

# Regional Commissions Development Update



Twenty-second issue, July 2007

Editorial

## 2007: Taking stock and strengthening efforts to achieve the MDGs

The current year 2007 offers the international community with an opportune moment to renew its commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). At mid-point since the world leaders pledged their support to these goals at the Millennium Summit in 2000, countries should seize this opportunity to assess progress and identify gaps that need to be addressed not only among countries of the various or same regions, but in many instances within the same country.

With this in mind, the regional assessments carried out by the regional commissions, in partnership and collaboration with other UN system and regional organizations, on the implementation of the MDGs, reveal a mixed picture, though mostly of significant shortfalls. In general, they also continue to offer instances of sharp contrasts in achievement, as global and regional trends obscure vast differences across and within region, subregions, and, at times, even within countries.

This is particularly true for MDG Goal 1 to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. In Africa, the continent facing the most daunting challenges to achieve the MDGs, the proportion of the population living under the poverty line since 2000 is estimated to have increased from 45 per cent to 47 per cent in 2006, and high levels of poverty co-exist with equally high levels of within-country income inequality. In the Asia Pacific region, child malnutrition remains disturbingly high in a number of countries with 48 per cent of children under-nourished in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, for example, and 47 per cent in India. While Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole is on track towards meeting the target, countries with the highest poverty rates need growth rates above the average for the last 15 years and improve income distribution in order to do it. Political instability and conflict also continue to pose critical challenges to poverty and hunger eradication in many countries, notably in the Middle East, Balkans and Caucasus.

This picture is not meant to undermine the tremendous progress achieved and efforts undertaken so far by developing countries around the globe to meet their development goals. Africa's tangible achievements on the economic growth front over the past 6 years and the recent Latin America and the Caribbean economic and social performance are testimony to that effect. It does emphasize, however, that accelerating and scaling up those efforts, and a further targeting of policies and aid are necessary to ensure a more equitable world in terms of economic and social development where the poorest and neediest could adequately share the fruits of a sustained economic growth around the world. The global partnership for development, as an integral part of the MDGs, will continue to play a crucial role in this regard.

It is most proper therefore that the United Nations membership chose to address the challenges of pro-poor sustained economic growth and strengthening efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including through the global partnership for development. Through their analysis and expertise, the regional commissions have been and will continue to be active partners in this stocktaking and efforts' boosting exercise to achieve the MDGs.

**Jose Luis Machinea**  
Executive Secretary of ECLAC  
and Current Coordinator of  
the Regional Commissions

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## Sixtieth Anniversary Session of the UNECE

The UNECE held its Sixtieth Anniversary Session from 25 to 27 April 2007 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva. The Commission session afforded the 56 member States of the UNECE the occasion to look at the technical and sectoral work of the UNECE in a wider context, thus providing them with the opportunity to set the strategic directions of the Commission's work for the coming biennium.

After a review of the reform adopted in 2005, as well as specific issues calling for action, the Sixtieth Anniversary Session was devoted to a series of high-level panel discussions, including one with participation of the Executive Secretaries of the other United Nations Regional Commissions. The Panels focused on the contributions UNECE can make to the development of the region; cooperation for stability and prosperity in Europe; strategic framework for pan-European cooperation, covering such key issues as partnerships, transatlantic cooperation, the role of Central Asia and the promotion of subregional cooperation.

During the Commission session a special exhibition devoted to Gunnar Myrdal of Sweden, first Executive Secretary of UNECE and Nobel Prize winner in Economic Sciences, displayed a summary of his life based on archives preserved in Stockholm. Six other former UNECE Executive Secretaries attended the session.

## Young Road Users in the UN Spotlight

Over 300 young people 18 to 24 years old representing about 100 countries gathered in Geneva on 23 and 24 April 2007 for a World Youth Assembly on Road Safety. Following a UN General Assembly model, young people discussed how best the safety of young road users can be achieved and adopted a declaration aimed at raising the awareness of their peers, policymakers, parents, teachers and the media, about the daily tragedy on the roads of which young people are the victims.

The World Youth Assembly was the central event of the First United Nations Global Road Safety Week (23-29 April 2007), jointly organized by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Regional Commissions, and targeting young road users, including young drivers. Modelled on the previous UNECE Road Safety Weeks, the first Global Road Safety Week provided UN Member States with a common framework for launching simultaneous national and local road safety campaigns, aimed at improving the safety of young road users and road safety in general.

