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Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6)

Twenty-seventh session

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Item 3 of the provisional agenda

International Conference on “Standards for the Sustainable Development Goals”

From commitment to action: Standards at work for the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Submitted by the secretariat

Mandate

The Working Party agreed at its 25th session to continue discussion on how it could further contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2015/2, para 11).

Summary

This document presents a proposal to strengthen the role of the Working Party as a convening platform for all relevant institutional partners to enhance the role of standards in the implementation of the United Nations “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

More in detail, this report discusses how different voluntary standards developed by standards setting and intergovernmental bodies can contribute to the implementation of Agenda 2030 as a general undertaking and to the realization of specific SDG Goals and Targets.

The report goes on to propose that the Working Party’s activities be restructured in 3 clusters: to be named: “Standards for Agenda 2030”, “Coherent regulatory frameworks for the SDGs”, and “Quality infrastructure for sustainable development” and that the name of the Working Party is changed to “Working Party on Inclusive Standards and Regulations for Sustainable Development”.

Both Members States and the Groups of Experts and initiatives under way under the umbrella of the Working Party are encouraged to consider these proposals for discussion

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with a view for adoption at the plenary.
 This document is for decision.

I. Introduction: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development

1. Agenda 2030 and the UN landmark agreements adopted in 2015 and 2016 are the defining agenda of the international community
2. The 2030 Agenda sets forth a “bold and transformative” plan of action to shift the world towards sustainable development. It is a universal commitment to renew action in all three dimensions of sustainability, namely social, environmental and economic.
3. Agenda 2030 is part of a broader development paradigm that builds around a set of landmark agreements adopted in 2015-16, including: the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Addis Abeba Agenda for Action (AAAA), the Paris Agreement and the UN/HABITAT New Urban Agenda.
4. Agenda 2030 consists of 17 goals and 169 targets for which a set of 232 indicators of achievement have been agreed to (see: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> and <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>)

Sustainable Development Goals¹

Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
Goal 2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
Goal 3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
Goal 4	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
Goal 5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
Goal 6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
Goal 8	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

¹ Document A/70/1, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
Goal 10	Reduce inequality within and among countries
Goal 11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
Goal 12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
Goal 13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Goal 14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
Goal 15	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
Goal 16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
Goal 17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Table 1. The 17 Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



Source: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>

II. The contribution of WP. 6 to the SDGs

5. The Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies remains the only intergovernmental body within the UN system whose terms of reference are

exclusively standards and standards related issues, including technical regulations, standardization, metrology, accreditation, conformity assessment, and market surveillance.

6. It is a convening platform open to governments, regulatory bodies and administrations, but also, standardization bodies, the private sector, and the wide range of bodies that make up a country's "quality infrastructure".

7. Historically, the Working Party has played an important advocacy role, promoting the use of standards by policy-makers and businesses, as tools for reducing technical barriers to trade, furthering innovation and competitiveness, promoting increased resilience to disasters, and fostering innovation and good governance.

8. After the adoption of Agenda 2030, the WP.6 becomes then naturally a platform for the promotion of standards as a tool for the implementation of UN-wide agendas, in particular the SDGs but also other key landmark UN Agreements.

9. More specifically, the Working Party:

- Furthers the integration of standards in regulatory frameworks;
- Promotes the use of standards by policy-makers and business;
- Supports the development of the institutional mechanisms and infrastructure.

10. Table 2 illustrates by giving examples of relevant ongoing initiatives of WP.6 that support specific goals and targets.

