

**Economic and Social Council**Distr.: General
5 April 2013

Original: English

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**Sixty-ninth session**

Bangkok, 25 April-1 May 2013

Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

Dates, venue and theme topic for the seventieth session of the Commission (2014)**Dates, venue and theme topic for the seventieth session of the Commission (2014)****Note by the secretariat*****Summary*

The present document contains information on the possible dates and venue of the seventieth session of the Commission, which is to be held in 2014, and a proposal for a theme topic for that session.

The Commission may wish to make a decision on these matters.

I. Introduction

1. The present document contains suggestions made by the secretariat for the consideration of the Commission at its sixty-ninth session. The Commission may wish to consider the dates, venue and theme topic for its seventieth session, to be held in 2014, and to provide the secretariat with guidance in this regard.

II. Dates and venue

2. Rule 1 of the rules of procedure of the Commission requires it to recommend the dates and venue for its next session, subject to the approval of the Economic and Social Council and in consultation with the Secretary-General. In accordance with established practice, at each session, the Commission recommends the convening of the next session. The actual dates and venue are then determined by the Executive Secretary in consultation with the members and the Chair of the Commission.

* E/ESCAP/69/L.1.

** The late submission of the present document is due to the need to take into account the outcome of discussions of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR) at its 346th and 347th sessions, held on 19 February 2013 and 20 March 2013, respectively, and at two informal sessions held on 2 and 4 April 2013.

3. In addition, in rule 1 of the rules of procedure it is stated that sessions of the Commission shall ordinarily be held at the office of the United Nations in Asia and the Pacific, unless the Commission recommends otherwise.

III. Theme topic

4. The secretariat submits the following topic for the consideration of the Commission: “Regional connectivity for shared prosperity”.

5. The Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR) at its 346th and 347th sessions, held on 19 February 2013 and 20 March 2013, respectively, and at informal sessions held on 2 and 4 April 2013, considered proposals for a theme topic for the seventieth session of the Commission and decided to submit the above theme topic for consideration by the Commission.

A. Background

6. To sustain economic growth and enable all countries in Asia and the Pacific to share in the prosperity it generates, there needs to be a deepening of integration of the economies of the region. Strengthening regional connectivity is critical in order to enhance regional cooperation and move towards regional integration.

7. Over the past decade, cross-border trade and investment among Asia-Pacific countries has grown significantly. The more advanced economies have shifted their traditional labour-intensive manufacturing activities to developing and least developed economies, and refocused their own efforts to invest in knowledge-based economies driven by advanced technologies and services. This process, together with increased trade between member States, has facilitated the region’s recovery from the recent global economic crisis. In spite of uneven progression among different subregions, the pace of economic integration is accelerating, facilitated by growing trade (for example in commodities), improved infrastructure, cross-border transport agreements, improved logistics and financial and informational connections through the greater use of information and communications technology (ICT). As a consequence and in parallel, social integration is taking place through enhanced labour mobility and tourism, allowing for more fluid movement of peoples, ideas and cultures across borders.

8. However, connectivity gaps between the few high-income countries and the middle- and lower-income countries are hindering the full participation of countries in the region’s economic dynamism. To obtain more equitable growth throughout the region, countries need to collectively address the wide disparities in the breadth and quality of infrastructure among countries of the region. Improving regional connectivity will enhance the competitiveness and efficiencies of countries, particularly lower-income countries that are disadvantaged by more rudimentary levels of infrastructure and services. For example, having efficient and reliable ICT systems in place will make it easy to connect farmers to regional markets and businesses to regional customers, while secure and sustainable energy systems will link energy demand with available supply.

9. At the same time, concerted efforts are needed at the national and subnational levels in order to ensure that the benefits arising from greater connectivity are spread equitably within countries. Governments can support

the increased participation of their people in economic and social activities by creating enabling environments for the private sector to flourish, while at the same time freeing up space for civil society to grow. They can also strengthen partnerships with relevant stakeholders to share collective responsibility for equitable development and for financing development. For prosperity to be truly shared and sustainable, interventions are also required that target the poorer and more vulnerable groups in society. Shared prosperity promotes harmonization and prevents issues of potential conflict both at the country level and subnational level.

10. In this context, the proposed study would contain an exploration of the rationale as to why regional connectivity could contribute to shared prosperity, and identify ways of strengthening regional connectivity, not only in sectors but also through more comprehensive development initiatives. The study would contain an investigation of the challenges that countries are facing through a review of relevant data and experiences from the Asia-Pacific region, and proposes a set of recommendations on what could be done most effectively to achieve the goal of increasing regional connectivity for shared prosperity.

B. Structure of the study

1. Introduction

11. In this section, the rationale for improving regional connectivity for shared prosperity would be discussed.

2. Sectoral and multisectoral review

12. The chapter would contain a discussion on the main challenges, opportunities and benefits related to achieving better regional connectivity in the Asian and Pacific context from sectoral and multisectoral perspectives. It would include a review of the current status of regional connectivity by sector, such as transport, energy, ICT and migration, and its relationship with regard to population movements, the economy, social and commercial mobility and equitable prosperity, including an analysis of evidence that shows the strong link between regional connectivity and shared prosperity. The chapter would also contain an assessment of the interdependencies between different sectors and an explanation that stresses the need for integration of sectoral connectivity in order to maximize opportunities and beneficial synergies.

