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**EMERGING ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENTS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL:
POVERTY REDUCTION**

(Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda)

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON POVERTY REDUCTION
ON ITS FIRST SESSION**

SUMMARY

The Committee on Poverty Reduction held its first session at Bangkok from 8 to 10 October 2003. It discussed the financial and other key resource mobilization issues in implementing the Millennium Development Goals. It also discussed issues related to poverty statistics and poverty measurement, transfer of good and innovative practices, and information and communication technology for poverty reduction. The Committee considered programme planning, the evaluation of two flagship projects and arrangements for the Subcommittee on Statistics.

The Committee emphasized that both financial and non-financial resources were needed for achieving the Goals. It recommended that all stakeholders, including bilateral donors, international organizations, Governments and civil society, join hands and coordinate their efforts to achieve the Goals. The United Nations should play an active role in helping to achieve success in that regard.

The Committee stressed that good-quality poverty statistics were essential for designing effective poverty reduction policies and also for evaluating their impact. In that regard, it noted the need to strengthen national statistical infrastructure and promote improvement in the quality of statistics.

The Committee noted that the identification and replication of good practices constituted one of the important activities for the secretariat to implement. It encouraged the secretariat to expand its networking efforts to provide more coherence in the identification and replication of poverty reduction interventions. It urged the secretariat to place special emphasis on the capacity-building of the agencies involved in the formulation and implementation of poverty reduction programmes.

The Commission is invited to consider the major conclusions and decisions by the Committee and to endorse the recommendations brought to its attention. The Commission may also wish to provide the secretariat with guidance on the implementation of the recommendations.

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I. MATTERS CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE COMMISSION OR TO BE BROUGHT TO ITS ATTENTION

1. The Committee recommended that ESCAP, being the only comprehensive intergovernmental organization dedicated to economic and social development in the region, play an important role in pooling the development experiences of countries in the region and ensuring greater cooperation and exchange of ideas and information.
2. The Committee recommended that all stakeholders, including bilateral donors, international organizations, Governments and civil society, cooperate with each other and coordinate their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations should play an active role in achieving success in that regard.
3. The Committee held the view that ESCAP could assist in and facilitate the strengthening of government and civil society partnership in poverty reduction efforts.
4. The Committee was informed about the decentralization reforms introduced by countries. Besides the numerous benefits of those reforms, there were challenges of coordination among different levels of government. The Committee recommended that ESCAP assist in sharing the experiences of countries that had undertaken decentralization reforms. That would help in tackling the challenges of decentralization.
5. The Committee recommended that ESCAP, along with other multilateral institutions, provide technical assistance to countries reforming their budgetary system in implementing operational budgeting to increase the efficiency of resource spending by Governments and, as a long-term plan, in upgrading the operational method to the advanced method, which was zero-based.
6. The Committee encouraged ESCAP to expand its networking efforts to provide more coherence in the identification and replication of poverty reduction interventions. It urged the secretariat to place special emphasis on capacity-building and capability enhancement of the implementing agencies in the formulation and implementation of poverty reduction programmes. In particular, it drew attention to the need to strengthen the capacity of implementing agencies at the local level, since it recognized that the most effective interventions were at the micro level.
7. The Committee noted that sound poverty measurement at the country level depended on the national statistical system as a whole.
8. The Committee noted that a regional action plan to improve poverty statistics and support the Millennium Development Goals was needed and suggested that the Subcommittee on Statistics be given the mandate to prepare a draft plan. The view was expressed that any action plan on poverty statistics should not involve monitoring the incidence of poverty at the national level.

9. The Committee noted that good poverty analysis required good-quality data and accurate information.

10. The Committee stressed that survey respondents should be viewed as clients of the national statistical system and that data methods and results should be as widely available and user-friendly as possible.

11. The Committee noted the value for statistical agencies of providing easy access to microdata, via web sites and other means, provided that the principle of confidentiality of personal data was fully respected.

12. The Committee emphasized the importance of transparent disclosure of the sources on which data collection was based, and of any limitations that underlying survey techniques and methods posed for the interpretation of data.

13. The Committee recommended that poverty statisticians and policy planners regard the media as allies and actively nurture relationships with their representatives.

