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INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: PROSPECTS FOR
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

(Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda)

**ASIA AND THE PACIFIC INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:
PROSPECTS FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: SUMMARY**

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

In recent decades, the Asian and Pacific region as a whole has made considerable progress in almost all areas of social development. The adoption by governments of the region in 1991 of the Social Development Strategy for the ESCAP Region Towards the Year 2000 and Beyond and of the 1994 Manila Declaration on the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region provided an impetus to this progress. The endorsement by these governments of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and World Programme of Action gave a further boost to social development efforts. At the same time, social progress has been extremely uneven. Major advances have been made in some countries and on some issues, but the situation remains stagnant or is deteriorating in others. This unevenness underscores the need for the region not only to continue its efforts to promote the well-being of all of its people but also to prioritize for attention the provision of assistance to the less developed countries and regions, as well as to the poor and other disadvantaged and vulnerable population groups, while enhancing their capabilities and promoting their full participation in all of society's activities. In order to attain their respective social development objectives for the early part of the twenty-first century, governments of the region need to address those issues and areas that were largely neglected in current development programmes, as well as newly emerging issues which need priority attention.

Recognizing the increasing importance of social development issues confronting its members and the need for action-oriented policy to address those issues, the Commission decided that the fifty-fourth session should focus on the region's prospects for social development into the twenty-first century. The secretariat has prepared a theme study entitled, *Asia and the Pacific into the Twenty-first Century: Prospects for Social Development* and the present document highlights the main findings of that study.

The first chapter presents an overview of the prospects for social development into the twenty-first century, covering the key social issues facing the region including poverty alleviation, social protection, education and health for all and people's participation. Chapter II covers the major trends and issues, and prospects for specific population groups. The first part of the chapter provides the demographic background for the ensuing discussions on issues and policy approaches relating to the poor, youth, older persons, women and disabled persons. Chapter III discusses policies in six areas which could enhance social development prospects in the region: (a) promoting an enabling environment, including promoting participation and equity, social concern and security, and good governance; (b) accelerating poverty alleviation, employment generation and social integration; (c) building capacities; (d) strengthening families and communities; (e) promoting partnerships; and (f) regional support. The conclusion contains proposals on some regional cooperation modalities and on the role of ESCAP in promoting the acceleration of the social development process.

The Commission may wish to address the priority issues in social development towards the twenty-first century through the adoption of regional support measures oriented to the forging of a caring and cohesive society. Particular attention should be given to issues relating to poverty alleviation, employment generation and social integration; social services provision to the poor; reproductive health of youth; health, income security and care-giving for older persons; narrowing the gender gap in literacy and education, employment and wages; and ensuring that persons with disabilities can live a full and active life in a housing and living environment within which they can function effectively, at a workplace where they are not discriminated against, and in a society which accepts them.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission, at its fifty-third session, decided that the theme topic for the fifty-fourth session should focus on the prospects for social development of the Asian and Pacific region into the twenty-first century. This presented an opportunity for the Commission to review progress in social development in the region against the agendas adopted by its members in the 1994 Manila Declaration on the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region (known as the regional Social Development Agenda) and by the World Summit for Social Development in the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action, and to identify the priority issues requiring attention. The secretariat has prepared a theme study entitled, *Asia and the Pacific into the Twenty-first Century: Prospects for Social Development* and the present document summarizes that study.
2. The first chapter presents a regional overview of the prospects for social development into the twenty-first century, covering the key social issues facing the region including poverty alleviation, social protection, education and health for all, and people's participation. Chapter II covers the major trends and issues, and prospects for specific population groups. The first part of the chapter provides the demographic background for the ensuing discussions on issues and policy approaches relating to the poor, youth, older persons, women and disabled persons. Chapter III discusses policies which could enhance social development prospects in the region and is followed by a concluding chapter which discusses the possible role of ESCAP in supporting the acceleration of the social development process.

I. PROSPECTS FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: A REGIONAL OVERVIEW

3. The region as a whole has made considerable progress in almost all areas of social development, as well as, and to a significant degree because of, the remarkable progress in economic development. All indicators of social well-being have shown significant improvements in recent decades. At the same time, progress has in many cases slowed in recent years, suggesting the need for renewed efforts to attend to those issues and areas that remain largely neglected in development efforts. Furthermore, little or no attention to some key policy and institutional issues may have contributed either to the current financial crisis and related social consequences that some countries are currently facing or to the difficulties that they are experiencing in the recovery process. Whatever the causal relationship, there are a number of situations that adversely affect, and may even set back, social progress, and a number of social development issues will need to be more assiduously addressed.
4. Social development progress in the region has been extremely uneven. Major advances have been made in some countries and on some issue areas, whereas the situation remains stagnant or is deteriorating in others. This unevenness underscores the need for the region to strengthen efforts to

assist the poor people and the less developed countries, and for the Commission to prioritize for attention those issues where the needs are greatest, with particular reference to disadvantaged and vulnerable population groups.

5. The regional experience suggests that, notwithstanding the expressed commitment to social development, the action measures taken have not been as strong as the situation requires. The focus remains predominantly on economic development even though there is widespread recognition that success in economic development does not necessarily enhance the social development prospects or the overall quality of life for all population sectors. There is an inadequate focus on capability-building, strengthening of local authority, families and communities, resource mobilization and targeting of programmes to accelerate social development. Furthermore, there is a regionwide need to provide an enabling environment conducive to social progress.