3. Subregional experiences

13. Given that physical proximity has a strong influence over historic and current patterns of connectivity, many subregional organizations and multilateral development banks have attempted to address connectivity issues at the subregional level. Even though subregional approaches have some advantages over regional approaches, experience to date shows a mixed record of success. The chapter would include descriptions of some of the different approaches being taken at the subregional level towards achieving better connectivity along with a discussion on why situating these subregional approaches within a larger regional framework could, in some cases, enhance their effectiveness and also lead to greater benefits for the region.

4. The role of partnerships

14. Compared with 50 years previously, the role of Governments in driving economic growth and development has changed markedly. Major groups, such as the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders, are taking on some of the economic and social activities which were previously considered to be within the realm of the public sector. In this chapter, the strengthening of partnerships among major stakeholders would be advocated through the identification of areas of joint interest, mutually beneficial synergies and clusters to organize participatory approaches to policy and decision-making. In particular, the discussion would identify the potential roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in strengthening regional connectivity, and how these major stakeholders could share the costs, risks and benefits.

5. Overcoming the financing challenge

15. Building on the previous chapter, the focus of this chapter would be on the role of partnerships in overcoming the financing challenges facing individual Governments. In this regard, the chapter would contain a description of financing options for activities that contribute to regional connectivity. Most Governments in the region face significant shortfalls in funding for infrastructure development and are unlikely to be able to meet their investment needs from public funds alone. Alternative sources from private capital markets, such as foreign exchange reserves, pension funds and private savings, may help fill financing gaps. One successful model of private sector involvement has been the public-private partnership, or PPP, which is widely used in middle- and higher-income countries. The use of PPPs in most developing countries, however, has been significantly constrained due to limited capacity and know-how in Governments and underdeveloped capital markets. Both the public and private sectors in these countries need to build their capacities in order to develop successful PPPs. Regional approaches to financing, such as the ASEAN Infrastructure Fund established by member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with the active participation of the Asian Development Bank, might also contribute to the development of regional connectivity projects.

6. Strategic approaches for achieving regional connectivity

16. The theme study would conclude with an analysis of the sectors that should be prioritized in order to achieve regional connectivity, including specific areas from which a more comprehensive, multisectoral approach could lead to the greatest overall gains. In this chapter, there would be a discussion on the role of regional cooperation in strengthening regional connectivity towards achieving sustainable and inclusive development.

IV. Previous theme topics

17. For reference, a list of the theme topics of previous Commission sessions is contained in the annex to the present document.

Annex

List of theme topics of previous Commission sessions*

Session	Year	Theme topic
40	1984	Technology for development
41	1985	Technology for development
42	1986	Human resources development
43	1987	Human resources development
44	1988	Human resources development
45	1989	Restructuring the developing ESCAP economies in the 1990s
46	1990	Restructuring the developing ESCAP economies in the 1990s
47	1991	Industrial restructuring in Asia and the Pacific, in particular with a view to strengthening regional cooperation
48	1992	Regional economic cooperation in the ESCAP region: prospects, priorities and policy options
49	1993	Expansion of investment and intraregional trade as a vehicle for enhancing regional economic cooperation and development
50	1994	Infrastructure development as key to economic growth and regional economic cooperation
51	1995	Strengthening of regional cooperation in human resources development with special reference to the social implications of sustainable economic growth in Asia and the Pacific
52	1996	Sustainable development and poverty alleviation in Asia and the Pacific
53	1997	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: opportunities and challenges for ESCAP
54	1998	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: status of and prospects for social development
55	1999	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: information technology, globalization, economic security and development
56	2000	Development through globalization and partnership in the twenty-first century: an Asia-Pacific perspective for integrating developing countries and economies in transition into the international trading system on a fair and equitable basis
57	2001	Balanced development of urban and rural areas and regions within the countries of Asia and the Pacific
58	2002	Sustainable social development in a period of rapid globalization: challenges, opportunities and policy options
59	2003	Integrating economic and social concerns, especially HIV/AIDS, in meeting the needs of the region

Session	Year	Theme topic
60	2004	Meeting the challenges in an era of globalization by strengthening regional development cooperation
61	2005	Implementing the Monterrey Consensus in the Asian and Pacific region: achieving coherence and consistency
62	2006	Enhancing regional cooperation in infrastructure development, including that related to disaster management
63	2007	Development of health systems in the context of enhancing economic growth towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific
64	2008	Energy security and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific
65	2009	Towards sustainable agriculture and food security in the Asia-Pacific region
66	2010	Addressing challenges in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals: promoting a stable and supportive financial system; and green growth or environmentally sustainable economic growth, including through technology and financing
67	2011	Beyond the crises: Long-term perspectives on social protection and development in Asia and the Pacific
68	2012	Enhancing regional economic integration in Asia and the Pacific
69	2013	Opportunities to build resilience to natural disasters and major economic crises

* Fortieth through sixty-ninth sessions.