14. The Committee emphasized the benefits of linking the results of different household surveys, allowing the integration of income and expenditure data, on the one hand, and other socio-economic information, on the other.

15. The Committee called for increased international efforts to develop alternative measures of poverty and to standardize concepts and methodologies in that field.

16. The Committee stressed the importance of according adequate priority and resources to the collection of the administrative data that were needed to monitor development targets; it emphasized that national statistical offices should treat suppliers of administrative data as valued customers and partners.

II. PROCEEDINGS OF THE SESSION

A. Policy dialogue: financial and other key resource mobilization issues in implementing the Millennium Development Goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger

17. The Committee had before it the document entitled “Financial and other key resource mobilization issues in implementing the Millennium Development Goal target for income poverty” (E/ESCAP/CPR/1). It noted that the reduction of poverty was one of the main Millennium Development Goals. The Committee further noted the efforts made by countries in achieving the Goals. It appreciated that ESCAP regarded poverty reduction as one of the key thematic areas of its activities and tackled the associated issues in an active manner.

18. While deliberating on poverty reduction strategies, the Committee took note of the fact that several modalities could be adopted to implement them. Those included efforts by Governments,

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along with the private sector and communities, in the creation of business and employment opportunities for poor people; empowerment of the poor to enable them to attain their economic, social and political rights; capacity-building; and the provision of social protection and security schemes to cover poor people, particularly the poorest groups, including senior citizens, neglected children and disabled persons and those rendered poor by natural disasters, economic crises and social conflicts.

19. The Committee held the view that economic growth and development were necessary for achieving poverty reduction. To enhance economic growth, trade and investment, development of the private sector and transfer of technology should be promoted. Furthermore, development of economic infrastructure, legal institutions and human resources should be supported. It was important that, while prioritizing those areas for intervention, a varied approach, depending on the situation in each country, be adopted.

20. While acknowledging the fact that rapid economic growth was necessary to reduce poverty, the Committee observed that emphasis on growth alone would not help to solve the problem of poverty. Growth had to take place in consonance with the principle of equity or balance. Growth should reach and have a positive impact on poor people. The provision of job opportunities, safe water, affordable food, quality environment, a fair justice and court system and a better social and cultural atmosphere should also be emphasized. Equally strategic in any poverty reduction effort were targeted interventions for the poor, which involved the delivery of appropriate projects to meet their needs.

21. The Committee observed that the International Conference on Financing for Development, held at Monterrey, Mexico, in 2002, had called for the forging of a new partnership between developed and developing countries to ensure the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Committee noted with concern the fall in the amount of promised ODA in recent years. While development efforts were being undertaken individually at the national level, without international support and cooperation underpinning those efforts many developing countries and countries in transition would find it extremely difficult to reach their own development objectives and those set by the Millennium Declaration.

22. The Committee held the view that while donor countries should be encouraged to continue their efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the commitments reached in the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development, it was also important for developing countries to mobilize and coordinate all the resources available. Recipient countries should also tackle that issue with a sense of ownership so that the provision of ODA led to substantial reduction of poverty in a more effective manner.

23. The Committee noted with appreciation that the secretariat document on financial and key resource mobilization issues in implementing the Millennium Development Goal target for income poverty raised many methodological issues and data requirements for the costing of the Goals.

24. While agreeing with the view that costing a Goal target would be made much easier if a country had a clear poverty reduction strategy, the Committee observed that the model-based methodology in estimating both the required rate of growth and the financial cost, although ideal, could pose major constraints in many countries in the form of non-availability of statistical data, apart from the need to spend a substantial amount of time and resources in building the model. As such, the elasticity approach and the aggregative approach of estimating the rate of growth and financial cost respectively could be considered sufficient and, in most cases, practical. An alternative view favoured the model-based approach, since it was comprehensive.

25. The Committee discussed the issue of how to prioritize groups of poor people to reach the Millennium Development Goal target relating to income poverty. Policies and programmes aimed at those near the poverty line could help in achieving a fast reduction in poverty. However, on equity and humanitarian grounds, the poor in the bottom half deserved priority to alleviate their sufferings. In that regard, the Committee noted that, depending on the ethical judgment of the policy makers, there might be some trade-off between efficiency and equity.

