



Southern Voice

2015 On Post-MDG International Development Goals

Occasional Paper Series

28

Regional Monitoring and Review Mechanism for Effective Implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Debapriya Bhattacharya

**REGIONAL MONITORING AND REVIEW MECHANISM
FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA**

Southern Voice Occasional Paper 28

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Publisher

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First Published January 2016

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ISSN 2307-9827 (Online)

ISSN 2307-681X (Print)

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Preface

The year 2015 witnessed culmination of a number of international processes leading to the creation of a new post-2015 global development agenda. After two years of global efforts, at the seventieth session of the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015, the member states have adopted the declaration *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Now that the 2030 Agenda concerning the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has stabilised, attention has shifted towards tailoring the SDGs to the national context and ensuring their implementation and monitoring.

Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals – a network of 49 think tanks drawn from Asia, Africa and Latin America has underscored the importance of monitoring the post-2015 agenda at national, regional and global levels. It specifically called for a national and regional level baseline for monitoring global programmes emanating from the post-2015 agenda. *Southern Voice* through its activities has also provided strategic support to produce policy papers regarding emerging issues related to the post-2015 agenda as well as preparation of country level data action plans and national level implication analysis for implementing the SDGs. It pointed out the need to ensure mutual accountability to improve gender equality, particularly in the fragile states. Regarding the scope of the post-2015 accountability mechanism, the Southern Voice network is of the view that “zero tolerance towards corruption” should be one of the guiding principles.

Concerned literature acknowledges that the design of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) did not properly recognise the regional dimensions of the 2015 Agenda, including the role of a regional monitoring and review mechanism (RMRM). The current emphasis on the “inclusiveness” of the post-2015 agenda implies that more attention has to be paid to the assessment of SDGs impact at disaggregated level. One of the implications of such a perspective relates to the need to have better understanding of the state of delivery of the SDGs at regional and sub-regional levels. Concurrently, popularisation of the concept of “Data Revolution” has also brought to the fore the need to generate necessary data and information to undertake, inter alia, regional level assessment of the SDGs. In view of the above, issues relating to a monitoring and review mechanism in general, and a regional arrangement in particular, have received noticeable attention in the debates and discourses on the post-2015 agenda. The present Southern Voice Occasional Paper on “Regional Monitoring and Review Mechanism for Effective Implementation of Post-2015 Agenda” precisely tries to address the abovementioned issues.

The paper was originally produced for United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) as an official note to facilitate the discussion on “Regional Monitoring and Review Mechanisms for Implementation of the United Nations Development Agenda Beyond 2015,” at the [Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development 2015 \(21-22 May, Bangkok\)](#). During its drafting, the author has received inputs from the UN-ESCAP Secretariat: *Dr Anisuzzaman Chowdhury*, Director, Statistics Division; *Mr Yanhong Zhang*, Chief, Population and Social Statistics Section, ESCAP Statistics Division; and *Ms Zeynep Orhun Girard*, Statistician, ESCAP Statistics Division. The author also benefitted from discussions with *Dr Shamshad Akhtar*, Executive Secretary, UN-ESCAP.

The author thankfully acknowledges the competent research assistance received from *Umme Shefa Rezbana*, Senior Research Associate, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Dhaka. Contributions of *Nazmatun Noor*, Deputy Director, Dialogue and Outreach, CPD and *Maeesa Aysha*, Programme Associate, CPD are also recognised.

However, the author alone remains responsible for the analyses and observations expressed in the paper.

Dhaka, Bangladesh
January 2016

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Abstract

Inadequate regional provisions have been one of the weak links in the global monitoring of, and accountability for, implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As a result, the question now is how does the regional monitoring and review process need to improve as a more demanding post-2015 development agenda is introduced? To address this question, the paper follows three analytical approaches. First, by reviewing various global-level inputs channelled towards articulating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it teases out the implications of the new agenda for a Regional Monitoring and Review Mechanism (RMRM). Second, by revisiting the experiences of various existing frameworks for a regional mechanism, it highlights the strengths and weaknesses of their varying approaches and instruments. Third, the paper tries to identify the critical attributes of the institutional structure and modalities that have to characterise such a mechanism in the new context. In conclusion, the paper underscores the need to bolster regional statistical capacity, particularly in the field of regional public goods and the proposed regional indicators of the sustainable development goals. It also proposes elements of a possible mechanism, building on the existing practices of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

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Acronyms

ACORD	Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AMR	Annual Ministerial Review
APCTT	Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology
APFSD	Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
ARIC	Asia Regional Integration Center
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CAPSA	Centre for the Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture
CDKN	Climate and Development Knowledge Network
CGD	Center for Global Development
CRC	Rights of the Child
CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
CSAM	Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FfD	Financing for Development
GEP	Group of Eminent Persons
HLP	High-Level Panel
IAEG	Inter-Agency and Expert Group
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IEG	Independent Expert Group
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITT	Inter-Agency Task Team
LDC	Least Developed Country
LLDC	Landlocked Developing Country
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoI	Means of Implementation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NEPAD	New Partnership for African's Development
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NPoA	National Programme of Action
NSDS	National Statistical Development Strategy
NSO	National Statistical Office
NYU	New York University
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OWG	Open Working Group
RMRM	Regional Monitoring and Review Mechanism
RPG	Regional Public Good
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solution Network
SG	Secretary General
SID	Small Island Developing State
SPPPD	Strategic Programme Planning and Partnership Division
TFM	Technology Facilitation Mechanism
TFSCB	Trust Fund for Statistical Capacity Building
TPRB	Trade Policy Review Board
TPRM	Trade Policy Review Mechanism
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
UN-NGLS	United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service
UNSD	UN Statistics Division
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
WTO	World Trade Organization

Regional Monitoring and Review Mechanism for Effective Implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Debapriya Bhattacharya

1. Introduction

1.1 The Context and the Issues

The 15 year tenure of the United Nation's (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), is coming to an end in 2015. Member states of the UN decided at a Summit (2010), and subsequently reconfirmed in 2012 at the Conference on Sustainable Development to design and operationalise a successor agenda, styled as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2010a and UN, 2012a). Since then the discussions on shaping the post-2015 have sequentially gathered momentum and now at a penultimate stage. The new agenda will seek to consolidate the achievements of the MDGs, take note of the recent changes in the international development landscape, and address the emerging challenges facing effective delivery of the SDGs.

Lack of an adequate monitoring and accountability mechanism has been widely recognised in concerned literature as one of the fault lines of the MDGs (UNICEF, 2011). It is maintained that MDG design did not properly recognise the role of regional monitoring and review mechanism (RMRM). It is further held that availability of an effective RMRM could have strengthened the MDG implementation at sub-regional and national levels by informing the process with more transparency and participation.

The rationale for instituting an RMRM has been also underscored in the context of the new dimensions of the SDG agenda.¹ The current emphasis on the 'inclusiveness' of the post-2015 agenda implies that more attention has to be paid to the assessment of SDGs' impact at disaggregated levels. One of the implications of such a perspective relates to the need to have better understanding of the state of delivery of the SDGs at regional and sub-regional levels. Concurrently, popularisation of the concept of 'Data Revolution' has also brought to the fore the need to generate necessary data and information to undertake, *inter alia*, regional-level assessment of the SDGs.

In view of the above, issues relating to a monitoring and review mechanism in general, and a regional arrangement in particular, have received noticeable attention in the debates and discourses on the post-2015 agenda. In this connection, reference has often been made, to the strengths and weaknesses of relevant regional practices in operation.

However, adequate clarity regarding the monitoring and review mechanism of SDGs is yet to emerge at the global level. Consequently, the discussions on an RMRM remain a bit tentative.²

¹Taking note of the sensitivities of the member states, the nomenclature "Monitoring and Accountability" has been replaced in the official UN documents by "Review and Follow-up."

²The UN inter-governmental negotiations on "Review and Follow-up" of the SDGs, scheduled to take place in New York on 18-19 May 2015, may provide more guidance in this regard.

In the above context, how does the regional monitoring and review process needs to shape up as a universal, transformative, inclusive and integrated global agenda? The present paper is a modest attempt to address this question.

1.2 Scope and Design of the Paper

Definitions

While there is no widely accepted definition of ‘monitoring’ and ‘review’, there is a broad consensus about their guiding principles and functions.

It needs to be mentioned that the concepts of process and its focus is quite often context-specific and defined by its focus. Monitoring and accountability are quite complex processes and the areas of their interface are even more complex.

