of the SDGs in the countries and the region. She underscored the importance of different actors and partners engaging in meaningful discussions at the Regional Forum.

23. Taking stock of progress so far, the Director-General of UNOG saw a mixed picture of SDG implementation. The magnitude of challenges had yet to be met by the pace of actions. The Regional Forum demonstrated the vital role that regional actors played in the necessary transformation. It was also a laboratory of ideas, strategies and best practices with applicability for the region as much as for the world beyond. For the outcomes of the Regional Forum to take root, the Director-General invited participants to look at Geneva as the operational heart of the international system. A key convener to leverage and amplify Geneva's collective expertise was the UNOG SDG Lab.

24. Delivering closing remarks on behalf of civil society, the Vice-President of the European Disability Forum stressed a number of key messages referring to the topics of the peer learning round tables. He reaffirmed that civil society organizations stood ready to support member States and UNECE in building an inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous world, with the ultimate goal to end poverty, protect the planet, include persons with disabilities and leave no one behind.

25. Before closing the meeting, the Chair informed participants that the draft report of the Regional Forum, including the Chair's summary of discussions, would be circulated for comments by participants. The final version would constitute the official input from the UNECE region to the 2018 HLPF (New York, 9-18 July 2018).

#### Annex

##### Chair's summary of the discussions

##### High-level Policy Segment: Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies in the ECE region

1. The High-level Policy Segment provided an opportunity to take stock of progress and challenges and exchange views on major factors influencing SDG implementation in the region. In addition, participants considered the impact of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on SDG implementation.

The discussions also touched upon the role of science in advancing the 2030 Agenda.

**a) How to accelerate SDG implementation: coordination, coherence and partnerships**

2. Sustainable development requires addressing significant challenges by working out integrated solutions based on new models of production and consumption. There is no single recipe for this and different alternatives are possible. The interconnected character of the 2030 Agenda provides new policy spaces and potential pathways for implementation.
3. The universality of the SDGs means that they are relevant for all countries. Given the strong linkages between different challenges and the external spillovers of domestic actions, the initiatives of a few “sustainability champions” are not sufficient for success. In this context, where the domestic and foreign impacts of policies are difficult to separate, international cooperation acquires an increased importance.
4. Governments have the ultimate responsibility in leading the implementation of the 2030 Agenda but all stakeholders have to contribute to ensure rapid and effective progress. The important role of international organizations in providing different types of expertise was also acknowledged.
5. The involvement of civil society is essential to engage in partnerships, give visibility to issues that might receive insufficient attention and to explore a range of alternative policy options. Civil society organizations argued that a rights perspective is necessary in the implementation of SDGs, in order that all groups, including women, persons with disabilities, youth, older persons, migrants and others have their rights met.
6. The 2030 Agenda provides a global and universal roadmap, which serves not only as a signpost for changes at the national level but also as a vehicle for effective cooperation on sustainable development with other countries. Some countries, like Lithuania, have reformed their development cooperation policies to better support SDG implementation.
7. Building coherence between national and global policies and, more specifically, identifying the global impact of national actions are critical challenges for the UNECE region. Despite the progress observed so far, it was acknowledged that this is an ongoing process. The importance of regional cooperation for SDG implementation was stressed, in particular because many SDGs and targets have a transboundary dimension.

8. Implementation of SDGs has been linked to national development strategies and, in some countries, is closely related to the EU integration agenda, as in Montenegro. Middle-income countries share common problems and challenges, as reflected in the conclusions of the recent Regional SDG Coordination Leaders Forum (Minsk, 21–23 February 2018). This group of countries has particular needs, which should be acknowledged, and requires the support of United Nations organizations and international financial institutions. MAPS missions were mentioned as useful tools.
9. In many countries, high-level interministerial coordination mechanisms have proven to promote policy coherence, solve possible policy conflicts, increase awareness among ministries about the 2030 Agenda, ensure equal responsibility of all departments for its implementation and promote a long-term partnership with all stakeholders.
10. Some participants also stressed the need to involve different levels of government. In some countries, as in Belarus, subnational groups on SDGs have been created. Local authorities are key players in achieving many SDGs. However, they need to be empowered through decentralization policies and enabled through capacity-building tools. The diversity observed in cities' experiences is a source of comparative knowledge that can help shape policies at other levels of governance.
11. The role of parliaments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was highly emphasized. Parliaments approve new legislation and exert control over governments, including on budgetary matters. They can guide government's work on the basis of annual implementation reports. The involvement of parliaments has led in some countries, like Albania, to the creation of specific structures, such as the designation of SDG focal points in each parliamentary committee in order to provide an effective oversight of SDG related activities or the creation of subcommittees focussed on specific goals. Interparliamentary cooperation could contribute effectively to the exchange of experiences.
12. Achieving the SDGs will not be possible without strengthening the effectiveness of the state. Improving the quality of laws and their application and increasing the efficiency of public institutions, including by breaking down silos, would increase the ability of governments to ensure coherent and effective implementation. This would also have positive effects on social acceptance and trust by citizens.
13. Partnerships are critical for implementation. They imply moving away from an administration system towards a co-management system, involving all stakeholders, including civil society. The key is to build a social dialogue, broad social support and trust between public entities and their partners.