6. The consequences of the lack of adequate focus in these areas are, in general terms, that poverty rates in much of the region are declining very slowly, if at all; that a wide range of population groups, from persons with disabilities to some categories of migrants, continue to suffer social and economic exclusion; and that a considerable part of the region's human resources remain underdeveloped. Moreover, the region's environment continues to deteriorate, with few indications of significant improvement despite various regional and global commitments to stem the process of environmental degradation.

7. In evaluating their prospects for social development into the next century, countries of the region need to consider changes in the socio-economic, political and technological framework and their respective needs to modify or adapt to these changes. These include the following: the impact of economic liberalization and globalization processes; the demographic changes as fertility rates decrease and the numbers of older persons and their proportions rise dramatically in many populations; the rapid rate of population growth in urban areas; the high levels of mobility of capital and labour; the tremendous advances in science and technology; and the changes in family and community structures. The issues which stem from these very pronounced trends are many and complex but all have the capacity to affect social development prospects adversely unless they are addressed appropriately at policy and programme levels.

8. Along with increased economic liberalization and globalization, the end of the cold war has broken the ground not only for a more socio-liberal climate but also for the expansion of participatory democracy. Furthermore, it could be assumed that more resources could be diverted from the military to, particularly, the social development arena. The global trend towards participatory democracy reflects a heightened recognition of and increasing demand for (a) social justice and equality for all people and the universality of their rights as human beings; (b) the rights and obligation of people to participate, as individuals and collectively, in decision-making affecting their lives; and (c) the right and freedom of people to pursue happiness and well-being as defined and determined by themselves. This

trend signifies that development concerns have gone beyond merely satisfying people's physical and material needs. They include enabling them to participate in ways consistent with their sense of well-being and dignity.

9. Accompanying this trend, there has been strong evidence in the region of the proliferation of civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations, including community-based and self-help organizations. There has also been ample evidence of civil strife and conflicts among groups, including between various ethnic, religious and geographic groups as each strives for socio-political space. Many of these conflicts are deep-rooted in tradition and history, forwarded to the present and engender real or perceived threats to their respective roles and status. Such conditions generate increased possibilities of conflicts and socio-economic destabilization and further impoverish people, especially where governments seem unable to provide the enabling environment for enhancing social justice, equality and participation.

10. There has been inconclusive evidence on the overall progress in the region in relation to the three major social development challenges identified in the mid-1990s: poverty, unemployment and underemployment, and inadequate levels of social integration. While the complexity of these three core issues is acknowledged, as well as their importance, they remain unresolved in many countries. It seems clear that all three will continue to be major concerns for the early decades of the next century, and will therefore require stronger commitments from nations and the region.

11. Finally, however, there are some hopeful signs for future prospects. In comparison with the past, there is today a far greater awareness of the importance of good governance, an increase in the extent of democratization, and there are significant attempts to reform various aspects of governance. The higher levels of people's participation reflect higher levels of awareness of a range of social development issues, and many aspects of civil society have been strengthened. These trends, especially if the momentum can be sustained, augur well for social development prospects into the next century. These trends should enable the region and its members to focus more effectively on the major outstanding needs with which the region is confronted.

II. MAJOR SOCIAL TRENDS AND PROSPECTS FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS

A. Demographic trends and their implications

12. The demographic situation in the region is a changing one and, while the changes are not uniform across the region, they carry significant implications for social development prospects into the twenty-first century.

13. While the average annual rate of population growth is declining in the region, the growth rate remains high in South and South-West Asia, and particularly so in the region's least developed countries. This is therefore continuing to aggravate poverty and perpetuate other social conditions and needs such as those relating to the high dependency ratios from the large numbers of children and youth

in the population. In other parts of the region, the low to very low growth rates, together with higher life expectancy figures, are also changing the population profiles of some countries. In these countries the [ageing] population structure will see a significant change in the dependency ratio as the labour force ceases to expand while the number of older persons increases.

14. There is a discernible impact of economic trends, population mobility and changes in social attitudes on family structure and functioning. The nature of the family is changing quickly in many countries, making it very difficult for the family to perform the same roles that it performed in the past. This has several implications for social development, including the provision of support generally, and the care of dependants and the socialization of young people, in particular. In all such areas, the family will require strengthening and alternative support services will need to be developed.

15. The related phenomena of migration and urbanization provide some interesting trends. While the causes and nature of existing migration patterns are varied and the implications differ across countries, it is clear that the mobility of the region's population is increasing, with many implications for, in particular, labour policy, social integration and the environment. Two outcomes of increasing migration are the high levels of urbanization, including the clear trend towards very large cities, and the significant movement of labour within and across countries.

16. Three points may be emphasized: migration and urbanization are, to a significant degree, inevitable and will continue; migration and urbanization will have profound economic, social and ultimately political consequences; and migration and urbanization can be and need to be managed by a range of policies so as to maximize their beneficial aspects and minimize potentially adverse effects on social development.

B. Prospects for poverty alleviation

17. Of all the major social development commitments of the 1990s, none is more important than that of poverty alleviation. Despite the fact that poverty alleviation has been a major commitment in recent years and despite major improvements in some countries, poverty persists in the region and is even growing, in terms of absolute numbers, in some areas. Although poverty rates have declined throughout the region, the incidence of poverty provides a glaring example of social development failure in the region. The World Bank placed the number of poor in the region at more than one billion in 1993, in a total regional population of about 3.5 billion - a totally unacceptable situation in a region of tremendous economic growth and great potential.