Table 2. Examples of how currently the WP. 6 contributes to the implementation of Agenda 2030

Goal	Target	WP. 6 initiatives
<p>5 GENDER EQUALITY</p> 	<p>5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life</p>	<p><u>WP. 6 Gender-responsive standards initiative</u></p> <p>This initiative aims at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the participation of women in standardization to give women a voice in economic governance nationally and internationally. • Ensuring that biological and cultural differences between genders are fully taken into account in standards development and implementation so as to contribute to the participation of women in all sectors of the economy
<p>8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</p> 	<p>8.a Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries</p>	<p><u>WP. 6 initiative on Education on Standards and Standards-Related Issues</u></p> <p>WP. 6 advocates for increased assistance to developing countries in standards development and implementation specifically as part of the Aid for Trade envelope. In particular, it works to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that standardization is included in education programmes and academic curricula and to increase public

		<p>knowledge about standardization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop training materials on standards and standards-receptive regulatory frameworks, including risk management in regulatory frameworks, conformity assessment and market surveillance.
<p>9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE</p> 	<p>9.1 Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure</p>	<p><u>WP.6. Group of Experts on Market Surveillance (MARS)</u></p> <p>Develops best practice for market surveillance authorities, with the aim of guiding their operations, from the planning of inspections to the recall of products, supporting the enforcement of technical regulations.</p> <p>In particular, the Group has developed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A recommendation on how to plan and carry out market surveillance activities, so as to ensure that products meet legal requirements • A recommendation on how to fight the proliferation of fake and non-compliant products • A recommendation on how to use risk management tools to maximize the effectiveness of enforcement. • a template for exchanging information among MSAs • a simple, broad system of information on market surveillance authorities and a list of Global and regional market surveillance networks so as to facilitate the exchange of information among enforcement authorities
<p>11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES</p>  <p>12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION</p> 	<p>11.5 By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters</p> <p>12.a Support developing countries to strengthen their scientific and technological capacity to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and</p>	<p><u>Group of Experts on Risk Management in Regulatory Frameworks provides</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the design of regulatory frameworks that are based on a consistent risk management process allowing countries to protect their citizens, without unnecessary obstacles to international trade and unwanted impact on the industry's competitiveness. • Research and advocacy on the role of standards in the prevention and management of disaster risks with contributions by IEC, ISO and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk

	production	Reduction (UNISDR) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support governments in the design and implementation of crisis management functions as part of the regulatory frameworks in all key economic sectors
17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS 	<p>17.11 Significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports by 2020</p> <p>Working towards common regulatory frameworks to minimize technical barriers to trade.</p>	<p><u>Creating common regulatory frameworks in specific sectors</u> (based on Recommendation L)</p> <p>WP. 6 works towards jointly defined common regulatory frameworks in specific sectors, based on international standards and internally recognized conformity assessment mechanisms.</p> <p>These common regulatory frameworks enable producers to move their products freely within the markets of participating countries, without additional controls by the country's designated authorities. This contributes to increase the participation of SMEs, developing countries and countries with economies in transition in international trade</p> <p>Activities have been particularly successful in the fields of equipment for explosive environments and earth-moving machinery</p> <p>Given sufficient resources, this experience could usefully be replicated in other sectors that are of key importance to addressing sustainable development issues.</p>

III. The WP. 6 as a forum to progress the role of standards in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

11. As the table above shows, the UNECE Working Party on "Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies" contributes to a very large number of goals and targets, in all three areas of sustainable development, namely economic development, societal equity and environmental sustainability.

12. The adoption of the Agenda 2030 offers an important occasion to the WP.6 to rebrand and refocus its activities and become an effective convening platform for policy makers and standardization bodies in identifying and progressing policy actions that are needed to further the use of standards in the implementation of Agenda 2030.

