



CHAPTER NINE

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

MEMBERS OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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CAMBODIA
CHINA
DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA
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KAZAKHSTAN
KIRIBATI
KYRGYZSTAN
LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
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MALDIVES
MARSHALL ISLANDS
MICRONESIA
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PAKISTAN
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AMERICAN SAMOA (UNITED STATES)
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PURVIEW OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is responsible for supporting the economic and social development of Member States in the Asia-Pacific region. ESCAP focuses on poverty reduction, managing globalization and tracking emerging social issues within the region. This includes issues facing the entire region or several States within it, cross-border issues, and other emerging economic and social issues. ESCAP also provides technical assistance to its members and monitors progress of, and provides advice to, countries pursuing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The Commission is composed of 53 Member States and nine associate members. The associate members are not members of the United Nations and have no voting rights.

In 2017, AMUN will simulate the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific as a report-writing body, rather than a resolution-writing body. For more information about report-writing bodies, please see 20-21 in AMUN's *Rules and Procedures* handbook.

Website: www.unescap.org

ENHANCING REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

The Asia-Pacific region is incredibly diverse in culture, politics, economies and natural resources. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) members include Member States from North and South America, Asia and Oceania. To function well, the region, which represents over one trillion dollars in global trade, must

overcome very different beliefs in trade practices, asymmetrical infrastructure development, and an extremely varied set of cultural practices around development and trade. Despite the last few decades of progress in the region's economic development overall, poor infrastructure and inadequate practices in trade and transportation facilities have led to portions of the region lacking equal access to the world's largest and most dynamic markets. For example, South Asia has the largest concentration of the world's poor—309 million people living on less than \$1.90 a day—and only composes six percent of the region's trade. As a result, a large portion of the Asia-Pacific region's 4.5 billion people lack access to the region's markets—markets that represent almost half of global trade. Increasing access to markets could pull people out of poverty and create a more long-lasting regional development. As the region increasingly develops, ESCAP must create policies of sustainable growth that benefit all countries and people.

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific was formed in 1947 and has worked consistently to bridge the differences in the region. Regional initiatives throughout the United Nations were largely focused on promoting Member States' nationalistic goals prior to the 1990s. They provided a platform for States to assert their needs, but often did not lead to more than political posturing. The 1990s saw a boost in actionable economic cooperation following the creation of the Single European Market in 1992 and the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994. When the Asian economy collapsed in 1997, following a period of very quick growth, the need for regional cooperation became undeniable. The Asia-Pacific region was able to bounce back, with massive increases in membership in regional organizations, including major expansion of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other organizations, until the 2008 global economic collapse. Unfortunately, studies throughout the next five years showed that



infrastructural issues like sinkholes and unmaintained roads, trade barriers like tariffs and import export requirements, and economic disparities were getting little political traction, leaving the region vulnerable to food scarcity issues and potential economic collapse.

Many of the transportation issues in the region, including poor road conditions, reliance on maritime trade and import regulations, continued into the next decade. In addition, increased production of imports and larger export markets led to disjointed manufacturing regulations and standards that prevent some countries from importing or exporting products from or to other countries in the region. In 2014, the Commission also adopted a resolution, entitled “Implementation of the Bangkok Declaration on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific,” which created four target area expert working groups. These groups included: moving toward the formation of an integrated market; the development of seamless connectivity in the region; financial cooperation enhancements, especially to fund the region’s large infrastructure deficit; and increasing economic cooperation to address shared vulnerabilities of trade lines and economic systems, particularly to infrastructure collapse and natural disaster. ESCAP has pushed a variety of regional initiatives as part of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, such as One Belt, One Road. That initiative has created a network of trade deals meant to bridge differences between States, streamline maritime trade and increase infrastructure development. In 2014 and 2015, the sub-regional working groups created reports on their findings of regional economic cooperation. Currently, ESCAP has pushed for infrastructure development more seriously, including projects like the Asian Highway Network and the Trans-Asian Railway.

While the number of trade agreements have gone up, barriers to regional economic cooperation and integration still exist. The desire for more open trade still exists, but Member States still have prohibitive tariffs and regulations, massive infrastructure problems, and transportation issues. Even promising programs like One Belt, One Road come under fire for potentially wasting resources, increasing corruption, and potential manipulation of other Member States’ governmental systems. Trade agreements may solve some of these problems, but domestic reform is also necessary; additionally, Member States rich in natural resources and with very large low-income populations are, in practice, still left out of many development projects. The creation of trade associations has not universally created common markets or fully resolved many or even most of the regulatory and policy barriers to cooperation. As a result, ESCAP must still address issues of low trade cooperation leading to impoverishment regionwide.