18. There are variations in poverty levels between subregions and countries in the region, while disparities in poverty levels within some countries have been increasing at certain periods of time. Poverty in the region is often associated with who one is and where one lives. The majority of the poor are from rural areas, unemployed, landless labourers, small fishermen, women, persons with disabilities, members of indigenous minority groups and older persons. Increasingly, poverty is also becoming an

urgent concern in the urban communities, especially those which lack the adequate infrastructure and access to social services to keep pace with the needs of the fast population growth. The disparities in the poverty figures are a reflection of a wide range of non-poverty-related development concerns in the region.

19. The significance of gender, ethnic and age affiliations as correlates of poverty is recognized. The prevalence of deep-rooted traditions and biases continues to impede progress in poverty alleviation. The impoverishment of women is particularly significant as research has indicated that health and educational achievements of women have an important impact on family functioning and levels of achievement. Many of the economic policies prevalent in recent times have both intensified and created poverty. Inflation, in particular, has a devastating impact on the poor.

20. Poverty is associated closely with several other phenomena. The high levels of unemployment, ill health, including the resurgence of communicable diseases and the high level of HIV/AIDS infection, the lack of social protection and safety nets, the deterioration of the physical environment and inadequate development management all result in higher levels of poverty. While these trends can be addressed, one phenomenon which cannot be addressed directly and definitively is the poverty impact of natural disasters.

21. Clearly, the causes of poverty are many and the victims of poverty are an extremely diverse population. Complex though it may be, the commitment to alleviate, if not eradicate, poverty must remain the major commitment well into the twenty-first century. The prospects for poverty alleviation will vary for different subregions and countries and depend to a large extent on the social mobilization and empowerment of the poor themselves in the development process, in addition to strong multisectoral and integrated policy measures that enhance responsible governance, social equity and decentralized authority and build technical and resource capacities through partnerships with the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society.

C. Prospects for youth

22. Youth constitute one fifth of the region's population but their importance is much greater than this proportion suggests in that the future prospects of social development will very much be dependent on how nations respond to the needs of youth.

23. Those needs relate to education, employment, health and the social participation of youth. Running across all four areas, however, is the need to focus on the additional difficulties being confronted by girls and young women, and youth in rural areas who constitute a high proportion of youth in the region. They are also among the region's most disadvantaged and vulnerable persons. This overall situation demands a concerted effort to enhance the future prospects of youth, especially when the issues identified in each of the four areas of focus are also taken into account.

24. In the area of education, it is alarming to note that primary school enrolment levels remain low

in the poorer countries of the region, and especially for girls. This problem will be a major challenge well into the next century. The repercussions of low primary school enrolment figures flow through into low literacy rates, diminished opportunities for higher education and vocational training and employment, and ultimately into the poor quality of adult performance.

25. There continues to be concern about the quality of education. In an era of rapid technological, economic and social change, education is vital for the preparation of young people for all aspects of life. Regrettably, in many countries, the educational systems and curricula tend to lag behind and fail to meet the specific national situations and requirements to promote the integration of youth in development and their participation in the global community processes.

26. Employment is a key issue for youth since unemployment levels are on average four times higher than for non-youth. While the basic problem is a shortage of employment opportunities, unemployment hits rural and less educated youth hardest. Not only does this unemployment represent an enormous waste of human resources, but it can have devastating effects on the self-esteem and general development of young people. In certain circumstances, it can also constitute a threat to social integration.

27. The health issues of concern to youth relate to reproductive health and sexuality, on the grounds that the needs in these areas are dominant and are likely to continue to be so for some time. More young people are sexually active today than in the past, and the dangers of being without adequate preparation are high. Yet, the continuing trend is still to shy away from sex education and from frank and open discussion of issues like abortion, sexually-transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

28. The above situation is aggravated by what appear to be rising levels of sexual abuse and exploitation of young people: incest, rape, trafficking, pornography and prostitution. The fact that young people are increasingly in danger from adults around them makes their understanding of the dangers, as well as their protection, all the more important.

29. Finally, the economic, social and political participation of youth is important for youth and society. Prevailing trends affecting the well-being of youth make it all the more important that youth are enabled to participate fully in the society which is in effect determining their well-being now and into the future. Young people, as a positive force in the creation of society's future, need to be given opportunities and support to realize their aspirations.

D. Prospects for older persons

30. As noted above, many countries in the region are experiencing rapid population ageing, as a result of a combination of several factors. Along with this trend, other changes in society are impacting on the living situation and well-being of older persons, so that the net result is that many countries in the region now have growing populations of older persons whose general condition is more precarious than in the past.

31. In the context of modernization and rapid social changes, the social status of older persons is fast declining. Moreover, older persons experience increasing significant social isolation and low levels of self-esteem. More effort will be required to enable older persons to discover their place in modern society as full participants if their prospects in development are to be assured.

32. A key issue relating to older persons is the significant increase in the need for and cost of health care as people grow older. Health maintenance is already a formidable task for many countries, and an ageing population will place even greater pressures on what often remains an inadequate system.

33. Health maintenance for older persons themselves, however, is but one aspect of a serious income security issue. With less family care available to older persons generally, and with most people in the region having little possibility of making financial provision for their later years, countries will face an escalating need for social security provision. A substantial share of the social security bill will, for some considerable time, have to be funded by the public sector from taxation. Increasingly, however, countries will need to seek out an equitable and feasible solution to this problem.