26. The Committee observed that a substantial proportion of all of the social services in developing countries were provided by the Government and the public sector. Budget allocation mechanisms for government-affiliated bodies were the only instruments through which the Government made funds available for the provision of education, health, security and the implementation of infrastructural projects. In that context, the Committee discussed issues related to budgetary reform.

27. The Committee noted the distinction between the national poverty line and the purchasing power parity (PPP)-adjusted international poverty line set by the World Bank. The national poverty line used by Governments in their poverty eradication efforts was considered to have more operational validity than the international line, which had been created simply for international comparison and as part of the international endeavour to mobilize international resources to assist the poor countries. The Committee noted with concern that the adoption of the international poverty line by countries of the region might yield higher poverty incidence rates than when the national poverty line was used.

28. The Committee expressed the view that the secretariat should coordinate its work closely with other agencies dealing with poverty reduction and statistics, such as the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21), by sharing information.

29. The Committee also noted the views of the Asia-Pacific Civil Society Forum, as a side event held from 6 to 8 October 2003, on how the Millennium Development Goals could be achieved, particularly the goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. The Forum provided a wide range of proposals and recommendations aimed at improving current poverty eradication strategies and policies, including the rights-based approaches to development and poverty eradication; the effective participation and involvement of the poor in the planning and implementation of programmes; a more comprehensive understanding of the root causes of poverty and its multidimensional and diverse consequences and the right policies; the reorientation of public expenditure to ensure adequate financial resources for tackling poverty and hunger instead of debt-servicing and military spending; and comprehensive action aimed at addressing the root causes of poverty directly.

B. Poverty statistics: statistics needed for poverty measurement

30. The Committee considered the item on the basis of secretariat document E/ESCAP/CPR/2, entitled "Data sources for poverty analysis"; a presentation by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on the importance of statistics for good policy and planning; and a presentation by the National Statistical Office of Thailand giving data producer perspectives on poverty analysis.

31. In describing the major sources of poverty data, document E/ESCAP/CPR/2 made the point that measures and indicators of poverty were only as good as the underlying statistical data on which they were based. An understanding of the limitations and uncertainties of poverty measures should improve the policy conclusions drawn from them. The Committee noted that, as poverty was a multidimensional phenomenon, a large number of measures and sources were required in order to portray it fully. Thus, sound poverty measurement at the country level depended on the national statistical system as a whole.

32. The Australian Statistician and Chairperson of the former Committee of Statistics, in his presentation, outlined the vital role of statistics for good policy and planning. Good statistical information was necessary for formulating policies and monitoring their effects; good data should therefore be seen as an investment in good policy and planning. That was indeed the case with poverty statistics, where the basic requirements were not only to assess the number of people who were poor but to determine who they were, where they were located and how they could best be assisted. He gave some examples of the statistical requirements of different initiatives at varying levels from the global, regional and national levels down to the local level. Statistical information had to be of good quality to support policy analysis; therefore, there was a need to increase statistical capacity-building in many countries, including the ability to analyse and use data for policy purposes. The Committee on Poverty Reduction was urged to encourage Governments in the region to work collaboratively on improving poverty statistics and to provide adequate resources at the regional and national levels for that work.

33. The data producer perspective on poverty analysis was introduced by the representative of the National Statistical Office of Thailand. Her presentation touched on the policy response to the poverty problem, which in Thailand had led to the introduction of several new policies and programmes, all of which needed data to monitor and evaluate the degree of their success in reducing poverty. The major data source for poverty analysis in Thailand was the Household Socio-economic Survey, which was sufficiently large to give subregional information down to the provincial level. Another data source, the Basic Minimum Needs data, collected at the community level, was not derived from individual interviews and was therefore less reliable; moreover, that source did not contain information on household expenditure and income. Among the improvements to the poverty data under current consideration was the introduction of a panel survey, which would allow the Government to better evaluate whether poverty reduction policies benefited poor households, as intended. The Committee noted that the country experience illustrated the dependence of good poverty analysis on good-quality data.

34. The Committee welcomed the secretariat paper on data sources and the two presentations, which together formed a good basis for the discussion on how to improve poverty data for policy and analysis. It also noted the need to strengthen national statistical infrastructure and promote improvement in the quality of statistics in order to evaluate the effectiveness of policies to reduce poverty.