Bartle (2007) defined monitoring as “the regular observation and recording of activities taking place in a project or programme. It is a process of routinely gathering information on all aspects of the project.” UNDP (2009) defines monitoring as the ongoing process by which stakeholders obtain regular feedback on the progress being made towards achieving their goals and objectives. Thus monitoring needs to be treated as not merely reviewing progress made in implementing actions or activities. On the other hand, World Bank (2007) looks upon monitoring as a continuing function that primarily aims to provide the management and main stakeholders of an ongoing intervention with early indications of progress, or lack thereof, in the achievement of results. An ongoing intervention might be a project, programme or other kind of support to an outcome. In the above sense, a regional monitoring mechanism should not only focus on the progress of contemplated actions of an agenda, but would also assess the results (and outcomes) that the agenda has set out to achieve.

Bovens (2007) has defined accountability “as a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgment, and the actor can be sanctioned.” According to UN (2010b) accountability includes achieving objectives and results by an entity in response to its mandate, fair and accurate reporting on all aspects of performance results according with rules, regulations and standards, including a clearly defined system of rewards and sanctions.

In other words, accountability follows monitoring through a transparent process of answerability once an objective account on the progress of mandated activities and outcomes are obtained. Obviously, this process of monitoring and review in the regional context may be both vertical (e.g. global to regional to national and reverse) and horizontal (e.g. countries or organisations being assessed by the members of the peer community). The monitoring and review mechanism may be also defined by the lead institution (e.g. UN System, other international organisations and non-government bodies), as well as by the nature of participation (e.g. inter-governmental, multi-stakeholder participation). In the context of the present paper, we categorise the RMRM in reference to the UN System.

Objectives

The prime objective of the paper is to explore the elements of a regional monitoring and review mechanism for effective implementation of the post-2015 international development agenda. Concretely, the paper focuses on the following issues.

- i. New context and new demands on RMRM;
- ii. Experience of the existing practices of RMRM;
- iii. Structural features and operational modalities of a possible RMRM; and
- iv. Data and statistical needs for a post-2015 RMRM.

Approach

To address this question, the paper follows three analytical approaches. First, by reviewing various global-level inputs channelled towards articulating the SDGs, it teases out the implications of the new agenda for an RMRM. Second, by revisiting the experience of various existing frameworks of RMRM, it highlights the strengths and weaknesses of their varying approaches and instruments. Third, the paper tries to identify the critical attributes of the institutional structure and modalities that have to characterise RMRM in the new context.

The analysis and conclusions of the paper has been largely informed by the policies and practices of Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) of the United Nations.

Layout

The paper has been structured around its core objectives. Following the introductory section, Section 2 reviews the perspectives that have emerged during the preparatory phase of the post-2015 agenda. Section 3 revisits the major regional practices in the area of monitoring and accountability of MDGs and beyond. Elements of an effective RMRM in terms of structural features, operational modalities, and information and data needs have been explored in Section 4. The paper concludes by highlighting some of the challenges associated with putting in place a substantive RMRM in the context of post-2015 agenda.

2. Review of the Perspectives on RMRM in the Context of Post-2015

This section reviews various observations and comments on an RMRM contained in different input documents prepared during the preparatory phase of designing the SDGs. These documents have been considered here under two broad groups, viz. (i) the inputs emanating from the UN process; and (ii) other inputs which have been put forward by non-state actors including the non-government organisations (NGOs), think tanks and different networks. The section also seeks to consolidate the views emerging from these two strands at the end of the section.

2.1 Review of UN Documents

A number of important documents have been produced in the multitrack UN process which contributed towards shaping the SDGs. These include the reports of the High-Level Panel (HLP) of Eminent Persons set up by the UN Secretary General (SG), UN Task Team, UN Global Compact of the private sector, UN Sustainable Development Solution Network (SDSN), Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs and the Synthesis Report of the UN SG. Table 1 provides a summary of the observations and a High Level Panel comments on the rationale, scope and modalities of RMRM in the context of the post-2015 agenda.

High-Level Panel. According to the report by the HLP, UN's five regional commissions, with regional development banks, member governments and regional organisations, could form part of an improved coordinating mechanism in each region of the world, which would discuss and report on the sustainable development agenda in advance of each global forum. It states that for discussion and reporting mechanism, coordinating mechanism is important (UN, 2013a).

The HLP report also states that the proposed regional forum has to cooperate with global cooperation fora such as the G7+, Group of Twenty (G-20), the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Although the ESCAP and other regional commissions provide regional forum, there is no coordination between global cooperation forums and regional forums. Regional cooperation fora have to be involved at the global cooperation forum. It is also suggested that regional platform could ensure regional accountability mechanism with cooperation and a unified approach.

It has been further stated in the HLP report that there is a need of both reporting and peer review at the regional level which could complement global monitoring. Peer review mechanism is practiced at the Africa region, but regional reporting is absent here. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) practise both. Thus, the HLP recommends both peer review and reporting should be ensured for every region.

In sum, the HLP identified the need to create a regional platform with the UN regional commissions playing a coordinating and cooperative role with other similar regional and global entities. It calls for both peer review and reporting as the major instruments for operationalising the anticipated regional platform.

UN Task Team. The UN Task Team in its reports does not mention regional accountability mechanism directly, but it has mentioned about accountability to help the poorest and the most marginalised countries and communities. On the other hand, it states the need for reshaping the global partnership for development to support implementation and to ensure an effective accountability mechanism at all levels, i.e. national, regional and global (UN, 2012b). The UN Task Team maintains that to hold institutions accountable, well-defined, rule-of-law-based performance standards and benchmarks for accountability should be generated at all levels. Accountability to all stakeholders through transparent access to information is necessary for an effective post-2015 development agenda. According to the UN Task Team, a strong, robust and comprehensive framework is essential to make all actors (e.g. governments, private sector and civil society) accountable. Interestingly, the UN Task Team has mentioned that the post-2015 accountability mechanism should be universal as well as national. The distinction between the two was not readily obvious.

Open Working Group. The OWG proposals do not directly address the issue of regional accountability mechanism; but they refer to the same for the developing countries, least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS).

The OWG in its final outcome document (OWG, 2014), under Target 17.18 has emphatically underscored the importance of high quality, timely and reliable data to service the monitoring and review mechanism. In this connection, Target 17.19 calls for support to statistical capacity building in developing countries which by implication is a support towards strengthening the RMRM. Thus, OWG has considered the availability and access to quality and timely data to be one of the most important pre-requisites for operationalising the monitoring and accountability framework.

SDSN. The SDSN documents essentially mention regional level accountability and monitoring mechanisms in connection with issues relating to environment and ecosystem (SDSN, 2014).

The SDSN holds that countries should quantify their contributions toward regional and global efforts to tackle planetary boundaries, such as agreements under multilateral environmental instruments on climate change, biodiversity, ozone depletion and desertification. Recognising the links among national, regional and global efforts, the SDSN emphasises quantification of country contributions to support regional efforts in this regard. The SDSN proposed a target to be included in the SDGs which reads as follows: "Participate in and support regional and global arrangements to inventory, monitor, and protect biomass and environmental commons of regional and global significance and curb trans-boundary environmental harms, with robust systems in place no later than 2020."

The SDSN further proposed to distinguish between ecosystem management at the national and sub-national levels (first target) and regional or global efforts (second target). It maintained that ecosystem management at the regional level should be identified and those management systems should be administered properly. In this connection, suitable indicators, e.g. halting the loss of biodiversity, can and should, be constructed at national/local and regional/global levels to measure the achievement of the targets across a broad range of ecosystems.

It may be concluded from the SDSN's proposition that regional arrangements of accountability along with specific monitorable indicators are essential for securing the ecosystem and sustainable development.

Global Compact. The report prepared by the UN-sponsored Global Compact of the private sector mentions that inclusive and transparent practices should be used to monitor the effectiveness and usefulness of local, regional, national or international policies (United Nations Global Compact, 2013). It expressed its preference for regional or national targets, rather than only global targets.

The Global Compact also highlighted the role of UN regional commissions in deepening the global discussions on accountability for the new agenda, and in organising dialogues on the shape and form of review mechanisms at the regional level. At the same time, Global Compact referred to the role of its Regional Centre for the Support of the Global Compact in Latin America and the Caribbean. It specifically mentioned ESCAP's regional institutions such as Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology, Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development, Centre for the Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture, Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization as potential contributors in ensuring regional accountability.

It may be noted that the Global Compact was the regional centre of excellence which would contribute towards looking at the private sector to be involved in the post-2015 monitoring and review mechanism.