Statistics show that young people are over-represented in road accidents. Young people from 18 to 24 years represent about 10 per cent of the population but 2 per cent of those killed in road accidents around the world. In the UNECE region alone more than 29,000 people under the age of 24 are killed every year on the roads.

But the First UN Road Safety Week also aimed to improve road safety in general. In Western Europe the long-term trends are quite positive. In the past 30 to 40 years, on average, the number of people killed on the roads per year has been halved, while road traffic has increased by a factor of 4. As a pioneer international organization in the area of road safety, the UNECE has contributed to this achievement. It has done so through the development of uniform regulations for the various components of road traffic, firstly for the road user through harmonized traffic rules, signs and signals, but also for vehicles and the road infrastructure itself.

## UNECE Experts Promoting New Ways to Combat Counterfeit Goods

The dual tasks of protecting intellectual property rights and combating counterfeit goods are among the most pressing issues facing governments in the UNECE Region. Counterfeit goods can be life-threatening—for example, adulterated or contaminated foods, hazardous toys, substandard electrical products and shoddy car or aircraft parts. The UNECE Advisory Group on Market Surveillance ("MARS" Group) has examined these and other consumer protection problems and its findings were of key relevance to discussions at the Third Global Congress on Combating Counterfeiting and Piracy, held in January 2007 in Geneva. This event,

hosted by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and convened by WIPO with Interpol and the World Customs Organization, saw participation by leading stakeholders at the global, regional and national levels.

As a part of the UNECE work on “good practices” in market surveillance, following long consultations, the “MARS” Group drafted a proposal, for approval in November 2007 as a new UNECE Recommendation, urging Governments to enlist those authorities charged with enforcing product safety in the fight against counterfeit and pirated goods, where they could complement the efforts of Customs police and intellectual property agencies. Having two complementary processes would benefit both private consumers and commercial users, help establish “rule of the law” principles in society, and promote fair competition and business development.

## UN/CEFACT Releases International e-Invoice

The total cost of processing paper document invoices is around \$125 billion for Europe and North America. Electronic invoicing can reduce that cost by 40 per cent. Why then do paper documents still account for over 95 per cent of all invoices in Europe and the United States? The main reason is the lack of an international data exchange standard for invoicing. At its 10th Forum in Dublin, held on 26-30 March 2007, the UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), for which UNECE provides secretariat support, addressed this critical need with the release of the Cross Industry electronic Invoice (CII).

The CII can be used, for instance, by the Steel, the Automotive or Electronic industries, the retail sector or Customs and other Government Authorities. The CII also covers the requirement for Value Added Tax (VAT) declarations in European Union Member States. It includes account information that enables automatic handling in the accounting systems of both buyer and seller. The UN/CEFACT CII provides not only standard XML schemas, but also globally consistent invoicing processes and data that are common across a wide range of industries.

## Action Programme for the Dniester River

A Transboundary Diagnostic Study for the Dniester river basin was published at the end of 2005 and a Protocol of Intentions signed by water and environmental authorities in Ukraine and Moldova (see [www.dniester.org](http://www.dniester.org)). This was the basis of a UNECE-OSCE project: “Action Programme to improve transboundary cooperation and sustainable management of the Dniester river” that started in August 2006. The objective is to develop an Action Programme to improve the cooperative management of water and related resources of the Dniester River Basin according to the principles of the UNECE Water Convention. The activities include drafting, negotiating and agreeing on a new bilateral agreement between the two countries.

The text of the new agreement was agreed at a meeting in Chernovtsy, Ukraine in February 2007. As it will take some time for this to be officially approved and signed, the project also aims to develop the existing framework for cooperation according to an agreement from 1994. In a positive sign, representatives from the Transdnister region of Moldova have participated in the project work.

## Poor Rail Infrastructure Constrains the Development of Intermodal Transport

International transport of containers and lorries by railways increased by 15 per cent in many UNECE countries in 2006, thus contributing to reducing the impact of transportation on the environment and helping to relieve the often-saturated road networks. However, UNECE experts recently warned that increasing international intermodal transport will lead to serious rail capacity problems on important European North-South, as well as East-West railway lines. As a result, rail service quality already has and will continue to decline, with delays remaining frequent (only 53% of intermodal transport trains arrived on time in 2006, i.e., with a delay of less than three hours).