35. The Committee welcomed the announcement that the Philippines was planning to host the International Conference on Official Poverty Statistics: Methodology and Comparability, to be held at Manila in October 2004. The Conference would address the need to establish a convergence mechanism for discussing and assessing the preparedness of the national statistical agencies in generating official poverty measurement and to formulate an integrated work plan for institutionalizing the regular compilation of official poverty statistics for periodic/progressive assessment of the Millennium Development Goals. Both poverty mapping and small-area estimation would figure prominently on the agenda. The Committee noted the desirability of coordinating the arrangements for the Conference with those for other meetings, including the envisaged high-level forum of Asian and Pacific statisticians recommended by the Committee on Statistics.

36. The Committee noted that many members felt keenly the importance of support for the national statistical agency from both policy makers and the general public. That support was necessitated by the role of the general public as survey respondents and the role of policy makers in allocating resources to public information about statistical services. The Committee stressed the need to view respondents as clients of the system and to make data, methods and results as widely available and user-friendly as possible. The more citizens appreciated the importance of statistics, and how they as data suppliers could contribute to the compilation of accurate statistics, the more likely were the national statistics systems to produce quality statistics for sound policy formulation. It could be

expected that response rates would improve and that the work of the statistical agency would be valued more highly.

37. The Committee noted the value for statistical agencies of providing easy access to microdata, via web sites and other means, provided that the principle of confidentiality of personal data was fully respected. Users who had received feedback in the form of data that were useful to them, along with explanations of the data-gathering process and methodologies, were far more likely to generate increased demand for good statistics, and that strengthened the *raison d'être* of the statistical system. The Committee recalled that usefulness to the population provided the ultimate rationale for allocating resources to statistical institutions.

38. As countries were compiling poverty indicators based on different methodologies and varying assumptions, the Committee emphasized the importance of transparent disclosure of the sources on which their data collection was based. Moreover, it felt that the users of poverty statistics should be informed candidly about the limitations posed to data interpretation by the methodologies and accuracy of underlying survey techniques and methods while statistical institutes should publish indicators of accuracy of statistical surveys. The Committee recommended that poverty statisticians and policy planners regard the media as allies and actively nurture relationships with their representatives. That would assist the media in fulfilling their responsibility to cite poverty statistics with the necessary contextual information (metadata) so as to avoid giving a biased or misleading picture of poverty.

39. The Committee noted that several countries were interested in introducing panel surveys to improve their poverty data. The longitudinal data obtained from such surveys provided better insight into changes over time of the social characteristics of the poor, and allowed Governments to better evaluate the success of measures for poverty reduction. Repeated observations of the same individuals over time made it possible to estimate the probabilities of the target group entering or exiting poverty as compared with the individuals who were not targeted by policy measures. National statistical offices might need to redesign their system of household surveys when they introduced rotating sample schemes into their existing surveys. The Committee emphasized the benefits of methodological efforts to link the results of different household surveys allowing the integration of income and expenditure data, on the one hand, and other socio-economic information, on the other. In that respect, the support of ESCAP and statistically advanced countries was explicitly requested.

40. The Committee also noted the difficulties that countries encountered with sampling infrequent phenomena, such as the incidence of poverty in local areas where numbers tended to be very small, and asked ESCAP to give guidance to national statistical offices on state-of-the-art statistical sampling techniques.

41. The Committee noted that in most countries where poverty was measured on a regular basis, income poverty was the primary concern; hence the focus was on improving the data collection

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instruments of household income and/or expenditure surveys. The Committee appreciated that a multidimensional approach to measuring poverty was increasingly being adopted by countries and that other sources of data, such as labour force surveys, were being explored in poverty measurement, with a view to depicting the profile of poverty from various perspectives.

42. The Committee expressed concern over the lack of a standard measure for poverty which could be used for cross-country comparisons. In that regard, scepticism was expressed as to whether the \$1 a day (PPP-adjusted) poverty line used by the World Bank and other international agencies as the global measure of extreme poverty was sufficient for national policy use and monitoring. The Committee called for increased international efforts to develop alternative measures and standardize concepts and methodologies, since the methods currently used yielded different interpretations and results.