UN SG's Synthesis Report. The UN SG's Synthesis Report, coming at a later stage contains more developed ideas regarding instruments of the upcoming accountability mechanism (UN, 2014). According to this Report, within thematic debates on accountability at the General Assembly, each region and UN regional commissions could be considered as regional review mechanism with mutual accountability at the centre. The report mentions of country-led national component, regional component for peer reviewing, and a thematic component for inclusion in the post-2015 development accountability mechanism.

As may be noted, the SG's Synthesis also recalls for the concept of 'mutual accountability.' The report calls for a 'new paradigm of accountability' which is not based on conditionality or of any specification, but rather of all actors – government, international institutions, private sector actors and civil society organisations, and in all countries, to the people themselves.

As one of the founding principles of the future accountability framework, the report argues for strong and inclusive public mechanisms at all levels for reporting, monitoring progress, learning lessons, and ensuring mutual accountability. As may be observed, the SG's Synthesis Report allows scope to ensure an accountability framework for the post-2015 agenda.

2.2 Review of Non-UN Documents

In contrast to the process which delivered the MDGs, the UN unleashed wide ranging consultations (going beyond the UN System) for generating inputs for shaping the SDGs. These consultations allowed various (mostly non-government) platforms, networks and organisations to express their views on the upcoming global agenda, including its monitoring and review mechanisms.

UN-NGLS. One such important platform was provided by the United Nations Non-governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS). It may be observed from the survey of the regional recommendations on the post-2015 development agenda, prepared by the UN-NGLS, that a number of organisations have emphasised the need to have a stronger role of the UN for ensuring accountability and transparency of the SDG agenda (UN, 2013b). For example, the African Trade Network called upon the UN to subject the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to oversight and support regional efforts toward "self-defined development." Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD)

and Third World Network-Africa (TWN) contended that the post-2015 development framework “must be responsive to national and regional conditions and priorities”.

A number of organisations advocated for employing human rights accountability mechanisms in the post-2015 agenda (UN, 2013b). For instance, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Center for Economic and Social Rights (2013, p. 32), maintained that UN bodies, including the regional ones, would “require states to justify their development performance in the light of human rights principles, such as progressive realisation and non-discrimination, scrutinise whether adequate national mechanisms of redress exist; issue recommendations for strengthening domestic accountability, and offer forums for raising and negotiating grievances”.

The Center for Economic and Social Rights (2013, p.7) also emphasises that, “Data gathering should not be limited to what is currently available, as this will frequently exclude data that is of particular relevance to communities facing discrimination and marginalization. National statistics offices and UN agencies should be enabled to collect the data needed to monitor disparities on the widest possible range of relevant grounds.”

It further emphasises that, “Transparency, along with equal and sustained access to quality information, is a precondition for participatory governance, empowering people to engage in decisions which affect their lives in informed and consequential ways. While openness itself does not necessarily lead to rights-realizing results, it is an essential prerequisite for a robust, informed public debate through which decision-makers become answerable to their people, and rights-holders are enabled to monitor and assess government conduct, including how resources are spent and generated. This duty requires governments to take proactive steps to address the weak institutional capacity of national statistical bodies, which can pose a barrier to the collection of quality, reliable and relevant information for all.”

Thus, the participating NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) have been asking for broadening of the scope of monitoring and review – both vertically and horizontally. They have also urged for replication of good practices in ensuring accountability at the international level as well as strengthening of the statistical systems at the national level in support of monitoring and review.

Beyond2015. Beyond2015 – a global civil society campaign – has pretty concrete views about the design of an RMRM (Beyond2015, 2015). It mentions that there should be an appropriate forum at the regional level for discussion of particular regional challenges, policies and strategies, and the prospect of regional cooperation. In this connection, UN Regional Commissions must be tasked to support member-states in developing regional processes of monitoring and review.

Beyond2015 is of the view that each region should establish mechanisms for peer review, drawing on existing structures. These reviews should be comprehensive in their coverage of the post-2015 agenda. The campaign further called for setting up participating and multi-stakeholder committees at regional levels which will be tasked with facilitating the participation of national and regional stakeholders during the peer review process.

CIVICUS. CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation in its advocacy strategy on the post-2015 development agenda singles out the role of UN regional commissions as the most important platforms for promoting multilateral dialogue, knowledge-sharing and networking for sustainable development between governments and stakeholders (CIVICUS, 2014). Indeed, CIVICUS sees opportunities for stakeholder engagements at the regional commissions for taking regional perspectives to the global level. It also believes that the regional commissions can play a pivotal role during the implementation of the post-2015 agenda.

Southern Voice. Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals – a network of 49 think tanks drawn from Asia, Africa and Latin America has underscored the importance of monitoring of the post-2015 agenda at regional levels. It specifically called for a baseline for monitoring global

programmes to be established, including the post-2015 agenda, from regional perspectives (Ahmed *et al.*, 2014). It pointed out the need to ensure mutual accountability to improve gender equality, particularly in the fragile state. Regarding the scope of the post-2015 accountability mechanism, the Southern Voice network is of the view that “zero tolerance towards corruption” should be one of the guiding principles.

CGD. The Center for Global Development (CGD) pointed out that monitoring progress and generating accountability are inter-related processes (CGD, 2014). It held that CSOs including think tanks and NGOs should monitor the progress of SDG implementation. CGD emphasised that post-2015 goals should be based on data availability and collection of data, which would be complement and compete with priorities of the regional policymakers.

In this connection, it was recalled that UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) provides funding and technical assistance for the improvement of civil registrations and vital statistics in Africa. UNECA works closely with the African Union to better harmonise statistical efforts between the African regional institutions. Based on above observations, we conclude that UN regional commissions may share knowledge and expertise based on their experience in promoting RMRMs.

ODI. Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in a number of its papers has pointed out the importance of regional institutions in monitoring the post-2015 agenda as they can ensure regional cross-comparisons and standardisation (ODI and CDKN, 2014). ODI advocated for establishing or strengthening regional collaborative centres and compilation of statistical information (baselines, metrics and targets) and data on regional and sub-regional disaster risks, impacts and losses. It also called for the capacity of regional and national scientific organisations and regional research hubs in the developing countries to be strengthened, and linking of these organisations to the regional accountability mechanism.

New York University. The New York University maintained that the post-2015 agenda should be accompanied by an integrated accountability framework that joins up and improves the existing global, regional, national and local level accountability mechanisms involving all relevant actors (Clippinger *et al.*, 2014). This integrated framework is to be driven by the following four principles – transparency, inclusiveness, deliberation and responses. Information provided to and reviewed by regional coordinating bodies, along with global and national bodies (pursuant to various existing accountability mechanisms) should be used to supplement, verify or challenge information provided by the state for the concerned forum.

2.3 New Demands on RMRM

These various views (summarised in Table 1) expressed during the preparatory phase of the SDGs suggest that there is an overall consensus regarding the need to strengthen the regional link in the monitoring and review system of the post-2015 agenda. Most of these views suggested that UN regional commissions should be the lynchpin in the newly fashioned RMRM. Indeed, regional commissions seem to have a comparative advantage over other institutions in discharging the responsibility of an RMRM in the context of the post-2015 agenda.

It has been also advised that bolstering the RMRM should not lead to creation of new structures, rather it should build on existing practices of the concerned institutions. Thus, one will have to explore how to fit in the new demands in the operational modalities of the regional commissions and other relevant institutions.

The newly ramped RMRM will have to invest a significant amount of its resources in performing a coordination function. This coordination role has to be performed within as well as beyond the region. Within the region, the lead (anchor) institution has to collaborate with other regional entities including the multilateral financial institutions. The RMRM has to also link up to the global process as well as other platforms such as G7+, Group of Seventy Seven (G-77), G-20 and BRICS.