Rail and terminal infrastructures, rolling stock and service quality

therefore need to be upgraded rapidly by Governments and rail and intermodal transport operators in line with the standards agreed upon in the European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC Agreement) and the benchmarks developed by the UNECE in model action plans and public-private partnership agreements.

The AGTC Agreement, administered by UNECE, provides a legal framework for the coordinated development of international combined road/rail transport infrastructure and services at the Pan-European level, with a view to facilitating international transport in the region. Work is under way to extend the AGTC network to the Baltic region, Central Asia and the Caucasus. A web tool was recently launched providing online access to information on the implementation of the AGTC Agreement in its 30 Contracting States: <http://unece.org.ch/wp24/agtc.aspx>.

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# Activities of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

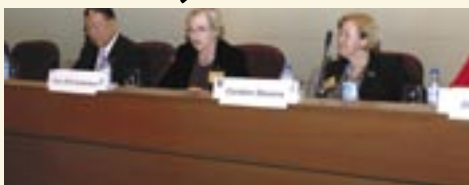
## UNESCAP Marked 60th Anniversary with Pride and Commitment

UNESCAP marked 60 years of service to the region on 28 March 2007 with a commemoration at the UN Conference Centre in Bangkok. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon sent a video message and special guests included Thailand's Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen.

"Throughout these six decades, UNESCAP has worked closely with the peoples of the Asia-Pacific region in their endeavour to build freedom from fear and freedom from want," said Mr. Ban. "Today, this region of four billion people is a powerhouse for global economic growth."

UNESCAP was founded as the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) on 28 March 1947. ECAFE moved its headquarters from Shanghai to Bangkok in 1949.

An Award for Lifetime Achievement was conferred on Economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen by UNESCAP as part of the commemoration. Born in Santiniketan, India, in 1933, Professor Sen was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1998, the only Asian to date to have been so honoured, for his contributions to welfare economics. Preceding the presentation of the award, Professor Sen gave a special lecture to United Nations staff on the subject of "Asian Immensities."



## Regional Meeting Points Way Forward to Tackle Asia-Pacific Infrastructure Gap

### Proposal to establish a new regional body to raise funds

The Asia-Pacific region faces a serious issue of underinvestment in infrastructure. The time has come to take solutions from academic discussion to political decision-making. It is also time to consider means of setting up a regional mechanism to utilize the large amount of savings of the region for much needed investment. The appeal came on 22 March 2007 at the end of a meeting in New Delhi. Participants included about 100 government ministers, officials, academics and private sector CEOs, representing 20 countries.

The two-day meeting, the High-level Policy Dialogue on Regional Cooperation for Infrastructure Development and Financing in Asia-Pacific, was co-organized by UNESCAP and a leading think-tank in India, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS).

A study commissioned by the Government of India and presented by RIS at the meeting echoes earlier research by UNESCAP. Both show that the region needs an annual investment of about \$600 billion in transport, energy, water and telecommunications. But there is a shortfall of more than \$200 billion annually. The region's foreign exchange reserves meanwhile stand at \$3 trillion dollars. Much of the reserves are invested outside the region.

The meeting endorsed a RIS study proposal to set up a regional body to channel savings into infrastructure investment. It could, for example, be an Asian infrastructure investment bank or an Asian infrastructure finance corporation. The new body could be independent or be an affiliate of an existing institution, such as the Asian Development Bank. Besides raising funds, the institution could also help Asia-Pacific countries in addressing non-financial constraints which discourage infrastructure investment by the private sector. The constraints include regulatory barriers, the lengthy process of project formulation and risks associated with long-term and large-scale investment.

## UNESCAP Examines Violent Traditions Against Women

UNESCAP organized an expert group meeting to examine how governments in the Asia-Pacific region can strengthen policies to reduce violence against women. The "Regional Strategies for Implementing the Recommendations from the Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Women with Particular Emphasis on the Role of National Machineries" was held from 26 to 27 April 2007 in Bangkok. The Meeting recommended strategies on preventing violence against women focusing on Asia-Pacific's socio-cultural root causes, such as sex selective abortions, female infanticide, dowry deaths, "honour" killings, forced marriages and sex slavery.