43. The Committee was informed that a handbook on poverty statistics, to be published by 2005, was being prepared under a project of the United Nations Statistics Division. The ESCAP region might make substantial contributions to that work through discussions in the forthcoming session of the Subcommittee on Statistics and other forums.

44. The Committee learned that a growing number of countries in the ESCAP region were carrying out surveys on time use, and that the data were being used for many different purposes. Time-use data were increasingly seen as an essential tool for investigating socio-economic behaviour between different population groups and also for understanding the effect of macroeconomic policies on households. It therefore encouraged ESCAP to continue to support those countries which needed assistance in carrying out time-use surveys.

45. The Committee noted that much of the data needed to monitor development targets derived from administrative data, which were not supplied by national statistical offices but by ministries. It was essential for Governments to understand the importance of according adequate priority and resources to the collection of administrative data: good data production should be seen as an investment and not as a cost. The Committee recognized the importance for national statistical offices of maintaining a good relationship with such ministries. By treating the ministries as valued customers and providing them with reports that were useful in their work, national statistical offices would be in a position to ensure that the providers of administrative data observed good practices and responded in a timely way.

46. The Committee noted that some 35 countries in the region were embarking on the 2004 International Comparison Programme (ICP) to update and revise PPPs, which were crucial for intercountry and intracountry comparisons of living standards and, via the \$1 PPP per day measure (Goal indicator No. 1), for assessing the extent of global poverty. The view was expressed that it would be helpful if member States could be provided with time series tables of PPPs, until such time as updated PPP data from the 2004 ICP round became available.

C. Poverty reduction practices

47. The Committee had before it two documents, “Transfer of good and innovative practices” (E/ESCAP/CPR/3) and “Information and communication technology for rural poverty reduction” (E/ESCAP/CPR/4). The first document provided a blueprint for the type of work that the Subcommittee on Poverty Reduction Practices, which would meet at the end of 2004, would be asked to consider.

48. The Committee noted that the identification and replication of good practices in poverty reduction was one of the important activities for ESCAP to implement. It expressed appreciation of the work undertaken by ESCAP in that regard and expressed support for the continuation of such activities.

49. The Committee affirmed the need to promote opportunities for and empower the poor, improve capacity-building and achieve social protection of the poor by taking into consideration their needs, priorities and conditions and letting them participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of poverty reduction interventions. It observed that in upscaling of a successful activity or project, the managerial capacity of the implementing agency and the willingness and readiness of the target group should be taken into account. The Committee urged ESCAP to make further efforts in promoting and supporting the use of information and communication technology (ICT) for rural poverty reduction. It observed that rural poverty reduction programmes should concentrate on non-farm activities in view of the incidence of labour surplus and underemployment in rural areas. It deeply appreciated the usefulness of the guidelines on the documentation of good practices developed by the secretariat.

50. The Government of Japan indicated that it had approved funding for two projects in the area of poverty reduction in 2003, on poverty reduction through rural-urban linkages of secondary towns in least developed countries (phase II) and strengthening income and employment generation for vulnerable groups of population in Central Asian countries during economic transition, amounting to approximately US\$ 220,000 in total. The Committee conveyed appreciation of the evaluation of the project on the Human Dignity Initiative and expressed interest in the follow-up to the project and the progress in achieving its objectives.

D. Programme planning and evaluation

1. Proposed medium-term plan for the period 2006-2009: subprogrammes on (1) poverty and development, (2) statistics and (3) development of Pacific island countries and territories

51. The Committee considered the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2006-2009, pertaining to (1) poverty and development, (2) statistics and (3) development of Pacific island

countries and territories, as contained in document E/ESCAP/CPR/5. The medium-term plan was based on a results-based format as required under General Assembly resolution 55/231 of 23 December 2000 on results-based budgeting to ensure a more meaningful assessment of the impact of programmes and more effective use of resources. The objectives and expected accomplishments of each subprogramme were based on ESCAP's organizational priorities, existing legislative mandates and comparative advantage. The ultimate objective of the exercise was to develop accurate, realistic and time-bound performance indicators to measure the impact of the subprogrammes.