14. It should be acknowledged that the implementation of SDGs is a process that will take many years. This time dimension calls for strategic considerations, including the identification of priorities and the sequencing of actions. The urgency of the challenges ahead creates a limited window of opportunity to intervene, so action needs to start immediately. Current behaviour will have a strong impact on the welfare of future generations.
15. Interventions in some particular areas may accelerate SDG implementation. Advancing gender equality would have a broad and positive impact on the 2030 Agenda. Digitalization and innovation, including new institutional arrangements, can be important factors facilitating progress, as emphasized by Armenia, Israel and Kyrgyzstan.
16. In addition, trade, which has been identified as a means of implementation in the 2030 Agenda, has acquired an increased policy relevance. The challenge is how best to use trade to support economy-wide development and structural transformation towards products with high added value. To exploit the potential of trade for positive change, it is important to ensure coherence between trade and policies in other areas, so that they are mutually supportive. This whole-of-government approach should cut across policy domains and institutional divisions, as it is being done in the Republic of Moldova.
17. The importance of data for SDG implementation was stressed by many participants. Data should be disaggregated, including by gender, age and income levels, to track the situation of particular groups, including migrants, people with disabilities and others. Participants presented experiences on how on-line follow-up mechanisms can enable a multi-stakeholder discussion on the progress made, on gaps and on prospects for future development, as it is done for example in Finland.
18. Appropriate financing, which is embedded in budgetary processes and long-term financial planning, is necessary for SDG implementation. The inclusion of sustainable development considerations in the state budget is a key step in mainstreaming SDGs into all sectoral policies and the allocation of financial resources. In some countries, ministries have to consider their policies, initiatives and resource demands from an SDG perspective. Besides domestic public resources, other sources of financing need to be mobilized, including private sector and external financing.

#### **b) Contribution of VNRs to SDG implementation**

19. Robust and efficient monitoring and review mechanisms are key for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. There is a need to keep track of what has been achieved and identify areas where more and faster progress is

required. VNRs were assessed as effective instruments by countries that have already made presentations at the HLPF.

20. VNRs are useful in different ways, including raising awareness among stakeholders, promoting ownership among different ministries, understanding the universal nature of the 2030 Agenda and fostering coordination and cooperation to monitor progress.

21. In some cases, carrying out VNRs has been very tightly connected with the preparation and implementation of development strategies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as was the case in Slovenia. VNRs can function as a trigger for establishing the overall mechanisms and policies for implementation while keeping up the momentum for action. Moreover, VNRs serve to identify priorities and focus on the adaptation of SDGs to national contexts.

22. Given the integrated character of the 2030 Agenda, all SDGs should be covered in VNRs. Ensuring greater policy coherence for development requires better mechanisms of horizontal and multi-level cooperation. An improved understanding of cross-cutting themes and interlinking elements is also required. VNRs have served to develop and test governments' readiness in this regard.

23. One of the key lessons of VNRs shared by participants is the importance of process, i.e. the way in which VNRs are prepared. The preparation of VNRs has often triggered extensive consultations, as was the case in Switzerland, involving representatives of ministries and other state institutions, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations, local communities, the private sector, professional organizations, and academia. VNRs can also contribute to increasing awareness and ownership of SDGs, supported by communication campaigns and the organization of thematic events, as in France. This is critical, since SDGs, as the Paris Agreement, rely on the mobilization of all actors.

24. Participatory models in the preparation of the VNRs are sometimes supported by the creation of task forces and the appointment of thematic coordinators for each SDG, as in Poland. In some cases, a wide range of stakeholders has been included, together with the government, in advisory bodies. Some countries, like Germany, have offered part of the presentation slot for their VNR at the HLPF to non-state actors. A whole-of-government should be combined with a whole-of-society approach.

### **c) Importance of scientific evidence**

25. Reaching a broad consensus on what needs to be done is facilitated when proposed actions are backed up by scientific evidence. Science can provide a better understanding of the linkages, synergies and trade-offs between different goals and targets. It can offer solutions and innovations to global challenges. It also facilitates the identification of factors that are driving major trends and their impact.

26. The ability to advance in particular areas or launch specific initiatives depends on two factors. First, the existence of uncontested evidence supporting action. This factual certainty contributes to generating consensus but is not sufficient. Second, a high degree of societal agreement. Interventions are harder in areas where there is lack of both sufficient knowledge and social support. There is therefore a need to increase the knowledge base all over the world, including through the creation of experimental spaces for learning. Strong partnerships are critical to both develop these spaces and widen the social acceptance for implementation.

### Peer Learning Segment

#### **Round Table Sustainable Water- 1 (SDG 6): Making universal access to water and sanitation a reality in the UNECE region**

27. SDGs provide a comprehensive framework where universal access to water and sanitation is linked to other goals and targets **applying human rights based approaches to ensuring universal, safe and reliable access to drinking water and sanitation**. SDG 6 stipulates an integrated approach to water resources management and the provision of water and sanitation services. The UNECE region is still far from reaching universal and equitable access to safe water and sanitation for all. Despite progress made in the past decades, inequities in access persist. Aggregated data frequently masks inequalities. There remain large urban/rural disparities, unaddressed affordability issues and problems of access in specific settings such as schools, hospitals and prisons. Also, **vulnerable marginalised** population groups such as minorities, **rural women**, migrants and refugees require increased attention.

28. Problems are particularly acute in rural areas, where about three-quarters of people without basic access to water live. The situation for sanitation is even worse. In schools, toilets often do not meet **the** needs of pupils and in particular adolescent girls; **lack of menstrual hygiene facilities detected almost everywhere throughout our region** affect learning, dignity and well-being of children. Inadequate water and sanitation services or poor hygiene increase the risk of infections and negatively affect school

attendance. E.g. 90 percent of female students in rural area in macedonia do not attend school 4-5 days per month due to lack of proper menstrual hygiene management in schools. In addition to access, the quality and safety of water and sanitation services require serious policy attention. Challenges related to affordability of services are also of growing concern. In some countries of the UNECE region, poor households are likely to spend over 3 percent of total expenditures on water and sanitation.