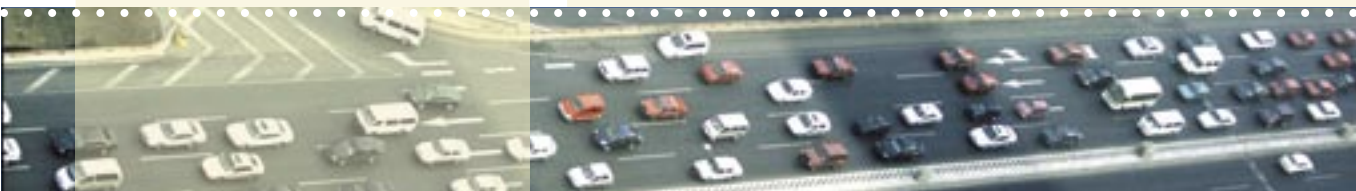
## Regional Action Plan Calls on Governments to "Reach the Unreached"

Participants at a UN/Asian Development Bank East and South-East Asian MDG Forum held in Hanoi, Viet Nam, from 1 to 2 March 2007 called on East and South-East Asian governments to do more to "reach the unreached" by improving educational and health care services. Participants also called for increased efforts to protect the subregion's quickly dwindling forests. At the Forum more than 100 participants from 12 countries identified common road blocks to universal primary and secondary education, health care for mothers and children, equal treatment of women, sustainable use of forests, and obtaining the human and financial resources to meet common development goals.

Other points in the Plan of Action include recommendations to improve the quality and availability of teachers, especially in rural and remote areas, to disadvantaged groups such as minorities, child workers and the disabled; improve accessibility of health care facilities in remote and mountainous areas; change traditional/cultural perceptions of women's role in politics, and train women elected officials at the local level to enter national-level politics; consider economic instruments such as fees or taxes to support the sustainable use of forests and water resources; create new and strengthen existing South/South partnerships in the subregion.

The Forum is part of a tripartite MDG initiative by UNESCAP, UNDP and ADB. A South Asia regional forum was held in Nepal in October in 2006; a Central Asia Forum is being planned for later this year.





## Pacific Islanders with Disabilities Face Negative Attitudes

The Expert Group Meeting on Disability in the Pacific, held from 28 to 30 March 2007 in Nadi, Fiji, was organized by UNESCAP, the Pacific Disability Forum, and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Attending the meeting were government and non-governmental representatives from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu, Australia and New Zealand, as well as representatives from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, UNDP, and other bilateral and multilateral donors.

"People with disabilities in Pacific island countries are among the poorest and most marginalized members of their community. Negative attitudes, prejudices, ignorance and apathy of policymakers remain significant barriers faced by people with disabilities and their families," Ms. Tewai Halatau, Chairperson of the Pacific Disability Forum, told experts at the opening of the meeting.

"Our challenge is to move disability into the mainstream so that it is not a marginalized issue. NGOs and disability self-help groups will be leading the way in this effort," she added.



## Meeting Promotes Corporate Responsibility in Asia

A three-day Regional Meeting of Global Compact of Asian Network Focal Points held from 2 to 4 April 2007 was the Asian part of a worldwide examination of Global Compact (GC) progress. The GC is a corporate social responsibility agreement arranged by the UN. It covers conduct in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption. The April meeting was organized by UNESCAP and the GC secretariat in New York to train both small companies and multinationals on how to implement the ten GC principles to contribute to UN development goals. The meeting aimed to address participating companies' concerns on how to best work with the UN on the Compact, and how to communicate progress. The workshop hoped to support the leadership of Asian Global Compact members as local role models in their field.

## UN Official Calls on Asian Economies to Change Growth Patterns

While developing economies in Asia and the Pacific are projected to grow by an impressive 7.3 per cent in 2007, such growth is driven by high resources consumption and cannot be sustained in the long run, warned Mr. Kim Hak-Su, Executive Secretary of UNESCAP, at the opening of a Workshop on Developing Sustainability Strategies in Asia in Bangkok.

Over 100 high-level representatives from the region and the industrialized member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) attended the two-day workshop jointly organised by UNESCAP, OECD and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA).

Delegates discussed ways to ensure that environmental and social concerns are reflected in development planning. A special session focused on the role of stakeholders, including business, trade unions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

A recent report by UNESCAP warns that Asia and the Pacific is already living beyond its ecological carrying capacity. To ensure continuing economic growth, UNESCAP says, countries in the region will have to move away from the current "grow first, clean up later" mentality and to embrace a "Green Growth" model.