52. The Committee expressed appreciation to the secretariat and endorsed the preliminary draft medium-term plan, prior to consideration of the plan in its entirety by the Commission at its sixtieth session, at Shanghai, China, in April 2004. In doing so, it noted that modifications might need to be introduced to the medium-term plan in the event that the General Assembly decided to introduce a shorter medium-term plan covering two years rather than four.

53. The suggestion was made that the medium-term plan should include activities to promote good governance so as to ensure that resources were used effectively. It was also felt that the plan should include support for the development of statistical data collection in the region that would allow data comparability and convergence of methodologies.

54. The Committee suggested that ESCAP strategies in poverty reduction should focus on helping countries to build capacity in policy-making and in the implementation of micro- and small-scale poverty reduction interventions. It was informed that the ESCAP capacity-building activities would be specified in biennial programme budget proposals, which would be developed within the framework of the medium-term plan.

55. Further, assistance should be provided for monitoring and evaluation systems that would allow the assessment of the overall programme impact to promote information and experience sharing in the Asian and Pacific region. Subprogramme strategies should also promote coordination among organizations working at the national and regional levels to promote a synergistic approach.

2. Evaluation of selected projects in poverty reduction: “Supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals” and the “Human Dignity Initiative”

56. The Committee considered the reports on the evaluation of two ESCAP flagship projects, “Supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals” and “Human Dignity Initiative”, as contained in documents E/ESCAP/CPR/6 and E/ESCAP/CPR/7.

57. The Committee was informed that the evaluation reports had been prepared as part of the secretariat's efforts to assess the value of its work and to draw lessons for improved planning and implementation of future ESCAP projects.

58. In order to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the secretariat's projects, the Committee emphasized the need for better coordination and cooperation among development organizations at all levels. It was pointed out that developing countries had been overburdened with the various administrative and reporting requirements of different development agencies. The Committee thus encouraged the secretariat to extend its networks with other United Nations agencies, financial institutions and subregional organizations in implementing development projects.

59. The Committee was informed that improved United Nations system-wide coordination was a priority issue in the Secretary-General's agenda for further change. The secretariat also reconfirmed its commitment to promoting stronger regional coordination and creating synergies with other development projects implemented by United Nations agencies. The Regional Coordination Mechanism, which was chaired by the Executive Secretary and coordinated the work of inter-agency thematic working groups, including that on poverty reduction, was cited as an example in that regard.

60. With regard to the project on the Human Dignity Initiative, the delegation of Japan expressed appreciation to the secretariat for the preparation of the mid-term evaluation report of the project. As the project was the first to be funded under the Human Security Fund, the Government of Japan was interested in following its progress. The delegation expected that the project would achieve further progress towards the intended impact.

61. The Committee further pointed out the importance of "institutionalizing" mechanisms for replicating good practices. It expected that the linkage between micro-level practices and the macro-level policy framework, as advanced by the project on the Human Dignity Initiative, would contribute to that process. The Committee encouraged the secretariat to accelerate steps to develop appropriate guidelines for replicating the good practices identified by the project.

62. Concern was expressed that the secretariat's project might overlap with other community-based initiatives in the region. The Committee was informed that, unlike the efforts of agencies such as the World Bank, the secretariat did not fund community-based projects but rather sought to assist in the identification of good practices and exchange of information.

63. With regard to the project on supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, the Committee was informed that regional workshops had been planned as follow-up activities to the ESCAP/UNDP publication *Promoting the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty Reduction*. The secretariat was also undertaking efforts to disseminate the findings of the report as widely as possible. In keeping with United Nations system coordination, the Committee was further informed that the partnership between ESCAP and UNDP would be strengthened and broadened to include other development partners.

64. The Committee noted that the scarcity of relevant and reliable data was a major obstacle in preparing the report on regional progress on the Millennium Development Goals. It therefore

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encouraged the secretariat to increase its efforts to build national statistical capacity. Following improvements in data quality and availability, the Committee noted that the secretariat could prepare a similar, more comprehensive, report in 2005. It was informed that the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, subject to the availability of funding by UNDP, would be initiating a project to promote Millennium Development Goal statistical capacity-building.

65. The Committee also pointed to the need for Governments to adopt pro-poor policies and pro-poor budgets and encouraged the secretariat to promote and advocate such policies. The secretariat concurred with that position and pointed out that that issue had been incorporated into the report.