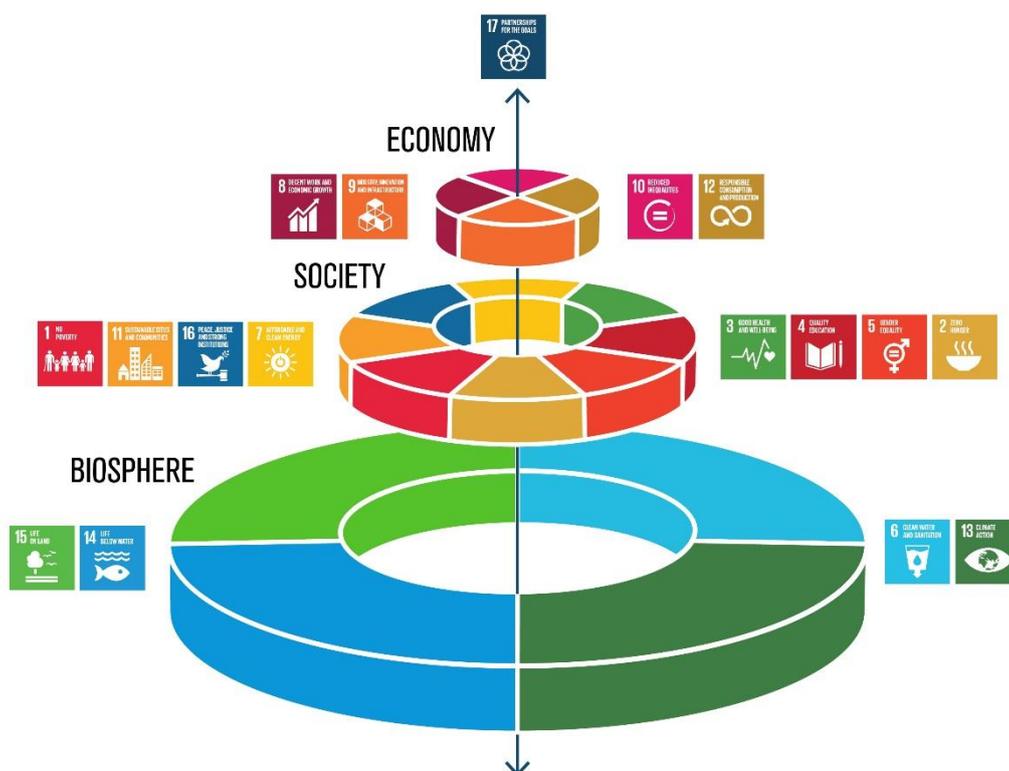
13. To do that effectively, this document provides an overview of the multi-layered impact of standards to the realization of the SDGs.

14. Given the cross-cutting nature of the topic of standardization, a comprehensive overview of all relevant standards would be beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, what follows is an illustrative list of examples taken from all kinds of standardization bodies and all sectors.

15. Agenda 2030 presents a holistic plan of action in which environmental, social, and economic development are an interconnected undertaking. Society operates within planetary boundaries in order to achieve economic prosperity for all. The achievement of each goal is dependent on many others: for example, eradicating poverty (SDG 1) and zero hunger (SDG 2) requires gender equality (SDG 5), decent jobs (SDG 8) and reduced inequality (SDG 10).

16. Keeping within this logic, let us see how standards contribute to the different layers of the “sustainability pie”: environmental sustainability (the biosphere), societal equity (society) and the economy.

Fig. 1 The 17 Interlinked goals of Agenda 2030



Graphics by Jenker Lukman/Azote

Source: <http://www.stockholmresilience.org/>

a. Examples of standards contributing to environmental conservation



17. Voluntary national and international standards support the achievement of the environmental part of the 2030 Agenda in different ways.

18. Some standards – like ISO 26000 – are cross cutting and “provide guidance to all types of organizations, regardless of their size or location, on (..) integrating, implementing and promoting socially responsible behavior throughout the organization and, through its policies and practices, within its sphere of influence”.²

19. Some others have become familiar names to the general public through their eco-labels. For example:

- the Marine Stewardship Council “MSC” eco-label supports sustainable fishing practices by sensitizing consumers about the impact of their choices on the health of the oceans, creating rewards for producers who base their catch on sustainable practices (Goal 14);
- the FSC Forest Management Certification provides assurance that a specific area of forest is being managed in line with codified best practice. It is widely used in sectors such as furnishing, publishing and paper (Goal 15).