Table 1: Views on Regional Accountability Mechanism in UN Preparatory Documents

UN Process	Elements for Regional Accountability Mechanism
High-level Panel (HLP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UN’s five regional commissions, with regional development banks, member governments and regional organisations could form part of an improved coordinating mechanism in each region of the world, which would discuss and report. • Regional forum has to cooperate with global cooperation forum. • Regional platforms in Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Europe are stepping in to cooperate and unified approaches towards trade, climate adaptation and mitigation, finance, infrastructure and other cross-border issues within the region. • Reporting and peer-review at the regional level could complement global monitoring. It is often easier to review policies in-depth with friendly and constructive neighbours than with the whole world.
UN Task Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability should be, first and foremost, to those the SDGs are designed to help – the poorest and the most marginalised. • Reshaping the global partnership for development to support implementation and to ensure effective review mechanisms at all levels. • Well-defined, rule-of-law-based performance standards and benchmarks for accountability can generate confidence among to hold institutions accountable. • In order to be effective, the future framework must emphasise accountability to all stakeholders through transparent access to information, and enable the meaningful participation of people. • Strong, robust and comprehensive review framework will make all actors – governments, civil society and private sector accountable. • The post-2015 framework must be universal, with nations working on, reporting against and contributing to all issues as relevant to their national context.
UN Global Compact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Centre for the Support of the Global Compact in Latin America and the Caribbean is the global compact local network partner. • Sustainability efforts in industries and businesses are also viewed as the preferred tool for battling corruption in private and public sectors in the Latin America and Caribbean and African contexts, provided that governments lead by examples through sustainable procurement programme, increased transparency and participatory accountability. • The greatest diversity of opinion with respect to the scope and nature of the Goals came with the issue of regional or national targets, rather than only global. • To deepen global discussions on accountability for the new agenda, UN regional commissions are organising dialogues on the shape and form of review mechanisms at the regional level, with support from the full UN development system. • It should be about inclusive and transparent practices used to monitor the effectiveness and usefulness of local, regional, national or international policies.
Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countries should quantify their contributions toward supporting the regional and global efforts to tackle planetary boundaries, such as agreements under multilateral environmental instruments by on climate change, biodiversity, ozone depletion and desertification. • Participating in and supporting regional and global arrangements to inventory, monitor, and protect biomes and environmental commons of regional and global significance and curb trans-boundary environmental harms, with robust systems in place by no later than 2020.

(Table 1 contd.)

(Table 1 contd.)

UN Process	Elements for Regional Accountability Mechanism
Open working Group (OWG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinguish between ecosystem management at the national and sub-national level (first target) and regional or global efforts (second target). • Suitable indicators, including halting the loss of biodiversity, can and should be constructed at national/local and regional/global levels. <hr/> <p><i>Data, monitoring and accountability</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17.18. By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing states, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts. • 17.19. By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries.
UN SG's Synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A country-led, national component for accountability; A regional component for peer-reviewing; a thematic component are principal components for post-2015. • The new paradigm of accountability that is sought, is not one of conditionality or North to South, nor South to North, but rather one of all actors – governments, international institutions, private sector actors, and organisations of civil societies, and in all countries, to the people themselves. • It must reach the highest standards of accountability, transparency at international civil service. • Thematic debates are held on accountability in the General Assembly, and in each region under the auspices of the respective UN Regional Commission. • Mutual accountability should be at the center. • Post-2015 should include strong, inclusive public mechanisms at all levels for reporting, monitoring progress, learning lessons, and ensuring mutual accountability.

Source: UN(2013a); UN (2012b); United Nations Global Compact (2013); SDSN (2014); OWG (2014); UN (2014).

It has been maintained that the scope of the RMRM should cover all SDGs. In this connection special focus has to be on regional priorities and supply of regional public goods. Some specific issues, such as gender equality, good governance and climate change have to be treated with importance within the scope of RMRM. Some have also agreed that the right-based approach has to be embedded in the regional review exercise.

Participation of wide ranging stakeholders is expected in the RMRM for post-2015 agenda. These stakeholders should include, among others, CSOs/NGOs, private sector bodies, scientific community and think tanks. Adequate avenues have to be provided to these stakeholders so that they may introduce new data and information as well as challenge those introduced by others including the national governments.

Regarding tools and modalities, there seems to be an expressed preference for reporting and reviews, peer-review, thematic and sectoral assessment. The major concern is to have an evidence-based independent assessment and effective follow-up.

Finally, data-related issues figured prominently in the observations reviewed earlier. Generation of quality and timely data and statistics to service the needs of an RMRM has been underscored. Beefing up the regional capacities along with strengthening national statistical systems has been considered to be a priority.

3. Revisiting the Existing Framework of RMRM

The main element of this section is a brief scrutiny of the framework of monitoring and review mechanisms and their implications for the RMRM in the context of the UN post-2015 sustainable development agenda. The review covers the experience of UN regional commissions and relevant agencies as well as that of other international bodies. The major issues researched in this regard include the structure of the review mechanisms and their operational modalities.

3.1 UN Agencies and Commissions

Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG). The IAEG was set up to meet the increased demand for reliable data/statistics in view of the need to track implementation of the MDGs.³ The group is coordinated by the UN Statistics Division (UNSD) in New York. The IAEG plays a significant role in overseeing the process of data transfer from national, regional and international organisations to a global database. The global database is maintained by the UNSD.

The IAEG includes representatives of the UN Secretariat, a number of UN agencies, IMF, OECD and The World Bank as well as national experts from statistical offices. Organisations concerned with the development of data for the MDGs at national and international levels, such as Paris 21 and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) are also represented in the group.

Data collection method, standards and available data for the agreed indicators, and reviews and analyses trends for each of the quantifiable goals and targets are discussed by the IAEG twice a year. The IAEG also prepares data and analysis to monitor progress of MDG delivery. The group is also responsible for defining and reviewing methodologies and technical issues in relation to the indicators, producing guidelines, and helping articulate priorities and strategies to support countries in data collection, analysis and reporting on MDGs.⁴

Over the past few years, the IAEG has made discernible contribution towards improvement and better documentation on the standards and methods used in compiling and analysing MDG indicators. These included aggregation of country data, establishing comparability and providing empirical depiction of the local situation. These activities are pursued by IAEG through thematic sub-groups established within the IAEG, as well as through other inter-agency mechanisms bringing together lead agencies in different areas of MDGs (King *et al.*, 2012). The 46th session of the United National Statistical Commission being asked by the OWG to develop an indicator framework for the SDGs, has agreed to establish an IAEG-SDGs and a High-Level Group of country experts and proposed a regular Global Forum to monitor SDGs progress. The IAEG-SDGs, supported by the UNSD is currently pre-occupied in developing the indicators for SDGs.

Taking note of the functions and performance of the IAEG, it will be useful to consider whether such an outfit with regional focus will be helpful in making the RMRM effective. The practice of having thematic sub-groups may also be found useful in pursuing specific elements of the post-2015 international development agenda.

United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)⁵. ECOSOC reviews the progress on the MDGs through the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR). The AMR, since 2007, has been assessing the progress in the implementation of the UN's development agenda. Building on its experience in reviewing progress on the MDGs, the ECOSOC is expected to play a major role in the implementation and follow-up of the post-2015 development agenda.⁶ However, the full mandate of ECOSOC in the

³<http://www.cepal.org/mdg/estrategia/default.asp?idioma=IN>

⁴<http://www.cepal.org/mdg/estrategia/default.asp?idioma=IN>

⁵<http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/mdg.shtml>

⁶<http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/mdg.shtml>

post-2015 context is not yet adequately clear, as a High Level Political Forum has also been created to provide 'high level' oversight to the implementation of the SDGs.

Whatsoever, the relevant lesson is that for an effective RMRM there has to be a platform engaging the relevant ministers (if not the head of the governments) to discuss at a regular interval (may be once a year) the progress in delivering SDGs in the region.

Regional Commissions. The five regional commissions are considered to be the UN's outposts in their respective regions:

- i. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)
- ii. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
- iii. United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC)
- iv. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)
- v. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA)

These regional commissions, among others, share a key objective of promoting of regional implementation of internationally agreed development goals, particularly the MDGs. To achieve their objectives, the regional commissions pursue evidence-based policy analysis, multilateral dialogue, knowledge-sharing and networking as well as support intra-regional and inter-regional cooperation. A large number of trade bodies, professional organisations and other NGOs regularly take part in various platforms of these commissions. Most of the regional commissions have sub-regional offices to address the specific development challenges of a sub-region.

Any RMRM anchored in a regional commission would enjoy the convening power of this entity. The structure of the regional commissions will allow the RMRM to undertake disaggregate exercises at sub-regional levels.

UN Specialised Agencies. Numerous UN specialised agencies, inter alia, facilitate the implementation of MDGs in their mandated areas. These bodies also monitor the progress of MDG implementation in their concerned areas. These functions of the specialised agencies of the UN are expected to continue in the post-2015 phase.

For example, the *United Nations International Children's Fund* (UNICEF) supports the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child by contributing to its monitoring exercise. UNICEF participates in the Committee's review of submitted reports, including working with the states to identify implementation strategies in response to the Committee's recommendations. In an earlier stage, UNICEF field offices hold in-country consultations to validate the accuracy and impact of reports. Such consultations are often co-organised with the government prior to drafting their reports.⁷ It also maintains and updates global databases and promotes dissemination of evidence-based data for planning and advocacy,⁸ particularly relating to improvement of state of the children.