29. Policy solutions to address affordability may include both tariff-related instruments, such as income-based block tariffs and non-tariff-related initiatives. Social tariffs can be a good instrument to overcome affordability issues for lower-income households. However, choosing the best method for funding social tariffs and identifying beneficiaries are challenging tasks. In most low-income households, the affordability issue is not limited to water and sanitation services and therefore mechanisms that tackle poverty in an integrated manner are necessary.

30. Water and sanitation infrastructures are lacking or deteriorating in parts of the region and are in need of repair and maintenance, and therefore capital investment needs are high. Water tariffs are often not adequate to cover maintenance costs. Poor services due to deteriorating infrastructures often have a negative impact on tariff collection rates and thus may cause financial problems. Overall, financing and investments remain largely below the needs to address water and sanitation challenges in the region.

31. Effective action requires bringing together different sectors and working across various policy areas (environment, health, education, and others). Improved access to safe and equitable services is the outcome of governance processes and the involvement of stakeholders at different levels.

32. Water and sanitation services are frequently provided at the local level and therefore local stakeholders, including civil society organizations, need to be fully involved. Local governments should be empowered to implement nationally defined policies on affordability. Civil society organizations drew attention to the limitations of privatization of water provision and called for the strengthening of public ownership and regulation.

33. Public participation and full implementation of Aarhus Convention is essential to ensure that the decisions adopted are accepted and sustainable over time and accessible to all. Children and adolescents are the primary users of water, sanitation and hygiene services at schools and need to be considered. Women and girls should be included when developing plans and policies for improving infrastructure and achieving universal and equitable access.

34. A unique feature of the pan-European region is the existence of legally binding instruments – the Water Convention and the Protocol on Water and



Health, to support the implementation of SDGs 6 and 3 and other water-related goals and targets. These regional instruments lead to the establishment of national targets and action plans and provide platforms for sharing experiences. The Protocol explicitly calls for ensuring equitable access, in accordance with the human rights to water and sanitation. It promotes self-assessment of the situation of access to water and sanitation through an equity lens. Outcomes of such assessments have proven to put the issue higher on the political agenda and foster policy development.

35. The European Union Water Initiative supports countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia in setting and implementing national targets and ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation. This support is coordinated through inter-sectoral and inter-agency platforms.

#### **Round Table Sustainable Water-2 (SDG-6): Sharing water: balancing competing needs in a context of declining resource**

36. Water scarcity is becoming more acute, even in previously water-rich countries, due to climate change and growing water use, including increasing water demand for irrigation in agriculture. This entails heavy economic impacts on all sectors, strong water competition and environmental challenges.

37. Reduced flows can also imply degrading water quality, notably through concentration of pollutants such as nutrients. Quality is also threatened by the complex chemical environment, including from modern lifestyles and use of cosmetics, drugs, and cleaning and plastic products. Countries are adjusting and updating the legal and regulatory requirements to address these emerging challenges and facilitate a more efficient use of water (e.g. regarding micropollutants or water-reuse).

38. The fact that most water resources in the UNECE region are shared across borders brings additional challenges in balancing water uses, allocating water and addressing water scarcity on a transboundary level. In this context, the lack of common **disaggregated** data for a shared understanding and of jointly agreed assessment methodologies to form the basis for water sharing as well as legal and information gaps create additional difficulties.

39. Water can ignite conflicts but also promote peace **and gender equality**. The UNECE Water Convention has supported for more than 20 years integrated water resources management and the peaceful and sustainable use of shared resources. Specific regulations in line with the Convention can be

adopted to address challenges such as water allocation and scarcity at the transboundary level.

40. Cost recovery and appropriate technologies for water saving are very important to reduce water use, especially in agriculture, in the most water-scarce parts of the region. Water recycling and reuse as well as nature-based solutions such as natural water retention, are also crucial to deal with scarcity. The repair and upgrading of ageing water infrastructure provide also an opportunity to introduce changes, such as multipurpose use of hydropower reservoirs or improving efficiency and safety of water distribution. New technological solutions are needed to increase water efficiency and improve water quality while available technologies should be employed more widely.

41. Solutions to water problems are often beyond the realm of the water sector. It is therefore key to find synergies with other sectors and to adopt an integrated / nexus perspective to evaluating actions by considering impacts of different sectoral measures and their interaction. **Synergies must address the structural barriers dominating who has access to water and who are disproportionately affected by water scarcity as well as forced migration. The distribution of water among local communities and among states and regions must be fair, with real measures against corruption.**

42. There are numerous co-benefits from such an integrated approach, for example increasing energy efficiency can also raise water use efficiency, and vice versa.

43. At the same time, when such interlinkages are not properly assessed, there are risks for sustainability as, for example, impacts on water use, water quality or hydromorphology if effects from energy production, including biofuels, are not taken into account. Including through international guidance and intersectoral dialogues, renewable energy development is becoming more sustainable. Regarding water quality, prevention of pollution - which requires cooperation with sectors such as agriculture or industry - is more effective than treatment. Wastewater from the point of view of a particular user can be a resource for another user, thus contributing to dealing with water scarcity.