34. Finally, as the number of "old-old" persons increases, the importance of the provision of care will increase dramatically. With less traditional care available, the need to provide care-giving services to older persons in their own homes, especially where they are living alone, and in various types of institutions will escalate. Such care is labour-intensive and skilled, and therefore costly to provide. It tends to be poorly paid and relatively unpopular work, so that appropriate staff are often difficult to recruit. The provision of care for those of an advanced age could well reach crisis proportions in some countries.

35. Issues relating to older persons represent a comparatively recent concern of social development in the region, but one that will be of increasing priority in the twenty-first century.

E. Prospects for women

36. The situation of women has improved considerably in recent decades, but problems remain in many areas. While equality, including gender equality, is a key goal of social development, it has proved to be a difficult goal to achieve. The gender gap in literacy and education remains very high, as it also does in relation to wages. Unemployment rates of women remain in most countries far higher than those of men. In some countries, legal and customary barriers still preclude women's full participation in economic and public life. Finally, labour laws and social policies often neglect working women's unique need to balance productive activities and reproductive responsibilities.

37. As a result of the lack of gender equality in much of the region, women are more often living in poverty than men, more often in the informal economy, more financially vulnerable and more likely to be adversely affected by globalization trends. Hence, the social development needs of women, virtually across the board, remain greater than those of men.

38. In addition to the continuing impact of gender inequality, other emerging trends affecting women require the attention of policy makers. Generally, women are marrying later, outliving men, and living alone after divorce or widowhood. As a result, there has been a significant increase in female-headed households, and these tend to be poorer than male-headed households and financially more vulnerable. The plight of older women and rural women living alone is a major one.

39. In much of the region, women's access to economic and political decision-making is very limited, and most countries in the region rank fairly low on women's empowerment measures. This is highly significant in itself, but also a major reason for a significant lack of progress in many other areas. In this regard, the trend towards a larger and more active network of women's movements to form and work for greater empowerment should have positive effects.

40. As the societies in the region move into the twenty-first century, the principal challenges in the prospects for women and social development are to improve gender equality, women's health, increase access to schooling, raise women's employability and skills, and provide child care. On current indications, however, improvements in these areas will depend to a large extent on an improvement in respect of women's empowerment.

F. Prospects for persons with disabilities

41. All the indications are that the twenty-first century will see an even higher prevalence of persons with disability. Those born with disabilities will be more likely to survive; modern life generates disabilities through accident rates and high levels of stress; and an ageing population adds to the number of persons with disabilities.

42. At the same time, it is clear that the region still has a long way to go in ensuring that persons with disabilities can live a full and active life. The creation of a housing and living environment within which persons with disabilities can function effectively, at a workplace where they are not discriminated against, and in a society which accepts them are well-recognized goals but still far from attainment across the region.

43. However, it should be emphasized that much has been accomplished and many measures for equalization have been introduced. Many initiatives undertaken by persons with disabilities themselves, individually or as a group, are a major reason for these achievements, and their work augurs well for the future.

44. Many options are now available to assist persons with various forms of disability. Recent developments in technology have opened up whole worlds to them, and the onus is now on governments to adapt these innovations in cost-effective ways for local use. Recent developments in architecture and urban planning have demonstrated how living environments can be made more accessible and become places within which persons with disabilities can function effectively. Again, it will take political commitment to ensure that new urban developments and renovations incorporate this knowledge.

45. The well-being of persons with disabilities can be enhanced in many ways. Behind all such initiatives, however, several steps are essential. First, the disability situation must be known and understood, and this calls for accurate data collection. Second, attitudes towards persons with disabilities must change so that they are viewed in terms of their potential as much as anyone else is. Third, a commitment is needed to undertake those changes required in society to enable persons with disability to enjoy a full life.

46. Finally, the preventive aspects of addressing disabilities should be emphasized. If, for example, land mines were all cleared, the high level of road accidents brought down, nutrition-related disabilities prevented through the provision of better nutrition, and safe and healthy environments created for people to live and work, the rates of disability could be dramatically reduced. While societies work towards that as a reality, persons with disabilities must be given an equal chance to participate in social development.

III. POLICIES TO ENHANCE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS

47. There are numerous policy options for most of the many issues discussed above. It should be emphasized that it is incumbent on national governments to determine the best option in their circumstances. The need to develop policies appropriate to the context should be stressed in relation to issues such as the provision of income security for older persons, urban planning, migration flows and the provision of family support programmes.

48. In addition to the need to develop country-specific policies and programmes, various essential aspects of social development should be focused upon if prospects for the future are to be improved. These policy recommendations run across the range of issues discussed, and are both crucial and universal aspects of social development. Without an improvement in the extent to which these aspects are addressed, policies directed at specific issues will be less effective. Moreover, without attention being paid to these aspects of social development, achievements in the area of economic development will not improve the social development prospects of large proportions of the population of many countries in the region.

49. The following policy areas of social development emerge as of central importance.

A. Promoting an enabling environment

50. Many population groups have a demonstrated need for an enabling environment if they are to develop their capacities and be able to contribute to and benefit from development. The development process of various population groups requires an environment that provides them with a range of opportunities for education, skill development and development of a range of life skills. They need to feel accepted into society and be given opportunities to participate meaningfully within it. Thus, youth require employment opportunities to develop as adults, and an environment within which their physical,

social, spiritual and creative dimensions can grow in a healthy and safe context. Without this environment, youth can experience much that is negative in their development and which will have adverse effects on society at large.