Similarly, the *Commission on the Status of Women* (CSW), created by ECOSOC, is dedicated to gender equality and the advancement of women worldwide. The CSW has a complaint procedure concerning violations of human rights that affect the status of women in any country.⁹

Understandably, RMRMs have to collaborate with various UN agencies so as to receive specialised inputs from them, while pursuing specific issue of the post-2015 agenda (e.g. gender equality and rights of the children).

⁷<http://www.claiminghumanrights.org/unicef.html>

⁸<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/stats.shtml>

⁹http://www.claiminghumanrights.org/un_agencies.html

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)¹⁰. The OHCHR, created in 2006, hosts the secretariats of most treaty bodies and the special procedures. The OHCHR's work has three dimensions: standard-setting, monitoring, and implementation on the ground.

The most effective monitoring and review mechanism which OHCHR has at its disposal is the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the human rights records of all 193 UN member states. The UPR, based on objective and reliable information, assesses the performance of each state regarding the fulfilment of its human right obligations and commitments. The NGOs can submit their own reports which can be added to 'other stakeholders' reports considered during the review. The reviews take place through an interactive discussion between the state under review and other UN member states. The commitments made by a member state during a review are again brought back to discussion during the subsequent review.

The UPR of the OHCHR has established itself as one of the best global practices of monitoring and review in the area of fulfilment of obligations and commitments undertaken by the member states. An ambitious RMRM can definitely consider equipping itself with an instrument similar to the UPR. However, adopting UPR provisions for review and follow-up delivery of the post-2015 agenda will demand enormous amount of political will on the part of the regional commissions.

3.2 Other International Agencies

World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO under its Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM) conducts scrutiny of the trade policies and practices of all Members of the WTO.¹¹ The first four trading entities of the world are subject to review every two years, the next 16 are reviewed every four years. Other Members are reviewed every six years, except that a longer period may be fixed for least developed country (LDC) Members. The review exercise is conducted under the supervision of the Trade Policy Review Board (TPRB) headed by one of the Permanent Representatives of a Member state.

In order to achieve the fullest possible degree of transparency, the TPRM in its deliberation discusses a report supplied by the Member or Members under review and a report drawn up by the WTO Secretariat on its own responsibility. The reports by the Member under review and by the Secretariat, together with the minutes of the respective meeting of the TPRB, are published promptly after the review. These documents are forwarded to the Ministerial Conference, which takes note of them. The minutes of the TPRB meeting are examined during the subsequent meeting of the TPRB for the concerned country in order to ascertain compliance of the decisions taken.

The main goal that concerns the WTO is MDG 8, building a global partnership for development. However, progress on MDG 8 is not necessarily addressed by the TPRM.

The practice of systematic and periodic reviews of all Member states regarding a certain aspect of its policy framework is an exemplary practice. The RMRM may very well consider deploying this method to put a specific policy of high priority for the region under scanner.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). OECD conducts regular monitoring of developments in member countries as well as outside OECD area. This includes regular projections of short and medium-term economic developments. In this connection, OECD Secretariat prepares and analyses datasets following which internal bodies discuss policies towards a particular information, a higher policy making body makes decisions, and then the governments comply with the recommendations.¹²

¹⁰<http://www.claiminghumanrights.org/ohchr.html>

¹¹https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/29-tprm_e.htm

¹²<http://www.oecd.org/about/whatwedoandhow/>

OECD deploys mutual examination by governments, multilateral surveillance and a peer-review process through which the performance of member states of the OECD is assessed by their peers. Discussions at the OECD committee-level sometimes leads to negotiations on role making for international cooperation.¹³ Such exercises may also culminate in formal agreements setting new standards and guidelines for conduct of policies and practices. An example in this regard would be the Working Group on Bribery, which monitors the implementation by signatory countries of the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Officials in International Business Transactions.¹⁴

One of the functions of OECD having high relevance for MDGs (and SDGs) implementation relates to the functioning of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The OECD maintains a database on global aid flows and DAC regularly tracks the aid volume, particularly in the light of the international commitments undertaken by the OECD member states.

The peer-review mechanism of the OECD sets a high standard of accountability and there had been attempts to emulate that practice, e.g. by the African Union through its African Peer Review Mechanism. If an RMRM aspires to follow this path it will definitely need a lot of political commitment on the part of the member states.

The World Bank and IMF. The Boards of Governors of the World Bank Group and IMF hold Annual Meetings each autumn, which provides a forum for international cooperation, and enable the Bank and Fund to better serve their member countries.¹⁵ Another round of meetings of the World Bank-IMF Boards is held in each spring. The autumn and spring meetings of the World Bank-IMF discuss a range of issues related to poverty reduction, international economic development and finance.

The World Bank-IMF practices have at least two lessons for the RMRM. First, assessment of an organisation's performance has to be performed by an independent body so as to avoid conflict of interest. Second, RMRM meetings may be held by rotation in different member countries to broaden ownership of the process. Wider participation of other stakeholders in parallel events also contributes towards transparency of the process. Evaluation of the World Bank projects and programmes are carried out by an independent office which reports to the World Bank Board.

African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The APRM was initiated in 2002 by the African Union in the framework of the implementation of the New Partnership for African's Development (NEPAD). The membership of the APRM is voluntary and open to all members of the AU. Expression of interest by a member country is followed-up drawing up of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the country and the APRM Forum. The member countries have to make an annual contribution of USD 100,000.

The four focus areas of a review are democracy and political governance, economic governance, corporate governance and socioeconomic development. There are also four types of review – a base review, a periodic review (every two to four years), special review on request, and early warning review. The APRM promotes self-monitoring by the member countries and provides for a space for dialogue. The National Programme of Action (NPOA) prepared at the end of the review process lays out the road map agreed upon by the stakeholders.

Till end 2013, out of 54 countries in Africa, 33 joined the APRM of which 17 have been reviewed.

3.3 Lessons Learnt

The foregoing review of the monitoring and review practices of selected UN bodies and other international organisations allows us to draw a few lessons for redesigning an RMRM.

¹³<http://www.oecd.org/about/whatwedoandhow/>

¹⁴<http://www.oecd.org/about/whatwedoandhow/>

¹⁵<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTABOUTUS/ORGANIZATION/BODEXT/EXTEDS18/0,,contentMDK:20042540~menuPK:393313~pagePK:64099144~piPK:64099061~theSitePK:393301~isCURL:Y,00.html>

First, availability of relevant, timely and comparable data and statistics constitute the fundamental basis for having a credible monitoring and review mechanism. Collaboration with entities having specialised information and knowledge may broaden the scope to have access to relevant data.

Second, to have proper authority, the monitoring and review mechanism should enjoy a high profile, desirably through ministerial level participation. Engagement of other stakeholders will also broaden the transparency and ownership of the mechanism.

Third, the monitoring and review process may cover pre-determined specific areas of policy focus or any priority area concerning the post-2015 agenda. For this, area or policy-specific thematic groups may be created to provide exclusive information and analysis on the concerned subject.

Fourth, the reviews have to take place regularly following an agreed time of frequency. The frequency of the review will be dictated by the nature of the issue(s) under review as well as by the level of willingness of the concerned parties.

Fifth, various models of peer-review may be observed. This may be ‘universal’ (i.e. covering all member countries) as well as ‘voluntary’ (i.e. based on expressed willing to participate). Even to putting in operation of a universal mechanism will necessitate expressed consensus among the member states and other stakeholders.

Sixth, there has to be a feedback loop in the monitoring and review mechanism to ensure compliance of the commitments undertaken by the country reviewed. The effectiveness of the compliance mechanism will largely depend on the depth of the monitoring and review mechanism.

4. Elements of an Effective RMRM in Asia and the Pacific

Based on the foregoing analyses of the perspectives on an RMRM expressed in the context of the post-2015 agenda and review of selected existing global modalities of monitoring and review, this section seeks to identify the elements of an arrangement which could effectively keep track of SDG achievement in Asia and the Pacific, and hold the concerned actors responsible in this regard. An attempt has been also made to explore how the new demands on RMRM fit in within the existing practices of UN-ESCAP.