44. The private sector is not only a partner in financing but can also play a key role in implementation. Companies are progressively adopting more sustainable approaches, as they are becoming increasingly aware of the business risks associated with water scarcity. However, the action of regulators continues to be necessary.

### Round Table Sustainable Energy-1 (SDG 7): Improving the efficiency of the energy system

45. Improvements in energy efficiency can play a role in meeting climate objectives, ensuring energy security, enhancing quality of life and improving economic performance. Although the benefits of energy efficiency initiatives are evident, there is low awareness of their positive impact across a range of indicators. This demands additional efforts by policymakers, businesses and other stakeholders to implement energy efficiency projects.

46. Provision of energy services in buildings must ensure the welfare of their occupants, including health and comfort aspects, while being attentive to energy poverty and gender dimensions. Improving energy efficiency can play an important role in addressing these concerns.

47. Participants proposed a number of options to raise energy efficiency. For large-scale energy efficiency projects, cooperation between authorities at the national and local levels, industry, and local communities is indispensable to make them economically viable. Multiple benefits need to be taken into account, for example, the positive impacts on pollution and health, so social returns of public interventions are properly assessed.

48. A well-developed programme of financial incentives for households could increase implementation of energy efficiency measures in the residential sector **and decrease women's burden of unpaid domestic work, whom work four times more unpaid hours than men in their households to ensure access to energy for cooking, heating and washing.** A public fund for energy efficiency can provide funding for pilot projects that have potential to be scaled up and can be used to leverage significant financial flows. Information and awareness campaigns for the general public may be one of the most cost-effective ways to improve energy efficiency in the residential sector. Education programmes would improve the understanding of energy efficiency benefits.

49. Significant improvements in industrial energy efficiency are possible with the introduction of sound business models. There is a need to develop proper instruments to incentivize retrofitting and renovation of outdated and inefficient infrastructure in accordance with modern standards. **[The energy sector is still highly male-dominated, which affects financial flows and the fight against climate change.] So there is an urgent need to set up programmes to ensure gender equality in the energy sector.**

50. Initiatives such as reducing market barriers to sustainable energy technology and deployment of standards such as Framework Guidelines on Energy Efficiency Standards in Buildings can bring real benefits. Normative instruments, as well as audits, energy management systems, proper measurement and verification, incentives, and, as needed, fines, are practical

**Comment [1]:** Source:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/feb/11/the-energy-industrys-power-problem-too-few-women>

measures to promote energy efficiency. **There is a need to decentralise and regionalise energy production and distribution; to empower the role of local communities especially in rural areas to reduce energy poverty.**

51. The energy system remains dominated by fossil fuels and stronger efforts are needed to decarbonize the economy **as well as phasing out nuclear energy completely**. Energy prices should reflect the full costs of energy production and use, including externalities such as greenhouse gases emissions. This could be done, for example, through carbon markets or carbon taxes. These prices would promote sustainable management of energy resources and accelerate the uptake of energy efficiency and clean energy technologies.

52. The use of energy subsidies should be rationalized while exploring alternative ways to protect **vulnerable marginalised** groups. Subsidies that stimulate energy production and consumption should be replaced by instruments that encourage investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy **that is not sourced from nuclear or coal**. Monitoring and reporting on progress in achieving the targets of SDG7 is critical for needed mid-course adjustments.

53. Information and communication technologies (ICT) open new perspectives for energy system integration and resilience (including notably the introduction of intermittent renewables), urban management, and empowerment of consumers, with positive implications for energy efficiency. However, cybersecurity issues also raise some concerns.

54. International cooperation and exchange of experiences among countries is crucial to accelerate improvements in energy efficiency. The Global Alliance for Building and Construction (Global ABC) is an example of such cooperation to improve building energy performance. Participants also emphasized the important role UNECE plays as a platform for identification and exchange of best practices.

#### **Round Table Sustainable Energy-2 (SDG 7): Transforming energy in support of the 2030 Agenda**

55. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda poses a number of transformational challenges for the energy sector. Reducing carbon-dioxide emissions is required also to honour the commitments under the Paris Agreement. Currently, the energy sector is **one of the biggest polluters, a major polluter**. However, in the short-term, the continued reliance on fossil fuels in the total primary energy supply of all UNECE member States is a reality. Policymakers and the industry are therefore confronted with the need to take immediate steps to deploy transformative technologies that will

reduce the carbon footprint of the energy sector and increase systemic and resource efficiencies.

56. Changing the energy mix towards cleaner sources of energy can play a role in the decarbonization of the energy system. Participants discussed how trucks could be used to ship liquefied natural gas (LNG) to remote or isolated communities, thus improving access to affordable and modern energy services. LNG trucking could set the stage for the development of a future zero-carbon hydrogen infrastructure. In the Eurasian Economic Union, there are plans to create a common gas market by 2025, which would greatly facilitate exchanges.

57. The change in the energy mix to reduce carbon emissions may take other forms. A case study was presented where the decline of coal-fired power generation may be accompanied by the construction of new nuclear units with zero carbon dioxide emissions. In addition, high-efficiency, low emissions (HELE) technologies would be introduced to improve the stability and reliability of the electricity system and facilitate deployment of renewable energy technologies. However, a shift towards increased reliance on nuclear energy remains highly controversial. Civil society organizations drew attention to the associated risks, including those from nuclear waste. **They emphasised that nuclear is not a clean source of energy, and its health effects are transboundary, and should be completely phased out.**

58. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas and therefore reducing methane leakage would contribute to climate mitigation efforts. Appropriately managed coal mine methane (CMM) can enhance mine safety and reduce the carbon footprint of primary energy production. CMM that would otherwise be vented into the atmosphere and contribute to global warming can be used as a clean fuel for power, heating or domestic uses. The problem of methane leakage can also be present in abandoned coal mines and non-producing coal fields. This infrastructure could be therefore used as well in countries moving away from the use of coal and could be combined with advanced coal gasification technologies.