51. Women need to experience an environment in which they have equality with men, a recognition of their gender-specific roles in society and the chance to make their contribution as women to society's ongoing development.

52. Similarly, people with disabilities require an environment in which they are accepted as people, their particular disabilities understood and accommodated within all areas of social life. They and older persons should be given the opportunities to be productive and contributing members of society to the fullest extent.

53. While the situations of each of these three population groups are quite distinct, their need for an enabling environment is typical of the need of all population groups. This reinforces the point that social development is about the development of societies in which all of its diverse members can enjoy a reasonable level of well-being. The World Summit for Social Development emphasized this dimension of social development.

54. All members of society require an enabling environment for them to maximize their potential as participants and beneficiaries of social and economic activities of the community. Policies therefore have to favour the provision of such features as peace and harmony within and among individuals, families, communities and states; respect for the dignity and rights of the individual; and a framework of sustained and equitable development.

55. In regard to the latter, it is incumbent upon governments to ensure a sustained and accelerated growth rate to sustain improvements in the quality of life of all of the people. According to the regional Social Development Agenda, this will include action to design and implement economic adjustments to accommodate changing market conditions and other circumstances that will take into account any adverse social effects and to devise complementary policies to minimize or offset those adverse effects, particularly on the poor and other disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Some countries in East and South-East Asia are currently dealing with a financial crisis of major proportions which started in the regional currency markets and this has challenged the ability of some countries to address the adverse socio-economic and political impact posed by an economic downturn. The policy responses vary among the various countries but the lessons emerging include the idea that policies for promoting an enabling environment become much more important during periods of economic and social crisis.

56. Some of these enabling conditions include enhancing participation and awareness and promoting social justice and equity, heightening levels of concern and promoting security, and promoting good governance. These are briefly discussed below.

1. Enhancing participation and awareness and promoting equity

57. Participation and equity are related aspects of social development and should be central to social development policy.

58. If people are to participate in all aspects of their country's development, they need to possess a level of awareness that will enable them to make appropriate choices among alternatives. Thus, rural youth need to be aware of what urban areas can offer in terms of living and employment so that they can contemplate movement to a city fully aware and prepared for all aspects of such a move; people with disabilities need to be aware of the range of assistive devices now available to them to enhance their ability to function in many aspects of life; older persons need to be aware of educational and other opportunities specially designed for older persons; and women need to be aware of their rights under international conventions and state legislation so that they can oppose sexual discrimination in, for example, the workplace. In all such situations, the level of awareness particularly of more disadvantaged groups in any society will have a major impact on their social development prospects. Hence, policies which are designed to promote awareness, in a range of contexts, have an important role to play in improving social development prospects.

59. Higher levels of public awareness are often important in ensuring adequate levels of participation. For example, until women are participating actively in decision-making, the issues which confront them as women are unlikely to be adequately addressed. Similarly, youth should be involved, through youth councils and so on, in society's decision-making structures. Participation of all people in social development is crucial to maximizing both the prospects of the society's development as a whole and the well-being of specific population groups. Policies to enhance participation will therefore be beneficial to the social development prospects of that nation and its people.

60. While several key values underpin social development, social justice and equity should be strongly stressed. The general proposition is that prospects for social development are closely associated with the extent to which a society has embraced the importance of reflecting social justice and equity across the full range of policies and programmes.

61. The lack of social justice and equity lies at the heart of the high prevalence of poverty, of the inferior situation in which many women find themselves compared with men, of the problems of people with disability and, generally, of the existence in societies of groups experiencing marginalization and social and economic exclusion. Many of the policy options should, therefore, basically involve the adoption of principles of social justice and equity.

62. Social justice and equity principles are at the heart of the international conventions referring to the population group in question, and many States have become signatories to those conventions. Far more than this is required, however, if both national policies and their implementation are to be based on those same principles. The strength of deep-seated customary support of certain attitudes and practices

is often such that major educational campaigns, undertaken internationally, regionally and nationally, are necessary if social justice and equity are to be adequately reflected across the social development field.

2. Heightening levels of concern and promoting security

63. In general, societies tend to relegate the functions of caring and concern for people to the more religious members of society, and to emphasize the importance of professionalism within a largely bureaucratic response to needs. This tendency constitutes a problem for enhancing social development prospects and a problem that can confront societies at any level of development.

64. It is not surprising that there has been a growing tendency to discuss the concept of the welfare society (as distinct from the welfare state) or the caring society. The needs of large sections of societies in the future will depend to a very great extent on the ability of countries to develop an enhanced level of social concern and care. Investment reflecting concern and care for the poor, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, victims of misfortune, immigrants and other minority groups is ultimately the only protection against social exclusion and relegation to marginalization and further impoverishment. A significant level of social concern will be required to ensure that governments enact policies and allocate budgets to society's least powerful, but often most important resource if development is to be sustained. It is also necessary to have a significant level of concern for professional people in all areas to be attracted in adequate numbers to work areas hitherto considered marginal and less prestigious. Finally, an enabling environment for social development requires a significant level of concern in society for communities, as individual members and as groups, to play a constructive role in social development.