4.1 Framework Issues

What is the additional value of having a regional monitoring and review mechanism? To begin with, an RMRM can leverage commensurate national and sub-regional processes as well as provide a building block for the corresponding global structure. It can instil transparency in diverse regional trends. It can provide a more congenial space (in comparison to international platforms) for the member states to discuss their development challenges in an open and candid manner. Guided by local knowledge, it can provide necessary policy guidance and technical assistance to the member states for effective implementation of the post-2015 agenda. It is possibly the most competent platform to monitor provisioning of regional public goods. The dearth of necessary data and statistics in the region can be best exposed as well as mitigated through a comprehensive RMRM.

As noted earlier, the regional commissions of the UN are best suited for hosting the RMRM for overseeing the delivery of SDGs in their respective regions.¹⁶ Accordingly, it will fall upon ESCAP to anchor a strengthened regional ‘review and follow-up’ mechanism for the post-2015 agenda in Asia and the Pacific.

¹⁶Not all experts agree with this proportion. See Browne and Weiss (2013).

As we know, ESCAP provides a forum for all Governments of the region to review and discuss economic and social (and environmental) issues pertaining to its geographical mandate. Annual commission meeting is the highest decision-making body of the commission. The proposed RMRM should have the opportunity to seek guidance from the commission meeting regarding its scope of work and functional attributes. Indeed, the member states of ESCAP may very well like to deliberate on the new design of the RMRM as they consider the regional strategic approach towards implementation of the post-2015 agenda (UNESCAP, 2014).

Given the nature of the task, it will be only natural for the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, as the chief executive officer of the Commission, to lead the refashioned RMRM for Asia and the Pacific. Given the multidimensionality of the post-2015 agenda, all divisions of the Commissions will have to contribute to the RMRM to provide substance to its operation. In other words, the work programmes of each of the divisions needs to have built-in issues relevant for making the RMRM effective. The Statistics Division has to play a defining role in this regard as the custodian of the regional database. However, Strategic Programme Planning and Partnership Division (SPPPD) has to be responsible for overall coordination as well as provide technical support and quality assurance.

The member states will have to play an active role in the refashioning the RMRM and have to recognise that it is an important tool for enhancing the efficacy of the means of implementation (MoI) of the post-2015 agenda. The member states, given expressed ownership of the mechanism, will have to invest necessary resources to this end. An important element of the new RMRM has to be sustained and substantive engagement of all other regional stakeholders including various regional public entities, private sector bodies, CSOs and NGOs, women and youth groups.

The Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD), launched by ESCAP in 2014, may be fruitfully engaged in generation and discussion of output of the RMRM. The proceedings of the first RMRM reveal that the Asia-Pacific CSOs are asking for a role in the RMRM in the post-2015 context.

The RMRM in Asia and the Pacific may be broadly conceptualised at three levels, viz. (i) policy making and oversight – provided by the ministers and senior officials; (ii) provision of data and information and technical analysis – provided by ESCAP Secretariat and experts from the member states; and (iii) validation of the process – ensured through multi-stakeholder participation in public forum (including the private sector and other non-state actors).

The four sub-regional offices of ESCAP for (i) East and North-East Asia, (ii) North and Central Asia, (iii) The Pacific and (iv) South and South-West Asia will have to be integrated in the RMRM structures. Similarly, the five following regional institutions of ESCAP have to provide specialised inputs in their areas of expertise.

- a) Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (New Delhi, India)
- b) Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (Incheon City, Korea)
- c) Centre for the Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture (Bogor, Indonesia)
- d) Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (Makuhari, Chiba Prefecture, Japan)
- e) Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization (Beijing, China)

Some of the guiding principles of the mechanism need to include the following:

- a) Universal approach based on common but differentiated responsibility
- b) Mutual accountability of all major actors
- c) Full transparency and disclosure pertaining to the process
- d) Multi-stakeholder participation at all stages
- e) Effective feedback loop regarding compliance

- f) Substantive linkage with global, sub-regional and national entities and processes
- g) Use of timely, disaggregated and reliable data and evidence
- h) Platform for exchange of ideas and good practices.

While revisiting its existing monitoring and review practices, it will be advisable for ESCAP to use the above-mentioned principles as yardsticks.

Scope of RMRM. The RMRM has to focus on the full range of areas covered by the SDGs and their means of implementation. However, a closer and in-depth look may be taken in the areas of regional priorities.

The tricky question is whether there will be a separate mechanism to track and monitor the relevant indicators of Addis Accord (FfD3). A large number of Addis outcome indicators overlaps with SDG targets and indicators, but not all of them are covered by the SDGs. Thus, there may be a rationale to institute a separate, but complementary monitoring track for the indicators of Financing for Development (FfD) along with the SDG-focused RMRM.

Outputs. The outputs of the RMRM will provide: (a) aggregate findings of national reviews on SDG delivery; (b) analysis of regional and sub-regional trends relating to SDGs (and MoIs); and (c) state of affairs in areas of regional priorities including provisioning of regional public goods and regionally relevant international commitments.

The outputs of the RMRM are expected to be fed into the (i) annual ministerial meeting of ESCAP; (ii) meeting of the High Level Political Forum; (iii) annual dialogue of ECOSOC with Executive Secretary of the regional commissions; and (iv) developed countries' review mechanisms, e.g. through EEC/OECD.

4.2 Operational Modalities

ESCAP already has at its disposal a number of monitoring tools. These include yearly project progress report, programme milestone report, project completion report and programme performance report at the end of biennium. While these reports along with various flagship reports may provide a basis for a post-2015 agenda oriented RMRM, these have to be complemented by a purposeful initiative to generate required data and information as well as analyses and follow-ups.

To this end, the following paragraphs put forward some institutional expressions of this initiative.

Review and reporting

- i. ESCAP may consider setting-up an *Independent Expert Group* (IEG) to monitor and report on the progress of SDG delivery in the region and suggest measures to expedite the same. A variation of the IEG could be a *Group of Eminent Persons* (GEP). The IEG or GEP may be constituted through a nomination process led by the member states with co-option provisions. The Statistics Division of ESCAP may provide technical back up to the group, and the group may create sub-groups with extended membership to deal with specific issues as identified by the ministerial meeting. In order to ensure independence of the group, it may report directly to the ministerial meeting or any platform designated by it.
- ii. If there is no consensus regarding creation of an independent expert body tasked with providing assessment on SDG progress, establishment of an *Inter-Agency Task Team* (ITT) may be considered. The ITT may comprise of all the relevant regional public entities including the UN agencies and multilateral financial institutions. In this case, the outputs of the ITT may be channelled through the Executive Secretary to the ESCAP governing body.
- iii. Of course, another option would be to form a Regional Inter-Agency and Expert Group as a regional equivalent of the global IAEG-SDGs. The member of the Group should consist of regional

offices of the UN agencies and regional institutions, such as Asian Development Bank (ADB), and experts nominated by member states from each sub-region. The tasks of the Group would include addressing data challenges, monitoring of progress at the regional and sub-regional levels and support member states in meeting various challenges.

- iv. *Thematic reviews* of certain aspects of the post-2015 may be considered not as substitute, but as a complement to the above proposed bodies. These thematic reviews may focus on regional public goods. Environmental Performance Review could be very relevant in this regard. Such reports may be prepared once in two years.
- v. ESCAP may encourage *voluntary self-reporting* by the member states so as to share its performance and experience in implementation of the SDGs. To incentivise the member states, the reporting countries may be distinguished in relevant ESCAP platforms. The country reporting should also cover the developed countries in the region as the SDGs constitute a universal agenda with targets particularly relevant for the developed countries.

Peer Review

If the member states want to be more ambitious, it can institute a peer review mechanism. A peer review mechanism may be voluntary (based on self-selection) or universal (all are covered over a period and repeated after certain interval). One may like to kick-off the process on totally voluntary basis with no conditionality attached.

Participatory Review

ESCAP may also support various participatory review initiatives in the region that are intended to monitor progress of SDG delivery and improve accountability in this regard. Such initiatives may be given space at the APFSD and allowed to channel their inputs to the annual meeting of the ESCAP governing body.

Analytical Work

To provide analytical depth to its RMRM, ESCAP or IEG or GEP (if not ITC) may consider pursuing analytical work, among others, in the following areas: (a) identification of the regional priority areas in the context of SDGs; (b) identification of data needs for an effective RMRM; (c) creation of the empirical base-line to proceed with the regional monitoring exercise; and (d) conceptualisation and operationalisation of a Regional SDG Index, and later a Sub-regional SDG Index.

If ESCAP spearheads this initiative, other regional commissions may learn from its experience.