59. Decarbonization can be supported by an enabling policy and regulatory environment fostering the emergence of innovative business models and technological solutions **and must ensure a just transition with social protection schemes**. Policies can provide financial incentives and promote technology transfer in support of a more rapid shift towards a low carbon energy system, including by contributing to scaling up cleaner low carbon technologies and, in particular, renewables.

60. Productive, equitable and meaningful participation of women **at all levels of** ~~in~~ the development of the future sustainable energy system is necessary. Professional women need networks that facilitate their

engagement in energy policy decision-making, so that women can contribute more actively to the structural transformation of the energy industry.

61. Effective communication with all stakeholders is important to manage this transition and facilitate the emergence of cleaner technologies. There is a strong need to base policy decisions on available scientific evidence, which should provide a critical input when assessing different options.

**Round Table Sustainable Cities and Communities-1 (SDG 11):  
Financing the transition to sustainable cities and communities:  
challenges and opportunities**

62. Governments design and implement a variety of programmes to support vulnerable population groups who cannot compete on housing markets with more well-off groups. International financial institutions provide resources to the governments of countries with economies in transition to complement their efforts in the provision of affordable housing. These resources can be used to subsidise mortgages, provide grants or finance large-scale investment projects for urban renewal.

63. Regional and local authorities play an important role in financing urban renewals and affordable housing. In particular, they provide the necessary strategic visions, promote intersectoral cooperation and establish multi-stakeholder platforms. The promotion of smart and sustainable cities would benefit from stronger municipal budgets and an expansion of local revenues. **All countries must recognize and challenge the existing multiple forms of discrimination such as based on age, gender, disability, LGBTI, ethnic groups, migrants, etc. A gender lens with the intersections is needed, including in financial mechanisms and gender budgeting.**

64. Public funding is very limited and therefore should be used for programmes reflecting the needs of the population, including different groups (youth, older people, families, persons with disabilities). The active involvement of urban residents from **all stakeholder groups** is necessary, so public authorities and developers receive appropriate feedback.

65. The private sector is a major source of housing and urban development financing. Competition between private sector organizations would lower housing and infrastructure costs, thus increasing affordability. Public policies should therefore ensure a competitive environment. Effective public-private partnerships means reconciling the need to attract private financing with a continued focus on peoples' needs.

66. Bridging the financial gap between insufficient public funds and large-scale needs in building and renewing urban infrastructure requires innovative

solutions developed with the involvement of all key stakeholders. Some of the initiatives discussed included: a grant competition for cities to develop sustainable urban renewal projects; affordable housing programmes using subsidies and mortgage programmes with subsidised rates; strategic plans for urban renewal and development; and the establishment of a government-funded investment fund to support renovation of social infrastructure. **It also would require disaggregated data, to better understand the needs of marginalised inhabitants.**

67. Strategic planning frameworks (long-term national, regional and city action plans) are critical for the successful implementation of urban projects, since they ensure the required long-term financial and institutional resources. An important factor contributing to this success is the institutional design of financing programmes. Strong vertical and horizontal coordination and stakeholders' involvement promotes greater efficiency.

68. Managing expectations and planning realistically is a common challenge faced by public authorities. Appropriate governance arrangements are essential, as the lack of capacity of implementing agencies and insufficient coordination between authorities may lead to delays in the implementation of projects. Coordination should therefore be strengthened. Plans should have an appropriate long-term horizon and should be formulated taking into account expert knowledge in both the planning and implementation stages.

#### **Round Table Sustainable Cities and Communities-2 (SDG 11): Promoting resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements**

69. There are different approaches to promoting sustainable urban development and resilience at national, regional and local levels. However, overcoming the gaps in the availability of reliable **disaggregated** data for urban planning and disaster risk management/reduction is a common challenge for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

70. Application of standards for data collection and the use of comprehensive indexes capturing vulnerabilities to natural and man-made disasters can be effective tools to gather this critical information. There is a need to build capacities for **disaggregated** data collection and analysis in local and national planning documents. The collaboration with academic institutions can support these efforts.

71. There are multiple challenges in developing inter-sectoral cooperation between different authorities while involving all stakeholders. It is therefore crucial to synchronise the planning and implementation of activities at the national and local levels as well as assuring the necessary political will.

72. Critical tasks include mapping potential urban development and resilience challenges; developing strategic urban plans; implementing sustainable urban development measures; and elaborating scenarios for long-term resilient and sustainable urban development. Progress in all these areas demands strong cooperation and broad partnerships.

73. Inclusiveness and access for all should be important concerns when developing relevant initiatives. Bottom-up participation, transparency and accountability should be guiding principles in urban planning. The needs of vulnerable people should be taken into account and supported by disaggregated data collection. Gender inclusive planning and budgeting are key to ensure cities provide safe public spaces free of gender-based violence, as stressed by civil society organizations.

74. The adoption of comprehensive legal frameworks supporting reconstruction of buildings can be effective measures to address hazard-risk vulnerabilities. However, lack of coordination between different authorities and legal inconsistencies create difficulties for implementation and weakens the role of the responsible authorities.