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# Activities of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

## Evaluating the Impact of Public Policies

**ECLAC** Policymakers discussed new quantitative models to measure the impacts of trade agreements, macroeconomic reforms and poverty reduction at the Regional Meeting on Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) Models: Contributions to Economic Policy Formulation in Latin America and the Caribbean, held on 12 April 2007 in Santiago.

Authorities responsible for the design of economic policies are confronted with the challenge of identifying economic, social and environmental impacts of public policies. Evaluating policy impacts and contributions to effective development requires the use of quantitative analysis instruments, including CGE models, examined in the meeting organized by ECLAC, the Inter-American Development Bank (IAB) and the Centre d'Études Prospectives et d'Informations Internationales (CEPII), with financial support from the European Union, as part of the REDIMA II (Network for Macroeconomic Dialogue) project.

In two days of meetings, national authorities from around the region exchanged experiences in the application of CGE models, to design and analyse economic policies and to conduct comparative reviews of the impacts of trade agreements, regional integration and other macroeconomic reforms, while taking into account sectoral economic and environmental impacts and poverty reduction.

CGE models provide an integrated way of quantifying the performance of economic agents (households, businesses and government) and the impacts of economic policies on production, employment, international trade, public finances and well-being at the household level. In Latin America and the Caribbean, CGE models are increasingly applied as an instrument of decision-making in the public sphere. The emergence of a new community of experts in this type of economic modelling is helping to refine its analytical and data-gathering potential. By bringing together national authorities and technical experts from the region to compare experiences, such meetings help to strengthen the analytical foundations of decision-making in Latin America and

## Republic of Korea and ECLAC to Study the Creation of Public-Private Alliances for Export Development

The Government of the Republic of Korea and ECLAC signed a cooperation agreement on 4 April 2007 to launch the project: «Building Long-Term Strategies and Public-Private Alliances for Export Development: The Experience of the Republic of Korea». ECLAC's Executive Secretary, Mr. José Luis Machinea, and Ambassador for the Republic of Korea, Mr. Kee Hyun-seo, took part in a ceremony held at ECLAC headquarters in Santiago, Chile. Financed by the Republic of Korea, the project will study how the country has created and implemented a strategy to turn itself into one of the world's primary exporters of knowledge-intensive, value-added goods and services, and how it has designed and managed governmental incentives for new private-sector activities in the fields of innovation and export development.

This issue will be included in the document to be presented by ECLAC's Secretariat for consideration by its members during the Thirty-Second Session of the Commission, to be held in the Dominican Republic in 2008. In comparison with the case studies developed by ECLAC in other countries, which also examine success stories in the process of forming public-private alliances for export development, the results of this project will be discussed at a roundtable for high-level government officials from the region.

The Republic of Korea applied for admission as a Member State of ECLAC on 23 October 2006. ECLAC's Session of the Committee of the Whole, which met at United Nations Headquarters on 5 June 2007, recommended inclusion of the Republic of Korea as a member of the Commission, to be approved by ECOSOC during its 2007 substantive session in Geneva.

## Investment in ICT Important for Development of Latin American and Caribbean Countries

The development of better, cheaper and faster information and communications technology (ICT) has increased productivity and economic growth. That was the diagnosis of various international experts who attended the seminar «Growth, Productivity and ICT», organized by ECLAC on 29 and 30 March 2007.

The seminar analysed the contribution of ICT in Latin America, Europe and OECD countries, with presentations and studies based on original data and different analytical methods. The seminar served as a venue for statisticians, analysts, policymakers and regulators to share knowledge and studies from various perspectives and methodological approaches. ICT investment explains at least half of recent US growth, while in Latin America capital investment in ICT is lower than in developed countries, with Chile and Mexico showing the highest contributions in ICT investment.

ECLAC is undertaking studies in order to assist countries in the implementation of the Regional Action Plan eLAC2007, which will be evaluated and renewed at a meeting in El Salvador in November 2007 (for more detail regarding the Information Society Programme, visit <http://www.cepal.org/socinfo/default.asp?idioma=IN>). These studies also aim to provide key information for decision-makers on why to invest in ICT over other priorities.

This seminar was organized by ECLAC, with financial support from the European Union's @LIS programme, the ICA-IDRC and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Fundación Telefónica also provided additional support for the seminar.