The choice of the tools and nature of their operation will largely depend on the level of political will available in their favour. The institutional capacity of ESCAP to undertake an extended function of RMRM will also be an issue.

4.3 Monitoring of Regional Public Goods

As is known, regional public good (RPG) is any good, commodity, services, system of rules or policy regime that is public in nature and that generates shared benefits for the participating countries and whose production is a result of collective action by the participating countries (Wollrad, 2007). The task of monitoring of RPGs in Asia and the Pacific in connection with implementation of the post-2015 agenda falls squarely in ESCAP's domain. The ESCAP-led RMRM needs to address these issues independently of the initiatives proposed earlier. RPG monitoring and review exercise in Asia and the Pacific may very well target issues such as cross-border infrastructure, acidification of oceans, cross-border crimes and environmental pollution.

The blue-print for monitoring and evaluation system of RPG may be found in the IDB. Expansion of regional cooperation and integration in Asia and the Pacific has accentuated the need for monitoring RPGs. The Asia Regional Integration Center (ARIC) created under the aegis of the ADB monitors the developments in RPGs like climate change, clean energy and environmental protection, anti-corruption and governance, human and drug trafficking and anti-money laundering. ESCAP may involve ARIC in its undertakings in the areas of RPG as well as collaborate with IDB in this regard.

Monitoring for environmental sustainability. IDB provides a platform with six instruments and a series of gauges reporting on pre-identified indicators along a results chain path. The six instruments are: (i) a repository for documents and data; (ii) a quality at entry checklist; (iii) a managerial situation dashboard; (iv) the performance accountability system (PMR-like system); (v) the sustainability assessment report (XPMR like system); and (vi) case-based evaluation of interventions on the results chain (Bocalandro & Villa, 2011).

Monitoring for cross-border infrastructure. It is particularly important to monitor the development of cross-border infrastructure in Asia and the Pacific. Successful cross-border infrastructure requires institutional arrangements, formal or informal, that will help reach an optimum outcome arising from cooperation as opposed to independently chosen sub-optimal outcomes. Multiple governments are often involved in planning, designing and coordinating cross-border infrastructure. Even within a country, the central planner often has different perceptions about the value of cross-border infrastructure than local governments and users (Kuroda *et al.*, 2007). The strong need for planning and coordination for cross-border infrastructure require a systematic regional institutional arrangement. There is also a strong need to monitor effectiveness of this arrangement and make sure that there is no 'free-rider' problem.

Monitoring free trade agreement. Free trade arrangements among the Asian countries are proliferating at fast pace. There is a strong demand to monitoring their functions in terms of commodity and services trade rules, investment flows and dispute settlement. This calls for strengthening of the trade-related database.

Although not under the heading of RPG, ESCAP does assess flows of certain public goods in the region. For example, given its deep involvement in promotion of regional connectivity, it does track cross-border flows of goods through land transport. However, the Commission has to generate a comprehensive and integrated inter-divisional work programme to monitor such RPGs.

In sum, monitoring of RPGs has to feature strongly in future activities of ESCAP, particularly while putting in place RMRM for post-2015 agenda.

4.4 Monitoring of Regional Programmes of Action

It would be counter-productive for ESCAP to focus on addressing each individual goal/target/indicator of the SDGs. The UN bodies and specialised agencies, as the custodians of each of the goals, have far greater technical and financial resources as well as the country infrastructure to support governments. Therefore, any attempt to compete with them at the individual goal level would be futile.

Rather, a more strategic approach for an RMRM would be to position itself on a higher regional plane, addressing the SDGs in their totality as a holistic set of development goals. This is possible for ESCAP given its regional framework, multi-disciplinary outreach, access to all sectors of governments, and inter-governmental machinery.

In this regard the RMRM should give priority to commitments that the member states have already made at the regional level and endorsed at the annual Session of the Commission. In fact, many of these commitments and regional action programmes nicely map on to the proposed SDGs and targets.

A good example is the *Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS)*: This Framework includes detailed targets pertaining to the proposed SDG target on legal identity. Another example is the Disability “Make the Right Real” framework that also has an accompanying monitoring framework, with strong links to the OWG proposal. SD/SDD have worked together to develop accompanying monitoring framework. A third example is the Asia Pacific Energy Forum outcome document that also has the form of a monitoring framework – a data portal is being established with the aim of providing a regional monitoring platform [and knowledge hub, etc.]; very strong linkage to the SE4ALL agenda and to the OWG proposal. There is also the need for monitoring of the SAMOA Pathway for SIDS and programme of action for LDCs and landlocked developed countries (LLDCs).

Regional assessment of the Beijing platform of gender quality and women’s empowerment undertaken by ESCAP is also an inspiring case in this regard.

Using these frameworks as the guide, support from the statistics sub-programme to member states could include: (a) full-fledged monitoring framework with suggested indicators and accompanying compilation guidelines; (b) in-country support to establish the baseline; (c) support to establish the technical and institutional arrangements for monitoring progress against that baseline, with the National Statistical Office (NSO) as the coordinator (in collaboration with other Divisions and in particular liaison support from SROs); (d) integration of relevant issues in the National Statistical Development Strategy (NSDS); (d) normative work to address statistics measurement challenges, development of related compilation guidelines, delivery of related training.

However, anchoring in-country support to existing regional intergovernmental agreements should not be exclusive. There should be flexibility in identifying additional areas and modalities to deliver country support not covered by existing agreements, but are aligned with country development priorities and that ESCAP is able to deliver that support.

In-country support should extend beyond monitoring – and should be delivered collectively by all ESCAP divisions, offices and institutions – and by other parts of the UN system – which again requires strong partnership and inclusiveness on the part of ESCAP in the planning and conduct of intergovernmental meetings (Commission, Committees, Governing Councils, Ministerial Meetings) as well as the RCM and its Thematic Working Groups.

The annual APFSD could be the forum for reporting and deliberating on the progress in these efforts – at national and regional levels – and involving line ministries as well as planning and statistics offices.

4.5 Monitoring of Regional Technology Facilitation Mechanism

Technology has a significant role in the delivery of the sustainable development agenda. “Technology, innovation, and capacity building” has been addressed in the OWG document as well as in the reviewed draft of the Addis Ababa outcome document. Therefore, both the FfD and the post-2015 tracks have considered Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) as a joint initiative.

Since 1970s, ESCAP has been supporting the transfer of technology in the region, especially through its regional institutions. The three regional institutions in question are: the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (APCTT), the Centre for the Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture (CAPSA), and the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization (CSAM). ESCAP, on 18 May 2014, in partnership with Green Technology Centre Korea, organised “Regional Dialogue on Technology Facilitation” as an associated event of the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development to guide the future efforts on technology facilitation.¹⁷ The dialogue noted that “global technology facilitation mechanism and regional cooperation complement each other as technology cooperation at

¹⁷http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Summary_RDTF.pdf

regional level can provide concrete examples of practices while global process sets norms and goals.” It also stressed that capitalising existing information, institutions, and resources and strengthening coordination at regional level by bringing relevant institutions together is important.¹⁸

Input provided by the ESCAP to the Secretary General’s report on technology transfer mechanisms shows the technology transfer may be facilitated by:¹⁹

- a) Inter-governmental or expert fora/dialogue mechanisms often set up with specific sectoral focus;
- b) Identification, collection, analysis, documentation, dissemination and adapted replication of good practices;
- c) Conduct of pilot/demonstration projects, under specific regional/sub-regional initiatives;
- d) Online technology transfer facilitation mechanism;
- e) Intermediary services;
- f) Training and capacity building;
- g) Technology Development Fund;
- h) UN system can play a key role will be significant in facilitating the intergovernmental dialogues on transfer of publicly-owned or – funded technologies.

It is often maintained that “broad systemic technology issues should be discussed in the FfD track, while concrete deliverables on the TFM should be part of the post-2015 outcome.”²⁰ Member-States have emphasised a regional approach is important within the TFM with a special consideration on differentiated country needs. Similarly, it has been mentioned that the ‘TFM must be a multi-layer platform supported by regional, sub-regional and national technology mechanisms.’²¹

Thus, it will be only appropriate for ESCAP to keep TFM within the purview of its RMRM in the context of post-2015 agenda. It is also expected that in post-2015 period the Technology Bank for the LDCs will also come into operation. Progress regarding operationalisation of the Technology Bank for the LDCs as well as the impact of the Bank should be included in this cluster of activities.