65. Are policies to heighten levels of concern possible? Governments which demonstrate a concern for the poor and the more disadvantaged and vulnerable in their society are heightening levels of concern through example. Social development units within government which can increase the level of awareness in the community and encourage the range of professionals, and the formal organizations within which they work, to be active in social development are heightening awareness. Finally, encouraging all sections of civil society to play an active role in tackling the priority areas of social development is to work towards achieving the caring society.

66. While this is another aspect of social development where it is impossible to be prescriptive because of the wide range of situations in the region, the policy area itself needs to be emphasized. The levels of insecurity which face very many people in the region as they grow older, the insecurity of those who find very little employment and live in poverty or on the margins of it, the insecurity felt by girls and women in the face of a growing level of violence against them, the insecurity of populations whose countries are plagued by conflict, and, as a final example, the insecurity of those who live in areas affected by disease or which are environmentally degraded or subject to regular natural disasters, all

represent situations which undermine social development.

67. Each of these areas is open to a policy response, no matter how complex the process might be, although each policy response will be largely determined by the local circumstances. Nonetheless, the importance of addressing situations of insecurity is undeniable, and the fact that some nations are doing so successfully is a source of hope. Policies that effectively address income security, protect against illness, crime and violence, engage in reconciliation and conflict resolution, tackle environmental degradation, and engage in forward planning for disaster relief are all examples of policies which can reduce levels of insecurity, to the advantage of those who feel threatened and for national development.

3. Promoting good governance

68. The central role of government in promoting social development, and hence the importance of good governance, should be continually stressed, and from several different points of view.

69. Good governance can be seen in part in terms of forging collaboration between politicians, the bureaucracy and civil society. Policies designed to promote such collaboration, accountability and transparency, are important to social development prospects. It is this collaboration which is also a major strategy for enhancing participation, which is in itself an important aspect of good governance.

70. Many of the initiatives which social development calls for need to come from various government departments, so that the understanding, professionalism and efficiency of the government bureaucracy are very important in social development. Without policies to achieve appropriate levels in these three areas of performance, many of the priority issues for social development will not be adequately addressed.

71. Many aspects of social development rely also on the network of state institutions. The ability of the economic systems to guide and support economic development, of the legal system to protect people's rights, and of the political system to reflect people's needs and aspirations are all vital to social development. Policies which will strengthen the institutional base of social development need then to be emphasized.

72. The financial role of government emerges as an important policy area. Governments need to ensure the provision of adequate budgets for income security, under whatever policy option they select, and to provide social safety nets. Governments also need to budget adequately for capability- building, through both external and domestic sources and involving the private and non-governmental sectors. Governments also need to organize taxation systems which are equitable and which lead to an effective distribution of revenue across the levels of service provision, the diverse population sectors and the various needs. Good governance, in the form of an equitable redistribution of available resources, is fundamental to social development.

B. Accelerating poverty alleviation, employment generation and social integration

73. Policy measures taken should have a major focus on poverty alleviation. The need for a multilevel approach to this aspect of social development, as to most others, should be stressed. Policies at the international level, in relation, for example, to trade, debt relief and the targeting of aid, are to be emphasized. Subregional and regional policies, including those dealing with the ongoing financial and economic downturn in some countries, also have roles to play. The final responsibility lies, however, at the national level. Policies pertaining to social protection schemes, strengthening various institutional structures, ensuring collaboration between the necessary range of initiatives and targeting programmes to the poorest localities and groups are all seen as essential to poverty alleviation and need to be sustained even during periods of economic slowdown. However, it is important also to note that processes like institution-building, collaboration and targeting are commonly emphasized across the social development field.

74. As mentioned earlier, employment generation is one of the three core issues of social development. The challenge to overcome poverty and unemployment in the context of an increasingly globalized and competitive economic environment poses new difficulties for all countries in the region. Among the most important trends and issues identified in relation to the poor, youth, women, persons with disability and even older persons is the need for productive opportunities, both because of their inherent importance and because of the need to generate income on which to live. Moreover,

the prevalence of poverty is seen as having a close relationship with the employment situation, while demographic trends carry major implications for labour policy in general.

75. The importance of employment should be emphasized, along with the need for governments to enlarge their vision of the range of employment opportunities. The stress, for example, should be placed on the informal sector as a major sector able to generate employment opportunities in labour-intensive situations; on training people for entrepreneurial activities, especially in out-of-school situations and among more disadvantaged groups; the potential of new initiatives, such as telework for people with disabilities to be able to work from home; and on the need to expand the range of employment opportunities in rural areas and in the service industries. In all these areas, policies to promote opportunities for asset-building through training, skills development, credit schemes and access to land, markets, transport and information are essential.

76. Social integration is another core issue which is vital in all discussions on enhancing social development prospects. Most studies addressing priority issues in relation to social development prospects in the region focus on the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in society. Poverty affects these groups above all others. Some categories of youth, women, persons with disabilities and older persons must be described as such. There is a tendency for all societies to disregard to a large extent such marginalized groups, devoting few resources to their social development. The lack of power among such groups highlights the need for advocacy on their behalf, but also their empowerment so that they may participate actively in their own development and not be regarded exclusively as objects of development. The imperative of social inclusiveness, or social integration, is very apparent.

77. Policies should equally be addressed to strengthening the degree of harmony between the differing ethnic, religious and civic groups and all other groups and sectors of society. The devastating impact on social development of civil conflict or war is well known. Several countries in the region provide clear examples of how quickly conflict can set back social development achievements and render further progress almost impossible until the conflict is resolved. The need for policy initiatives in the region to be strengthened at this level is crucial.