3. Arrangements for the Subcommittee on Statistics

66. The Committee considered the arrangements for the Subcommittee on Statistics on the basis of secretariat document E/ESCAP/CPR/8. It noted that Commission resolution 58/1 of 22 May 2002 on restructuring the conference structure of the Commission had made special provision for the Subcommittee on Statistics to meet annually rather than biennially, should the Committee on Poverty Reduction so decide. The Committee noted, however, that with the envisaged timing of the second sessions of the thematic committees, including the Committee on Poverty Reduction, it would be very difficult to hold annual sessions of the Subcommittee from the standpoints of logistics and reporting arrangements; moreover, the meeting servicing burden on the secretariat would increase. It was also pointed out that there were other forums in which official statisticians in the region could meet to discuss issues of interest and concern, including, in particular, the envisaged high-level forum of Asian and Pacific statisticians recommended by the Committee on Statistics at its thirteenth session. The Committee on Poverty Reduction therefore agreed that the Subcommittee on Statistics should meet biennially, in common with the other subcommittees under the conference structure of the Commission.

67. The Committee recalled that in its earlier discussions on other agenda items it had in effect provided the Subcommittee on Statistics with overall direction on the issues to be addressed and the prioritization of its work. It welcomed the fact that the draft provisional agenda for the first session of the Subcommittee in February 2004 included both a focus on poverty statistics and discussion of a number of important fields of statistics which had been identified as priority areas by countries, and which in turn had strong linkages to poverty measurement. The Committee noted that the secretariat would incorporate the various additions and amendments suggested by participants into a revised provisional agenda for the first session of the Subcommittee, for circulation as a working draft to national statistical offices in the region.

E. Other matters

68. No other matters were raised by the Committee.

F. Adoption of the report

69. The Committee adopted its report on 10 October 2003.

III. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

A. Opening, duration and organization of the session

70. The Committee on Poverty Reduction held its first session at Bangkok from 8 to 10 October 2003. The Executive Secretary, in his opening statement, highlighted the importance of that inaugural session of the Committee, which was to provide guidance to the secretariat's programme of work under the theme of poverty reduction and also to the work of the two Subcommittees. The first sessions of the Subcommittee on Poverty Reduction Practices and the Subcommittee on Statistics would be held in 2004.

71. With regard to the theme of the current session, "Financial and other key resource mobilization issues in implementing the Millennium Development Goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger", the Executive Secretary noted that it would be difficult to overemphasize the role of resources, both financial and non-financial, in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It was well recognized that reaching the Goals would require not only extra spending but also more effective and efficient spending. Steps needed to be taken to improve governance as well as human and institutional capacity in order to enhance the absorptive capacity of the countries to use resources effectively and achieve better results.

72. The Executive Secretary noted that ESCAP was adopting strategies that could make the best use of its resources and its comparative advantage to help countries to reduce poverty. One such strategy was the promotion of good and innovative practices that had proved to be effective for poverty reduction. ESCAP was in the process of creating a database of good and innovative practices. The gross disparity in the spread of ICT was resulting in uneven distribution of the economic and social benefits derived from technology, entrenching existing inequalities between and within countries. The Executive Secretary reported that in its new programme structure ESCAP had given increased importance to the use of ICT in poverty reduction.

73. The Executive Secretary noted that the heightened priority accorded to poverty reduction had led to strong demand for statistical data for poverty analysis, which in turn had drawn attention to the inadequacies of the statistics available in many countries for that purpose. A better understanding of the many sources of poverty data and of the major methodologies used should help analysts and

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decision makers to reach sounder conclusions in formulating policies and programmes designed to reduce poverty. The ESCAP secretariat was developing a regional action plan for the improvement of poverty statistics and poverty measurement and would welcome the collaborative efforts of other agencies working towards the same goal.

74. H.E. Mr. Chaturon Chaisang, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand, delivered the inaugural address. As poverty was a major challenge being faced by many countries in the region, he appreciated the theme of the Committee session. He noted that Thailand would not only achieve but exceed the Millennium Development Goal target of reducing income poverty by half by 2015. Moreover, Thailand was one of those countries that had proposed the new concept of “MDGs-plus”.