4.6 Monitoring Financing for Development (including Climate Finance)

As mentioned earlier, one would need a separate, but complementing track for monitoring indicators derived from the outcome document of the FfD3. While a large number of FfD indicators are covered by the SDGs, but not all of them. The data requirements for monitoring the FfD3 are also partly different.

The major objective of the FfD monitoring would be tracking the financial flows in the region in terms of public domestic finance (taxes), public international finance (official development assistance – ODA), private domestic investment and foreign direct investment (FDI). Beyond financial flows, review of the FfD will entail analysing the trade patterns including export expansion, intra-regional trade and regional (sub-regional) trading blocks. Systemic issues having regional implications, e.g. illicit financial outflow from the developing countries should be a matter of special focus in this regard.

It is not yet obvious whether climate financing would be part of the FfD outcome document as the issue of “additionality” is still being debated. Whatsoever, given that a large number of countries

¹⁸http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Summary_RDTF.pdf

¹⁹<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1251escap.pdf>

²⁰Post-2015 intergovernmental negotiations (Means of Implementation and Global Partnership): Joint session with financing for development and post-2015 processes. 21-24 April 2015, New York.

²¹Post-2015 intergovernmental negotiations (Means of Implementation and Global Partnership): Joint session with financing for development and post-2015 processes. 21-24 April 2015, New York.

in Asia and Pacific are adversely affected by climate change, RMRM for the region has to track the relevant flows of climate finance. Such flows not only have to be distinguished in terms of their broad use, i.e. mitigation and adaptation, but also in terms of their effectiveness, i.e. usefulness for the affected communities and people. Understandably, this dimension of monitoring will also create additional challenge for relevant data generation.

4.7 Data Need and Statistical Capacity

The post-2015 international development agenda has put new and enhanced demands in every region in statistical offices to support a review mechanism geared to increased transparency and protection. The HLP report has called for a “data revolution” to address the new and enhanced demands for data and statistics. Reducing information gaps and improving statistical and analysis procedures are essential for constructing regional baselines as well as for monitoring subsequent progress. The final outcome document of the OWG (dated 19 July 2014) as the Revised Draft (dated 6 May 2015) of the Third Conference on Financing for Development (FfD3) also underscore the need to address the data and information needs and gaps at the regional level.

Strengthening national statistical system should be the prime focus in this regard. Particular attention has to be given to improve the quality and frequency of nation-wide surveys, e.g. Household Income and Expenditure Survey, Labour Force Survey and Health and Demographic Survey. Generating disaggregated data on a number of SDGs will be a particular challenge. Support for improving statistical capacity is particularly essential for low-income countries in Asia.

ESCAP’s Statistics Division along with the Statistical Institute for Asia and Pacific, an affiliate of ESCAP has to play a lead role in meeting the emerging data challenges. Expert group meetings, dialogues and alliance building will be necessary to identify the data gaps and chalk a roadmap to address them.

South-South cooperation as well as North-South Triangular cooperation could be one of the ways of meeting the data challenges. This may entail, among others, technical assistance, sharing of best practices and experience and joint engagement in the SDG reporting process.

The technical report issued by the UN Statistical Commission on development of an indicator framework for the post-2015 agenda has identified at least seven targets which will need regional data (Table 2).

The report has observed data for most of these regional targets are “difficult to obtain even with strong efforts.”

More can be done to enhance the ongoing and vibrant collaboration between and among countries in the region to strengthen statistics development. The region has some of the world’s most advanced national statistical systems. In addition, the diversity in the economic, social and cultural contexts in which national statistical systems operate lends the region to a rich array of practices and solutions to challenges in the national context. Opportunities of more South-South collaboration can be explored as countries with relatively weaker statistical capacity may benefit from sharing successful practices and solutions to common challenges. This would include collaboration at both regional and sub-regional levels. A clearinghouse on statistical solutions and good practices can be established under the auspices of ESCAP to facilitate such regional and sub-regional collaboration.

Regional Trust Fund for Data and Statistics. Generation of relevant data and statistics is an expensive undertaking. To underwrite the data production and statistical capacity building efforts in the post-2015 context, a dedicated regional trust fund may be created. A number of initiatives to fund data revolution are already emerging globally. For example, Trust Fund for Statistical Capacity Building (TFSCB), a multi-donor trust fund is being put in place to invest in the developing countries

Table 2: Indicators include Regional Matters for Post-2015 Development Agenda

Goal	Indicator No	Indicator	Rating
Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries	10.1.1	Measure income inequality using the Gini coefficient or Palma ratio, pre- and post-social transfers/tax , at global, regional and national level disaggregated by groups as defined above	AAA*
	10.1.2	Change in real disposable income and consumption by quintiles over time, at global, regional and national level	BAA†
Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	11.3.2	Cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants that implement urban and regional development plans integrating population projections and resource needs	BBB
	11.a.1	Cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants that implement urban and regional development plans integrating population projections and resource needs	CBB
Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development	14.c.2	Number of countries implementing either legally or programmatically the provisions set out in regional seas protocols	BBB
Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development	17.16.2	Classification and trajectory of the multistakeholder partnerships in developing countries in terms of: a) Nature of partnership, b) Region: Global, regional , c) Objectives: Sharing technology, expertise, etc. and d) Country type (where partnership is active)	CBB
	17.18.2	Number of countries that have formal institutional arrangements for the coordination of the compilation of official statistics (at international, national and regional level)	AAA

Source: UNSC (2015).

Note: Rating AAA= feasible, suitable and very relevant; BAA= only feasible with strong effort, but suitable and very relevant; BBB= only feasible with strong effort, in need for further discussion and somewhat relevant; Rating CBB, means difficult even with strong effort, in need for further discussion and somewhat relevant.

*and † indicate those indicator were evaluated on the feasibility of the additional proposed disaggregation beyond age and sex.

to produce and use statistics with an overall objective of effective policy making for development. However, none of these initiatives attach much importance to the regional dimensions of data revolution. Thus, ESCAP may take an initiative to create a regional endowment to underwrite production, management and use of data which are particularly needed to monitoring and follow-up regional targets and indicators of SDGs. A governance structure of the proposed Regional Trust Fund for Data and Structure may be thought of involving the member states, financial contributors, experts and representatives of other relevant bodies.

5. Concluding Observations

In conclusion, one would like to highlight six challenges facing the designing and delivery of an effective RMRM in Asia and the Pacific.

First, creating a niche for RMRM in the implementation architecture of the SDGs will be a challenge. As all the UN agencies and entities are gearing up to position themselves in the implementation process of the new agenda, the regional commissions will have to creatively carve out for themselves an exclusive area of intervention. Monitoring of RPG and agreed regional programmes of action are

obvious choices in this regard; but there are also a number of SDG targets and indicators where engagement of ESCAP is particularly needed.

Second, developing effective tools and instruments for result-oriented operationalisation of the RMRM will be another challenge. ESCAP will possibly have to fine tune some of its traditional monitoring methods, but it will also have to adopt new mechanisms for ensuring accountability of the delivery process. Creation of an independent expert body, if not a voluntary peer-review mechanism, needs to be seriously considered in this regard.

Third, creating necessary data and information-related capacity in relevant institutions will be the other challenge. ESCAP will have to definitely draw up a roadmap to meet the new demands for data and statistics in the context of assessing progress in implementation of SDGs.

Fourth, endowing RMRM with necessary resources – human, financial and institutional – will also be a challenge. Mobilisation of such resources in favour of a RMRM will demand concerted and targeted efforts on the part of ESCAP.

Fifth, one of the challenges will be the demonstration of leadership in taking the RMRM process forward. This has to be energetically done by the ESCAP Secretariat.

Sixth, ensuring requisite political support in favour of the RMRM and expanding popular participation in the new mechanism will be a challenging task too. To what extent the member states are willing to demonstrate their political commitment towards an RMRM will largely define the substance of the mechanism. Otherwise, credibility of the mechanism in the eyes of other stakeholders cannot be guaranteed.

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Launched in 2012, **Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals** (Southern Voice) is a network of 49 think tanks from Africa, Asia and Latin America, which was set up to serve as an open platform to contribute to the global discourse pertaining to the formation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the challenges of implementation, monitoring and mid-course review of the SDGs. *Southern Voice* addresses the existing 'knowledge asymmetry' in the global debates and 'participation deficit' of the developing countries by generating evidence-based knowledge, sharing policy experiences originating in the Global South, and disseminating this knowledge and experience among key stakeholders. *Southern Voice Occasional Papers* are based on research undertaken by members of the network as well as inputs received at various platforms of the initiative. The *Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)*, Bangladesh hosts the Secretariat of *Southern Voice*.



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