78. It is clear that social policies need to reinforce the emphasis placed on these three aspects of social development in the region and by the international community in recent years.

C. Building capabilities

79. The ability of people to digest knowledge readily available, to participate actively in society, to engage in employment and income generation and generally to enjoy a satisfactory level of well-being tends to correlate with the extent to which their capabilities have been given the chance to develop. Hence, for a society to be able to utilize its major resource, its people, capability-building is of central importance.

80. There are many aspects of capability-building. On the one hand, it needs to cover a range of areas, including the provision of adequate nutrition (still a problem in parts of the region), facilities to maintain public and personal health, educational and training opportunities, and an appropriate environment within which to be socialized. On the other hand, it must cover the various dimensions of service provision, such as access to all such facilities for all people, the extension of the provision of such facilities to all parts of the country, and the maintenance of an adequate quality within such facilities.

81. It follows that policies across the range of social services are vital to social development, and recommendations along these lines should address access to suitable capability-building for particular groups of people. A clear trend across much of the region is for social service provision to favour the better-off sections of the population, and the challenge put forward here is the introduction of policies that will change that situation.

82. However, in many contexts, an adequate response to presenting needs will have to go beyond formal service provision. There is an emphasis in some contexts on community-based provision, self-help initiatives and other non-formal measures, which draw on the resources of communities. It is recognized that capability-building across populations is expensive if it is fully dependent on public expenditure. While high levels of government expenditure should be encouraged in this area as a crucial foundation for overall development, it should be recognized that there is a need to initiate effective low-cost measures, utilizing all resources from those at the community level and through better targeting of official development aid.

83. In this regard, government support to strengthen the capabilities of communities and self-help organizations should not be restricted to financial support. The provision of access to credit to viable income-generating or employment-creating projects could provide a substantial boost to their capabilities. The technical and managerial capabilities of these organizations could be enhanced through information and training programmes.

84. Policies should also include those which reinforce decentralization or devolution by strengthening the capabilities of subnational and local governments in planning and implementing local-level activities. This would include promoting the establishment of the basic infrastructure, including the provision of technical, financial and human resources. National social development programmes, for example, education and health, to a large extent could also be disaggregated into local components for planning and implementation at the local level.

85. The underlying principle in this aspect of social development is that all levels of development should recognize the importance of capability-building and allocate as large a share of available financial and technical resources as possible to it.

D. Strengthening families and communities

86. Policy responses are needed to address the social issues arising from the extent to which family and community structures have undergone change. There are several highly important social development implications.

87. In order to strengthen the family, efforts have to be exerted to enhance the ability of families to provide an adequate socialization context, to inculcate values in the young and to provide care for those members in need of such. There is a need for policies to provide adolescents and families with support in order that family and community values can be sustained and youth enabled to live healthy and productive lives; to assist families in providing care for its sick and older members where necessary; to assist couples in planning and enhancing family welfare; to make family life possible for people with disabilities; to support, where necessary, female-headed households; to enable older persons living alone to remain in their own homes; and, given the later age of marriage, to assist unmarried young people living away from the family home in securing an appropriate living environment.

88. Policy support is needed to strengthen the capabilities of viable communities in playing a central role in many aspects of social development. In respect to persons with disabilities, stress should be given to the importance of community-based rehabilitation services and of the importance for such persons of a living environment which has been carefully planned to accommodate their needs. It is similarly argued that older persons need to live in communities with positive attitudes towards them, appropriate housing facilities and opportunities for their participation in many areas of life. Community centres for older persons can be of particular importance. Many of these same requirements, differing only in detail, can also be applied to youth. Community-based rehabilitation programmes designed to reintegrate juvenile delinquents and drug addicts into society may serve as examples. The social integration function of community programmes will thus be strengthened as well. This integrative or social bonding function may be successfully implemented in community centres that are truly accessible to all members of the community.

89. While emphasis on community is logical, in practice very little emphasis is given to policies for strengthening communities. The tendency is to leave this aspect of social development to civil society. However, it seems clear that both poverty and affluence can significantly reduce the extent to which civil society is able and willing to undertake this role. It is therefore incumbent on governments, in both contexts, to devise policies which will enable communities to play an active role in social development, for the benefit in particular of the more vulnerable groups in the community.

E. Promoting partnerships

90. Partnerships should be promoted among the various actors and institutions concerned with social development: governments, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the business sector. Depending on local circumstances, including the capabilities and willingness of partners, these partnerships could cover a wide range of activities from policy formulation to grass-roots service delivery. Key objectives would be identifying and addressing the key socio-economic issues and policy and programme options. It is clear that the important collaborators would include national, provincial and local government agencies, the business sector, and civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations, trade unions and community-based organizations. External actors include bilateral and multilateral donors, international and regional intergovernmental bodies including ESCAP, transnational corporations and non-governmental organizations. Government agencies will have to play the leadership role in planning, policy and strategy formulation, and programme and project activities. They will also be at the forefront in mobilizing resources, both from national and international sources. However, the participation of other actors, particularly the client groups, in identifying needs and defining priorities, contributing to policies and strategies, designing programmes and implementing, monitoring and evaluating them is necessary for the success of social development programmes.