75. Appropriate financing for urban development and resilience, including for natural and man-made disaster management is essential. Promoting cost-sharing between different authorities and stakeholders and the active involvement of private sector actors, such as insurance companies, are important. This can reduce the financial burden of initiatives to alleviate the consequences of natural disasters and disaster prevention measures.

76. Private public partnerships (PPPs) can play a role in creating smart, sustainable and resilient cities and addressing financing constraints. However, it is important that PPPs are designed in way that they are not a source of risk to public finances and that affordability and inclusiveness considerations are duly taken into account.

**Round Table Sustainable Consumption and Production-1 (SDG 12):  
Successful approaches to delivering on Sustainable Consumption and  
Production by 2030**

77. Sustainable consumption and production (SCP) is an objective with links to most SDGs, although these relations are yet not fully understood. Policies and actions to integrate SDG 12 across sectors and at all levels remain a challenge in many countries. There is also a need to ensure that large initiatives with potential for significant investment and with possible impact on the environment integrate requirements for SCP and be green from the early stages of their development and in implementation.



78. SDG 12 cannot be achieved without consumers changing behaviour and making more educated choices, seeking sustainable products and choosing to repair rather than replace. Information on products and their environmental and social impacts is often lacking or even misleading. **Producers should guarantee that they abide the fundamental chemical safety principles of public's right to know and the precautionary principle.**
79. Poor information also prevents a better understanding by the private sector of the longer-term benefits of SCP for business. Government can give investment signals through incentives and regulations, while society can direct producers through its consumer choices.
80. There are technologies that can contribute to SCP but gaps remain between research and development, on the one hand, and commercialization and implementation, on the other hand. However, civil society organizations stressed that there is a need to go beyond innovation and increased consumer awareness: a systemic change is required to a new growth paradigm that reduces the use of resources in absolute levels.
81. There are multiple initiatives by governments and other stakeholders to tackle these challenges. Policy frameworks and action plans that enable the transition to more sustainable consumption and production patterns are being put in place. Regulation on issues such as planned obsolescence or the recovery and reuse of limited natural resources have been adopted in some countries. **There should be a mandatory phase out of all highly hazardous pesticides and toxins from electronic waste and other waste (including plastic waste), and measures taken to ensure that hazardous chemicals (according to BRS Conventions and SAICM) are phased out of products targeted specifically towards women and girls.** Innovation is being encouraged through financial assistance for start-ups and supportive regulatory frameworks. Companies are also given support to introduce technological solutions and best practices.
82. Sustainable public procurement is a particularly powerful instrument because of its weight in national economies and its effect on markets but it is often misunderstood as expensive, complicated and time-consuming. Countries have established helpdesks, platforms and training centres, but regulations also have a key role to play. Other tools include eco-labelling and life-cycle cost calculators, which provide a basis for more informed decisions.
83. International cooperation can support technology transfer, help to attract investment and promote sharing of good practices. Several international organizations work on sustainable procurement in the health sector while others have launched a global dialogue on healthier environments through trade. 10YFP includes a sustainable public procurement programme.

84. Starting small and upscaling initial efforts facilitate policy experimentation and successful outcomes. This strategy can also be followed when replicating or adapting existing initiatives to other national contexts, including by drawing on experiences presented in the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E) and shared on the Green Growth Knowledge Platform.

85. The development of SCP initiatives faces several obstacles. Cooperation across sectors is prevented by the persistence of an institutional culture that favours working within silos. As benefits are seen fully only in the long-term, there is a reluctance to engage into actions that may have immediate costs. In this context, budgetary provisions are often insufficient. A poor understanding by consumers of the advantages leads to insufficient pressure for change and a lack of engagement by the private sector. Overall, available information is inadequate and the measurement of impacts is imperfect. Inappropriate regulation results in unfair competition, while limiting private sector development in related activities.

86. In the presence of these obstacles, there is a need to ensure strong political leadership for transformation, which is accompanied by horizontal and vertical coordination and supported by appropriate governance and institutional structures. SCP-friendly legislation should be introduced but change will not come without the provision of appropriate public resources. There is a need to increase awareness and improve education on SCP, including by demonstrating the cost of inaction. Knowledge gaps should be addressed by developing indicators and monitoring frameworks that can capture both the environmental and the socio-economic impacts of consumption and production patterns. Digitalization presents opportunities that should be exploited

**Round Table Sustainable Consumption and Production -2 (SDG 12):  
Towards a circular economy: innovation for sustainable value chains**

87. A circular economy is an economy that designs pollution and waste out of the system, maintains products and materials in use, and regenerates natural capital. It promotes resource and energy efficiency, reduces food waste along the whole supply chain, builds sustainable infrastructure, and provides access to basic services, green and decent jobs, for a better quality of life for all. It represents a horizontal approach offering an opportunity to achieve targets under many SDGs, including not only SDG 12 on responsible production and consumption, but also those related to water, energy, sustainable cities, climate change and sustainable use of natural resources, among others.

88. The transition from a linear to a circular model is still at a very early stage. Today, it is estimated that less than 10 per cent of the global economy is circular. This raises the question of how fast the transition can be achieved and how to deal with those economic sectors and activities that cannot make it fast enough. A systemic transition requires cooperation across all ministries and levels of government as well as a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach. An effective measurement and monitoring system needs to be in place to get the policy mix right **as well as to ensure that no hazardous chemicals are “recycled”**.