Questions to consider from your government’s perspective on this issue include the following:

- How can ESCAP address the infrastructural issues, like worn roads and inadequate shipping routes, across the region?
- How can ESCAP aid in areas where infrastructure is lacking almost entirely?
- What types of regulations can be standardized or brought into alignment, what regulations must remain different and why? Can these regulations include tariffs?
- What can be done to better include Member States with large populations living on less than \$1.90 a day? Do infrastructure, tariffs or market coordination best address their needs?

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TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE, INCLUSIVE AND RESILIENT URBAN FUTURE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

The Asia-Pacific region has experienced unmatched growth in the past 50 years, with many States rapidly transitioning from small, agriculturally-based economies to financial and industrial centers. It now boasts three of the world’s 10 largest gross domestic products and two of the five fastest-growing economies. The United Nations estimates that urban residents will represent 66 percent of the world’s population by the year 2050. Urbanization, particularly at the scale happening in the Asia-Pacific region, can have serious environmental and other long-term consequences. Consumption of goods and services tends to be higher in urban centers. Close proximity of populations allows for disease to spread more rapidly and the effects of natural disasters are greater in urban areas. According a recent ESCAP report, half of the region’s urban



population lives in low-lying coastal areas, leaving many people and the environment at risk to the consequences of climate-related disasters due to poor infrastructure and lack of urban planning. These trends demonstrate the need to focus on sustainable growth and economic resilience.

The United Nations' focus on urbanization began in earnest in the mid-1970s with the first United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) Conference in Vancouver, Canada. The Conference established goals regarding human settlement policies, infrastructure and land usage. The second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in 1996 produced the Habitat Agenda Goals and Principles, Commitments and the Global Plan of Action, and the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements. These documents focused on improving the quality of life in human settlements by controlling population density, reducing homelessness and addressing poverty. Habitat II also acknowledged the interdependence of urban and rural areas. In 2016, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) yielded the New Urban Agenda initiative, which called for governments to provide basic services to all of their citizens, to root out discriminatory practices, to support clean city initiatives, to address climate change and to respect the rights of refugees. While the world has made great strides in the realm of sustainable development, Habitat III highlighted some of the substantial challenges that remain.

The Asia-Pacific region suffers from high rates of urban sprawl, which will likely increase in the coming years. With the passage of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 there has been increased attention put on sustainable, inclusive urban development. Goal Eleven aims to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.” The Commission identified multiple factors to meet this Goal's objectives. They include decreasing the percentage of the global population living in slums, decreasing urban sprawl, more efficiently managing solid waste and the improvement of the air conditions in urban areas.

In May 2015, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific convened the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. The participants agreed they would aim to better implement the three dimensions to sustainable urban development—economic, social and environmental—in the Asia-Pacific region as outlined in the 2030 Agenda. Member States agreed that there needs to be a better balance between these three factors in national policymaking, emphasized a renewed focus on education, gender equality and human rights, and highlighted the adverse effects natural disasters can have on sustainable development gains. The Forum also discussed the overall implementation of the SDGs as well as ways to monitor the progress in the region. The Commission outlined the need to close the equity gap in urban areas to reduce poverty levels and help create cities of opportunity. It also looks to enhance urban environmental quality by managing resource gaps, implementing integrated solutions and embracing green urbanism initiatives.

Moving forward, ESCAP must address numerous issues. The most significant issue in the Asia-Pacific region is how to balance the needs of megacities against the growth needs of secondary, mid-sized cities. The Commission recognizes that sustainable economic development should be spread throughout growing urban centers noting the role transport and trade play in their development. Other areas of consideration

include urban environmental quality and the management and use of key resources like food and water, improving urban areas' resistance to disasters, and focusing on the status of the poor in urban areas.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:

- What assistance do Member States need to implement the economic, social and environmental priorities identified at the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development?
- How should the Commission best balance the needs of growing mid-sized cities versus those of larger megacities?
- What best practices can Member States implement when addressing the question of sustainable urban development?
- Through what means can Member States better allocate resources to promote sustainable urban development across all aspects?

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