20. Other standards still are applied across different industries to monitor, assess and address the impact of human activity on the environment. For example:

- standards developed by the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on energy-efficient pumps – for example - are indispensable in making fresh water available to all and allowing for the effective treatment of wastewater, contributing to reduce pollution of all bodies of water (Goals 6, 14 and 15);
- standards such as ISO 14064 and ISO 14065 lay out an internationally agreed framework to measure GHG emissions and to verify industry reports (Goal 13);
- the widely applied ISO 14001:2015 standard guides organizations in setting up effective environmental management systems allowing for environmental impact to be measured and improved (Goal 15).

21. Across the board, a large number of environmental norms help spread good practice and supporting the uptake of innovative and resource-saving products and equipment.

² <https://www.iso.org/iso-26000-social-responsibility.html>

22. Additionally, standards enhance the stability of operations, reducing the risks of accidents preventing possible environmental damage and loss of human lives. They provide a framework that facilitates compliance with applicable local and national laws and assurance against the requirements of all relevant stakeholders.

b. Examples of standards contributing to societal well being



23. Examples of standards which are particularly relevant to the achievement of specific goals include:

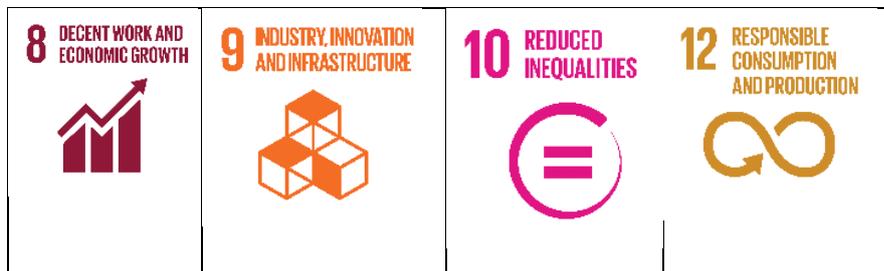
- Agricultural quality standards – such as those developed by UNECE– contribute to curb poverty by improving market access for farmers, including small scale farmers and improving consumers access to safe and nutritious food (Goal 1 & 2);
- Electrotechnical standards ensure the safety and dependability of core infrastructure projects such as wind farms and smart grids, promote energy efficiency and the transition to modern energy services and make millions of consumer appliances reliable and interoperable (Goal 7);
- Standards are a common universal language that allows communities to prepare for and more quickly recover from disasters, such as hurricanes, extreme cold or heat, floods and earthquakes (Targets 11.5 and 1.5);
- International standards such as those developed by IEC allow the rapid introduction of new medical devices that meet the expectations of citizens and regulators on safety, effectiveness and reliability (Goal 3);
- Standards lay out a universal language that supports the integrated, interconnected systems upon which cities depend to meet the ever more complex needs of a growing urban population (Goal 11).

24. In addition to target-specific and goal-specific relevance, standards play a key role in supporting a distributed governance model that empowers all collectives and communities in taking action in their respective fields of influence, promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status (Goal 10.2 and 10.3) .

25. By relying on standards developed in consultation with the industry, affords policy-makers, confronted with shrinking public budgets, the possibility of lowering the costs of

developing and enforcing regulations, without compromising on the safe management of their country's resources and the well-being of their populations (Goal 16).

c. Examples of standards contributing to economic prosperity



26. Perhaps the most obvious benefit of standards is that they drive industry competitiveness, sustain economic growth, and help achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation.

27. A study published by the French national standards body (AFNOR) finds that voluntary standards added €15 billion to the French economy or 0.81% of its GDP (2013 data). A study of the New Zealand economy similarly puts economic benefits of standardization to about 1% of GDP³

28. Standards are developed by world-class experts in their respective fields. They allow managers to tap into a reservoir of technological know-how and knowledge in a form that can be put to immediate use on the factory floor. This includes knowledge that allows developing innovative products and make more efficient use of resources in production and in consumption (Goal 9 and 12).