89. Voluntary and bottom-up approaches can yield success, but enabling regulation is also important as a catalyst for change. Tackling regulatory barriers within and across countries appears as efficient and cost-effective. At the same time, integrated packages of policy measures, such as fiscal incentives, investments in R&D and innovation along the whole product life-cycle and sustainable public procurement are also seen as instrumental in driving the necessary changes. Spurred by these measures, new business models are emerging. Social enterprises are playing an important role in this transformation, in particular in the sharing economy.

90. The necessary cultural shift can be facilitated through policies, regulations and approaches for strengthening consumers’ awareness, such as traceability systems of value chains, eco-labelling schemes, and sustainability standards. Market surveillance systems are essential to ensure compliance and enhance consumers’ trust. While changes influencing consumer behaviour are important, extended producers responsibility, **such as ensuring the precautionary principle**, and accountability are also considered important factors for change. Technological developments, such as blockchain, the internet of things and artificial intelligence may be enablers for a systemic change, if properly harnessed.

91. At the same time, compliance with ecological and other sustainability standards developed in advanced economies may create market access barriers, particularly for small producers from transition and developing economies. The international community has a key role to play to create policy frameworks and platforms for knowledge and technology transfer and capacity building. The transition to a circular economy presents a great opportunity to create a positive narrative on economic integration and globalization.

#### **Round Table Sustainable Forests and Ecosystems-1 (SDG 15): Sustainable Forest Management and the SDGs**

92. Forests are critical ecosystems, central to all the three dimensions of sustainable development. Sustainable forest management (SFM) also

involves multiple dimensions, bringing together a range of stakeholders (forest owners, businesses, local and state authorities, NGOs and others), who must work together to maintain ecosystem functions and ensure the provision of forest-related services and goods. **Many low-income rural communities in EECCA countries still rely on expensive and often illegally logged firewood to survive in winter as there are no natural gas connections working.**

93. SFM allows the economic use of forests without having a damaging environmental impact. However, the perception of an irreconcilable conflict persists. There is therefore a need to better understand the potential of forest products for sustainable production and consumption and dispel misunderstandings that limit policy options. **The primacy of human rights and environmental protection must be reaffirmed over finance, trade, monetary rules.**

94. Governance systems are often ill-suited to meet the needs of sustainable forest management. Political support remains insufficient as there is limited understanding among policymakers of the multiple contributions forests can make. Businesses can play a critical role in driving change, including by demanding an appropriate framework in support of sustainable forest management. The sector suffers also from severe financial constraints, as sustainable forest management financing is still dominated by revenues from wood since other forest services do not generate sufficient returns.

95. Overall, there is a need to broaden and strengthen the basis of support for sustainable forest management. Improved communication and awareness-raising initiatives would spread knowledge on the potential of forests and forest products to make a significant contribution to the green/bio/circular economy as well as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the Paris Agreement.

96. The creation of platforms facilitating dialogue between authorities, local communities, businesses, owners and consumers on choices to be taken around the management and use of forests can serve to reinforce mutual trust and provide the basis for strong partnerships. **We need a continued focus on disaggregated data, with a concerted effort to ensure that the needs and situation of all groups can be reflected.** Widely accepted verification mechanisms, including transparent reporting, certification, traceability and consumer information, can contribute to enhance confidence. Such mechanisms would facilitate the emergence of transformative business initiatives, changing the way of doing business in support of a circular economy through “circular companies” and “the circular design of products” (renewable and recyclable).

97. Sustainable forest management has strong linkages with other SDGs and successful initiatives in this area can meet multiple simultaneous objectives, including, for example, afforestation to prevent erosion and sequester carbon or the integration of biodiversity conservation into SFM. Individual initiatives work better when part of larger strategies, for instance being included in national strategies and actions or large-scale business plans. Sustainable forest management should pay attention to cross-sectoral issues, addressing linkages with tourism, agriculture and water, for example. Initiatives that generate income, including through the assistance to forest owners and business commercializing forest products, strengthen social support by creating jobs for local communities. Public interventions should also enhance the environmental capacities of forests, including by promoting peatland restoration, resilience to climate change, biodiversity and carbon sequestration. **In rural areas, CSOs have created renewable energy cooperatives and SMEs and are creating local jobs for women and men in building, installing and servicing solar water heaters.**

98. Ultimately, success will depend on the development and adoption of a common understanding of sustainable forest management. For this to emerge, there is a need to open initiatives to all stakeholders and better involve consumers in choosing sustainable patterns of consumption on the basis of forest products. The discussions on wood and forests should involve audiences outside the forest sector, so messages are widely shared and provide a strong basis for concerted action. This will support the recognition of the multiple roles that forests can make to the green economy and SDGs.

**Round Table Sustainable Forests and Ecosystems -2 (SDG 15):  
Biodiversity at the heart of sustainable development – Toward  
Transformation and Resilience**

99. The continued loss of global biodiversity and the relentless pressure on ecosystems are well-established facts. The 2030 Agenda opens new possibilities to engage with broader policy audiences and other stakeholders in addressing biodiversity problems. Biodiversity should be mainstreamed, for example, in land use planning, agriculture or sustainable forest management. These interconnections open new pathways for policy interventions. Appropriate and accessible data, including through the use of ICT, is required for monitoring purposes, to better understand the consequences of different actions and to facilitate the integration of different sectors in policy initiatives.