75. The Deputy Prime Minister reported that a comprehensive, multifaceted and integrated strategy for poverty alleviation was in place in Thailand: the main components of that strategy included the Macroeconomic Strategy, the Strategy for Capability-building, the Strategy for Social Safety Net Improvement, the Natural Resources Management Strategy and the Public Sector Restructuring Strategy. He also highlighted some specific schemes and programmes for poverty reduction introduced by the Government, including Debt Suspension for Small Farmers, the Village and Urban Revolving Fund, the One Village, One Product programme, the People’s Bank and the Universal Health Insurance Programme.

76. An informal panel discussion under the theme “Millennium Development Goals: resource mobilization and implementation issues” was held on 8 October 2003. Mr. Chia Siow Yue of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs made a presentation on macroeconomic and social policies for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Mr. Somchai Jitsuchon, of the Thailand Development Research Institute, focused his presentation on financial resource mobilization for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Mr. Sarath Fernando, a representative of the Asia-Pacific Civil Society Forum, organized as a side event, presented the Forum’s views on ways to reduce poverty.

77. On 10 October 2003, the Committee held an informal open forum on poverty measurement, focusing on the proposed regional action plan for improving poverty statistics. The Committee’s discussions on the draft plan were facilitated by a presentation by the secretariat and subsequent invited contributions from selected national, regional and international agencies.

B. Attendance

78. Representatives of 24 member and associate members of ESCAP attended the session: Australia; Bangladesh; Cambodia; China; France; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Mongolia; New Zealand; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Sri Lanka; Tajikistan; Thailand; Turkey; Viet Nam; Hong Kong, China; and Macao, China.

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79. In addition, 12 United Nations bodies and specialized agencies attended: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations Population Fund, International Labour Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Civil Aviation Organization and United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

80. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: ASEAN Secretariat, Asian Development Bank, Colombo Plan Secretariat, Secretariat of the Pacific Community and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

81. Focus on the Global South attended the meeting under the status "other entity".

C. Election of officers

82. Ms. Kumari Navaratne (Sri Lanka) and Mr. Oh Jong Nam (Republic of Korea) were elected Co-Chairpersons. Mr. Ercan Dansuk (Turkey) was elected Rapporteur.

D. Agenda

83. The Committee adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Policy dialogue: financial and other key resource mobilization issues in implementing the Millennium Development Goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.
5. Poverty statistics: statistics needed for poverty measurement.
6. Poverty reduction practices:
 - (a) ESCAP strategies in poverty reduction;
 - (b) Information and communication technology for rural poverty reduction.
7. Programme planning and evaluation:
 - (a) Proposed medium-term plan for 2006-2009: subprogrammes on (1) poverty and development, (2) statistics and (3) development of Pacific island countries and territories;
 - (b) Evaluation of selected projects in poverty reduction: "Supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals" and the "Human Dignity Initiative";
 - (c) Arrangements for the Subcommittee on Statistics.
8. Other matters.
9. Adoption of the report.

Annex

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

E/ESCAP/CPR/L.1 and Corr.1 and 2	Provisional agenda
E/ESCAP/CPR/L.2 and Corr.1 and 2	Annotated provisional agenda
E/ESCAP/CPR/1	Financial and other key resource mobilization issues in implementing the Millennium Development Goal target for income poverty
E/ESCAP/CPR/2	Data sources for poverty analysis
E/ESCAP/CPR/3	Transfer of good and innovative practices
E/ESCAP/CPR/4	Information and communication technology for rural poverty reduction
E/ESCAP/CPR/5	Programme planning and evaluation: proposed medium-term plan for 2006-2009: subprogrammes on (1) poverty and development, (2) statistics and (3) development of Pacific island countries and territories
E/ESCAP/CPR/6	Programme planning and evaluation: evaluation of selected projects in poverty reduction: "Supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals"
E/ESCAP/CPR/7	Programme planning and evaluation: evaluation of selected projects in poverty reduction: the "Human Dignity Initiative"
E/ESCAP/CPR/8	Arrangements for the Subcommittee on Statistics
PDD/CPR/INF.1	Costing Millennium Development Goals: a study in methodology with special focus on the target for income poverty
PDD/CPR/INF.2	The Millennium Development Goals and the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger

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