## Public-Private Sector Cooperation in the Fight Against Desertification in Latin America

In Latin America and the Caribbean, 378 million hectares of drylands (semi-arid, arid and dry subhumid ecosystems) are threatened by land degradation. The Puna Americana – a high plateau spanning Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru – is among the regions most affected by desertification.

To address this challenge, ECLAC organized a meeting on «The contribution of mining to the sustainable development of the Puna Americana and the role of mining in the implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification», on 19 March 2007 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The meeting brought together mining company executives and representatives of governments and NGOs to discuss public-private sector cooperation to control desertification in the High Andes.

Participants discussed initiatives to plant tree species adapted to the altitude and arid conditions; protect native plant species, especially the high-altitude peat lands; and support subsistence farmers in local communities, especially with regard to agreements among users concerning water rights and water conservation. Participants also agreed to invite other mining companies to join these efforts, along with governments and local communities.

## Disaster Evaluation in Bolivia

A team of experts from ECLAC has been conducting socio-economic and environmental impact studies in Bolivia on the damage caused by rains, flooding, freezing and drought, which have severely affected various areas of the country since January of this year.

These negative climatic conditions continue, and estimates from various sources suggest that more than 440,000 people have been affected, including 54 people who have died and 75,000 families who have been displaced.

This evaluation mission was in response to a request by the Bolivian Ministry for Planning. The goal is both to determine the country's needs in the face of such disasters, as well as to propose short- and medium-term recovery strategies. Working closely with the Bolivian government, ECLAC coordinated a team of UN, including FAO, HABITAT, ILO, WHO-PAHO, WFP, UNDP and UNICEF, as well as the Commission of the European Union, which contributed satellite imagery for the mission.

The mission travelled to the municipalities affected by the rains, flooding, freezing and drought and concentrated its analysis on social and economic impacts, particularly on productive sectors such as agriculture and livestock, infrastructure, housing, living conditions and the nutritional conditions of affected populations. The team of experts also observed environmental factors, examining in particular how the prolonged flooding is affecting waterways, given that some rivers have changed their course. They will also analyse whether the rains (and subsequent drought and freezing that have affected parts of the country's southwest) are related to climate change. The final study will determine the impact of the damage, incorporating intercultural and gender perspectives in its analysis.

Over its more than 30 years of experience, ECLAC has designed a methodology for disaster evaluation that is used around the world. It allows for an appropriate evaluation of losses and damage while identifying ways to achieve decent living conditions and economic recovery.

## ECLAC Executive Secretary Visit to Japan

The Executive Secretary of ECLAC, Mr. José Luis Machinea, made an official visit to Japan from 10 to 16 March 2007, at the invitation of that nation's Foreign Ministry. The UN official held meetings with high-ranking Japanese government authorities, leaders of the business community, academics and the directors of international cooperation and integration agencies. Japan is the first Asian nation to become a full member of the UN regional commission. In July 2006, ECOSOC approved Japan's official entry into ECLAC. Over the past decade ECLAC has carried out numerous projects with Japanese cooperation aid in areas of importance to both regions, including strategies for development and trade, regulation of short-term capital flows and financial crisis, and strengthening Asian-Latin American ties.

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# Activities of the Economic Commission for Africa

## Conference of African Ministers Adopts Action-Oriented Statement

The 2007 Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, ended with the adoption of resolutions calling for action to ensure that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are achieved in African countries. The Conference was hosted by ECA on 2 and 3 April 2007 on the theme “Accelerating Africa’s Growth and Development to Meet the MDGs: Emerging Challenges and the Way Forward”. The Ministers noted that time is fast running out for making the necessary investments to ensure that Africa reaches the MDGs, and committed, together with the international community, to ensure that 2007 becomes the year for scaling-up interventions at national, regional and global levels. September of this year marks the mid-point to the MDGs target date of 2015.

During the debate, Ministers concluded that scaling up of both public and private sector investments was key to meeting the MDGs. Although there was agreement on the crucial role of the private sector in accelerating growth, the Ministers noted that private investments would not grow substantially without a massive leap in public sector investments. This should go to key sectors like human resources and infrastructure development. The Ministers also committed to designing nationally-owned development strategies that have the MDGs at their core. In this regard, they urged the international community to allow African governments the necessary policy space to design strategies adapted to the specific needs of each country with a view to ending aid dependency over time.