100. Coordination and integration of biodiversity concerns at national level is often not done in a systematic manner. There is a need to raise ambition on biodiversity protection and drive transformational change through the integration of biodiversity into social, economic and climate

policies, among others. However, efforts in this direction are undermined by imperfect governance systems and insufficient political support, which partly reflects a limited understanding among policymakers of the crucial role biodiversity plays. In some countries, these problems are compounded by institutional and financial instability. Enforcement of existing regulations is sometimes lacking.

101. The linkages between enhancing resilient ecosystems and SDG implementation are not fully appreciated. Initiatives to communicate the potential of biodiversity and build bridges between the different actors, including land users, are critical. This would widen the space for policy action and partnerships.

102. Biodiversity has a cross-sectoral dimension and therefore appropriate platforms for engaging all stakeholders around management of ecosystems and conservation of nature reserves should be promoted. Particularly close links exist with sustainable forest management. Consumers have an important role to play, so labelling and certification schemes are also helpful.

103. Natural protection can also contribute to economic development strategies. Close relations exist between economic and income-generating activities and biodiversity, for example tourism or agriculture. While potential conflicts exist, building trust among different stakeholders should facilitate that these conflicts are appropriately managed.

104. Resilient ecosystems have a positive influence on human health. They are also critical for the living conditions of indigenous people. Various approaches exist for the valorization of ecosystem services, which should be further explored in order to expand financing flows. Given all these benefits, continued attention should be given to enhance environmental capacities of different ecosystems and promote biodiversity.

105. Transboundary initiatives can address the cross-border dimension of some biodiversity issues and reap the varied synergies that can be derived from international collaboration, which is supported by a number of normative frameworks, including the Convention on Biological Diversity. Local issues have significance at a wider scale – national, regional or global. Coordination across borders requires also resources and continued efforts. Some countries are also including biodiversity as part of development assistance financing to support SDG implementation.

106. Further progress is required in developing a common understanding of biodiversity and, in particular, of the indicators that would make effective monitoring possible, thus providing the foundation for an effective cross-sectoral dialogue. The importance of biodiversity for SDG

implementation is not sufficiently understood, and therefore, more data and analysis are required.

### **Connecting the Dots: Sustainable Resource Management and Lifestyles in the Region**

107. The integrated 2030 Agenda requires initiatives that fully reflect the linkages between different goals, regarding both their design and implementation. Intersectoral coordination is key for effective implementation. Policy lessons drawn from actions targeting particular goals may have a more general relevance and therefore should be disseminated beyond sectoral audiences. Sharing information and knowledge across sectoral boundaries is the basis to identify initiatives that have a positive impact across different goals.

108. All the SDGs considered in-depth at the Regional Forum – water, energy, cities, SCP and the circular economy, sustainable forest management and biodiversity – have an impact on the achievement of other SDGs. There are multiple and strong interlinkages. Sometimes, these have been reflected in specific normative instruments, such as the Protocol on Water and Health to the Water Convention. However, identifying them is not sufficient as a basis for informed policy actions. More progress is required on measuring and assessing these interrelations.

109. A cross-sectoral approach is essential but this should be complemented by the consideration of transboundary dimensions. Regional initiatives should serve as platforms to advance SDGs. Subregional integration associations in the region, including the Eurasian Economic Union, have an important role to play in the implementation of SDGs, in particular by providing impulse to trade through the adoption of common standards.

110. There is a need to reconcile different goals and targets and ensure that no one is left behind. For example, while addressing competing needs on water, equitable access should be guaranteed. Initiatives to improve energy efficiency can significantly contribute to achieving other SDGs, and they should take into account issues of affordability for the poor and vulnerable. Integrated urban planning should address the needs of citizens of all ages. Local labour policies can make an important contribution to tackle the challenges faced by women, elderly persons, migrants and other groups. A participatory approach with the involvement of civil society organizations will contribute to these goals.

111. The SDGs define a transformative agenda. But this transformation, including for example the shift towards the use of cleaner

energy forms, require that the interest of all groups affected by the transition are taken into account. The introduction of more sustainable patterns of consumption and production will improve resource efficiency and can have beneficial effects in other areas, like health. However, moving away from a linear to a circular economy carries also risks. While some economic activities will expand, others will contract. There is therefore a need to address job losses and skills gaps and introduce other forms of public intervention to smooth these changes.

112. The significance of appropriate information was remarked by many participants. Policymaking should make a more intensive use of scientific knowledge. Evidence provides the foundation for a well-informed dialogue across different policy areas that effectively breaks down silos. It contributes to the effectiveness of communication initiatives and increased awareness of the implications of actions, including at the individual level. For example, certification facilitates the emergence of new business models supporting sustainable development, while also allowing governments to promote sustainability beyond their own jurisdictions and exploit the linkages between trade and environment.

113. Some policy instruments can also have a cross-sectoral dimension, if appropriately designed. Participants mentioned the use of sustainable public sector procurement as a useful tool having an impact across many areas. The potential of digitalization and ICTs should also be harnessed, as they are cross-cutting enablers for all SDGs.

114. Financing is a common constraint faced when trying to advance different SDGs. Overcoming this constraint requires imaginative responses that should take advantage of the possibilities offered by cross-sectoral cooperation. The involvement of the private sector, which is essential for rapid progress, would contribute to mobilizing the necessary financing.

115. A common challenge faced in all areas is the need to raise awareness through improved communication. An integrated response is also a better way to address this challenge, jointly developing a positive narrative on how to overcome obstacles to transformation that cuts across sectoral boundaries.

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[1] Available at: [www.unece.org/rfsd2018.html](http://www.unece.org/rfsd2018.html).