91. Non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and the private sector can play important roles in resource mobilization, employment generation, service delivery and the provision of technical and organizational support. Government agencies should mobilize these partners and foster their collaboration and partnerships in formulating and implementing target-oriented social development projects. In many countries, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations could be important intermediaries in helping the poor and other disadvantaged and vulnerable groups to identify their needs and priorities, to design programmes, and to implement them. While governments may have a wider network and resource capacity for service delivery, there is evidence that their effectiveness could be strengthened by collaborating with non-governmental organizations which have better access to, knowledge of and experience in reaching and mobilizing the various target population groups.

92. Governments could more effectively mobilize the media in public information programmes to heighten the awareness of civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector regarding issues impacting on the poor and vulnerable groups. In the long term, fostering a national community that is attentive to those in need and responsive to the forces that can impoverish the nation could create a stronger, more caring and cohesive society. In addition to contributing towards the identification of common goals and objectives, partnership development results in promoting coordination and collaboration among the various partners, thereby improving efficiency and productivity in the process.

F. Regional support

93. The governments of the ESCAP region, in collaboration with their respective partners, have the primary responsibility of enhancing social development prospects in their respective countries. Their main activities will revolve around the following tasks: (a) adopting a multidimensional approach to social development; (b) identifying and analysing the priority social development issues confronting them; and (c) devising appropriate policies for addressing the key issues.

94. These tasks will be much more difficult for some governments than for others. ESCAP therefore has a major role to play. It could (a) serve as a repository of knowledge on social development issues and appropriate responses; (b) provide support to countries seeking to identify and implement appropriate policies; (c) operate as an advocate for social development, encouraging member countries to adopt an appropriate response to their countries' development; and (d) provide a forum for inter-country exchange of knowledge and information on new and emerging issues and policy approaches relating to social development prospects.

95. As the United Nations regional arm for Asia and the Pacific, ESCAP has long taken a lead role in promoting regional cooperation for social development in Asia and the Pacific. It has firmly placed the social dimension of development on the regional development agenda. The first important regional initiative was launched by forging a regional consensus on a Social Development Strategy for the ESCAP Region Towards the Year 2000 and Beyond, adopted by the Fourth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Welfare and Social Development at Manila in 1991 and endorsed by the Commission in 1992. In 1994, the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference in Preparation for the World Summit for Social Development adopted the landmark Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region, known as the regional Social Development Agenda.

96. ESCAP is well placed to monitor social development trends and issues and analyse national policy approaches. In cooperation with United Nations bodies and specialized agencies and other intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme, the Asian Development Bank, the Association of South East Asian Nations, the Economic Cooperation Organization, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the Pacific Community, it can undertake analyses, identify resource requirements, disseminate information on social indicators, policies and programmes and provide advisory services and technical assistance. These and other activities by the ESCAP secretariat earlier requested by the Fifth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Development in its recommendations to accelerate the effective implementation of the regional Social Development Agenda, would help to mobilize the concerted efforts needed to support action for poverty alleviation in the region.

97. The Commission may wish to address the priority issues in social development towards the twenty-first century through the adoption of regional support measures oriented to the forging of a

caring and cohesive society. Particular attention should be given to issues relating to poverty alleviation, employment generation and social integration; social services provision to the poor; reproductive health of youth; health, income security and care-giving for older persons; narrowing the gender gap in literacy and education, employment and wages; and ensuring that persons with disabilities can live a full and active life in a housing and living environment within which they can function effectively, at a workplace where they are not discriminated against, and in a society which accepts them.

IV. CONCLUSION

98. Progress in social development in the ESCAP region has been very uneven. While some parts of the region and some aspects of social development have moved forward with considerable speed, progress in other areas has been slow. On present trends, many decades would be required to bring about even reasonably adequate levels of social development in some countries and in certain priority concerns.

99. At the same time, the governments in the region have committed themselves to the regional Social Development Agenda generally, and to specific agendas in relation to several disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. The region has a considerable level of resources, possessing many good examples of successful social development efforts, and with well-developed structures through which to engage in this work. Why then is progress in social development so uneven and why are so many priority areas of concern not being given the full attention that they deserve?

100. The specific answers to these questions are clearly many and complex, but, in general terms, it can be said that a major concern lies in a failure to engage in a multidimensional and integrated approach to social development based on a set of fundamental principles, such as the need for development to be participatory and sustainable. In many country situations, the immediate reason for low levels of social development seems to be a lack of capability in one or more of the political, economic, environmental, technological, cultural or social dimensions of development. Social development requires appropriate action at all of these levels, preferably within an integrated plan. The requisite planning and effective implementation of necessary measures will remain a critical challenge for some countries.

101. The review of current and emerging national, regional and global trends and issues in various development sectors, and analysis of their impact on prospects for social development in the Asian and Pacific region into the twenty-first century, point to the stark reality that achievements still fall far short of the requisite levels for accelerating social progress, owing largely to the lack of national commitment to goals and targets established in the regional Social Development Agenda. While recognizing the interlinkages between economic growth and social development, the goals of poverty alleviation, employment generation, promoting equality and social integration continue to be put on hold in the

pursuit of growth-oriented strategies. In the final analysis, the message comes out clearly throughout the review of prospects for social development, for increasing the centrality and levels of social concern and awareness, participation and equality - the basic fundamentals in forging a caring and cohesive society, based on the principle of the worth and dignity of each human individual in society. Towards that end, it has been emphasized that the human and financial resources, expertise and partnerships of all sectors of society will need to be mobilized, engaging all development actors, including politicians, the bureaucracy, professionals, civil society, such as the corporate and non-governmental sectors, targeted beneficiaries and the public, in general.