29. As one example, the ISO 9001 standard on quality management is possibly the most widely implemented of all standards, with more than a million valid certificates (2015 data). Research carried out in Malaysia shows a positive and significant correlation between the implementation ISO 9000 quality management standards and the country's GDP growth (Goal 8).⁴

³ https://www.iso.org/files/live/sites/isoorg/files/archive/pdf/en/bottom_line.pdf
<https://marketing.afnor.org/Etude/ImpactEconomieNormalisation>
<https://www.standards.govt.nz/news/the-economic-benefits-of-standardisation-to-new-zealand/>

⁴ https://www.iso.org/files/live/sites/isoorg/files/standards/conformity_assessment/certification/doc/survey_executive-summary.pdf and
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259578944_The_Relationship_between_Iso_9000_and_Economic_Growth_in_Malaysia

d. Examples of standards contributing to the global partnership for the Goals

17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



30. Standards implementation increases access to international markets, as large multi-national corporations base their contracts to first and second tier suppliers on product standards, and often, also on their adherence to common process standards.

31. Additionally, international standards contribute to reduce technical and procedural barriers to trade and minimizing transaction costs by helping the transition from country-specific specifications to globally applicable ones.

32. In these and other ways, standards are recognized as the foundation of international trade and play a key role in supporting targets 17.10 “promote a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system” and 17.11 “increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries’ share of global exports by 2020”.

33. Additionally, standards contribute to the transfer of technology supporting the achievement of targets 17.6 and 17.7.

IV. Standards as part of a regulatory framework that supports the SDGs

34. To sum up, standards of all kinds can be mapped against all of the seventeen goals. They help achieve specific targets. They also more generally support companies and communities in conceiving and bringing to the market cleaner and more energy-efficient products, in monitoring and improving the quality and reliability of production processes, as well as in reducing energy and carbon footprint and ensuring that resources are used responsibly and are preserved for future generations.

35. This context provides a vast background for the activities of the Working Party, which under its present mandate could engage in any and all of the areas outlined above.

36. At the same time, to make best use of scarce resources, the Working Party should capitalize on its strengths, particularly, its unique membership and the wide range of stakeholders that contribute to its activities.

37. As explained above, the WP. 6 stakeholders are representatives of regulatory and policy bodies and also representatives of the private sector, standards bodies and quality infrastructure institutions.

38. The WP. 6 has provided an effective interface among these different stakeholders. For example, the WP. 6 activities in support of the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Action bring together local authorities, central governments, civil society representatives as well as standardization bodies. They work to promote standards as a way to prevent, manage and respond to disruptions from natural hazards by identifying relevant standards, promoting their implementation, and ensuring that they are relevant for the implementation of global mandates.

39. This experience has shown that while in many cases, the industry's spontaneous adoption of voluntary standards will help bring about desired policy outcomes, in others, instead, regulatory or non-regulatory actions by public authorities are needed to complement voluntary norms, and to ensure and monitor compliance.

40. Building on this example, a second key role for the WP. 6 is then to develop best practice on the use of standards in regulatory and policy contexts.

41. Both regulatory enforcement and standards implementation depend upon a complex system called "national quality infrastructure", which includes an array of private and public sector bodies, i.e. metrology institutions, accreditation and conformity assessment bodies, as well as test houses and laboratories.

42. These institutions are essential in ensuring transition towards a sustainable pattern of development. Taking as an example environmental emissions without the ability to perform adequate tests, no country can enforce its regulations and monitor over time the progress towards the achievement of relevant targets under goals 13, 14 and 15.

43. Currently, even in some of the most advanced countries in the UNECE region, enforcement authorities and the whole quality infrastructure system is severely underfunded. Markets across the UNECE are flooded with products that do not comply with regulations in force, and that are not responsibly produced. In these circumstances, investing in a better and more sustainable future becomes an impossible task for those businesses that care, but that are unable to compete against those that do not respect the same rules and do not take the same engagements.

44. For this reason, a third key role of the WP. 6 is supporting quality infrastructure institutions, especially in the context of enforcement.

45. While standards are important, their value for sustainable development ultimately depends on their being embedded into regulatory and policy frameworks that define public objectives, identify risks that may prevent their achievement, and devise appropriate solutions for their achievement.

V. Rebranding and refocusing: a proposal

46. In the months and years to come, the Working Party should focus its contribution to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development more narrowly to enhance its impact.

47. To summarize, the Working Party has a key role to play in three large action areas:

- **To develop approaches for using standards as tools for achieving the Goals of the 2030 Development Agenda:** this will aim at supporting the participation of different standardization bodies with their respective business models in the discussions on the development and implementation of all global mandates and supporting a participatory process for the development of standards that are needed;
- **To develop coherent regulatory frameworks that address risk and hazards and support the achievement of the SDGs:** this will aim at consolidating the best practice developed so far for an optimal interface between standards bodies and policy-makers and regulators, including the development of standards-receptive regulatory frameworks that are risk based.
- **To develop best practice recommendations for consolidating the required quality control and quality assurance infrastructure, especially in the context**

of enforcement: This will also include developing approaches for a viable funding of the institutions including through public private partnership approaches.

48. Under this model, the current activities of the Working Party would temporarily continue to operate under the umbrella of the existing initiatives and teams of experts, with a view to transition to a more structured and coherent format. Table 2 presents a possible interface between the current and projected structure of the Working Party's activities.

<i>Cluster</i>	<i>Activities & projects</i>	<i>Goals</i>
Standards for Agenda 2030	Gender-responsive standards Education on standards and standards-related issues	Goal 8a , 9.1
Coherent regulatory frameworks for the SDGs	Group of Experts on Risk Management in Regulatory Frameworks Initiative for safe and reliable facilities in the "Ex" sector	Goal 11 & 12
Quality infrastructure for sustainable development	MARS Group	Goal 8a , 9.1

49. The Bureau, delegates, and teams of experts active under the Working Party are encouraged to reflect on their respective contributions to the three priorities sketched out above as they report to the Plenary.

50. To reflect this new direction for the activities of the Working Party, the Secretariat proposes that the WP. 6 changes its name to "Working Party on Inclusive Standards and Regulations for Sustainable Development".

51. The Secretariat also proposes the establishment of a Advisory Board, composed, in addition to the Bureau, of representatives of standardization bodies, the civil society, the private sector, as well as national and international quality infrastructure institutions. The Board would be responsible for developing approaches for selected projects that would be developed under the Working Party's three clusters, giving a timeline for their achievement and supporting and monitoring their activities. The Advisory Board would meet virtually two times a year. The Bureau members would be de facto members of the Advisory Board.

52. Delegations are invited to express their opinions on these proposals and if appropriate present alternative proposals up to and during the annual session.

VI. Conclusion

53. Standards have a largely untapped potential for the realization of Agenda 2030 in its three dimensions. Their uptake is key to the achievement to numerous aspects and targets of all of the 17 Goals.

54. Taking this into account, the role of the WP. 6 – as the only intergovernmental body in the UN system that has standards-related issues at the core of its mandate – has an important role to play.

55. The Secretariat proposes that the WP. 6 changes its name to “Working Party on Inclusive Standards and Regulations for Sustainable Development”.

56. The Secretariat additionally proposes that the Working Party’s activities be restructured in 3 clusters: to be named: “Standards for Agenda 2030”, “Coherent regulatory frameworks for the SDGs”, and “Quality infrastructure for sustainable development”.

57. Finally, the Secretariat proposes the establishment of an Advisory Board.

58. It hereby invites delegations to:

- Express their opinions on these proposals and present alternative proposals up to and during the annual session;
- Invites the groups of experts, advisory groups, and initiatives to reflect on the direction of their ongoing and future activities so as to ensure that their contribution to the achievement of Agenda 2030 is upheld and communicated with enhanced clarity.