The Former President of Tanzania, H.E. Benjamin Mkapa, who currently co-chairs the Investment Climate Facility, a body established to encourage international investments in Africa, also addressed the meeting. President Mkapa referred to the domestic resources gap, which means foreign investments and external resource flows will continue to be important in the effort to scale-up interventions. The eminent economist, Mr. Jeffrey Sachs, stated his belief that the MDGs can still be achieved in Africa, but that it will require a massive scaling-up of investments in four key sectors – health, education, agriculture and infrastructure.

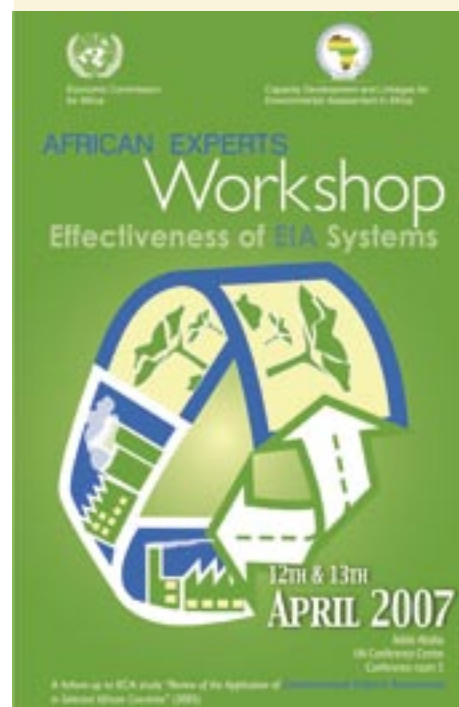
The Ministers commended ECA for its bold and strategic business plan for the years 2007–2009, and committed themselves, together with development partners, to fully back the programme with adequate resources to ensure its success. They also noted with appreciation the strong and growing working relationship between ECA, the African Union Commission (AUC) and the African Development Bank (AfDB).

## ECA, UNDP Form a Partnership to Scale-up Capacity Development in Africa

ECA and UNDP have formed a strategic partnership to jointly leverage their resources to scale-up capacity development in Africa, according to a “Compact for Collaboration” signed on 1 February by Mr. Abdoulaye Jannet, Executive Secretary of ECA, and Mr. Gilbert Houngbo, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for the Bureau for Africa. Priority areas of collaboration include monitoring the progress made by Africa to achieve the MDGs, fostering regional integration, promoting trade, rendering assistance to NEPAD and the APRM, and advancing governance. “The two institutions agreed to exploit synergies arising from their mandates and enhance collaboration in a more structured and systematic manner through functional rationalization, strengthened programme coherence and complementarity; efficiency in programme delivery, and effective mechanisms of coordination and consultation at national, subregional, and regional levels,” the Compact says.

## Effective Environmental Impact Assessment in Africa

African experts participated in a two-day workshop from 12 to 13 April to deliberate on a specific practical and feasible process to improve environmental impact assessment (EIA) in Africa. Organized by ECA and Capacity Development and Linkages for Environmental Assessment in Africa (CLEAA), the workshop considered the recommendations contained in ECA’s seminal study on the application of EIA in African countries, “Review of the Application of Environmental Assessment in Selected African Countries”. The workshop also concentrated on developing concrete action plans and broader dissemination of specific, practical and feasible measures for improving the quality and financial sustainability of EIA review, enforcement and compliance.







## Meeting of Committee on Women and Development Bureau and the Advisory Panel of the Africa Women's Rights Observatory

The Bureau of the Committee on Women and Development (CWD), comprising Ministers for gender and women's affairs from six countries, met on 19 April in Addis Ababa. The CWD is a statutory body of ministers and experts that advise ECA on gender related issues. Among other things, the Bureau discussed how national gender machineries can better deliver the agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment. The Bureau meeting was followed by the first meeting, from 20 to 21 April, of the African Women's Rights Observatory (AWRO) Advisory Panel, a joint initiative of UNDP and ECA. The Panel is composed of representatives of governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, African women's rights organizations, media institutions focusing on women and gender issues as well as research and academic institutions.

The AWRO role is to host the Observatory that will systematically track progress made in African countries by collecting, analysing and disseminating information on the status of women's rights in Africa. AWRO will also facilitate exchange of information on challenges and best practices. The niche of the Observatory is expected to be the capacity to make information and data available on the status of women's human rights in Africa in a comparative way and from a regional perspective with a view to motivating advocacy by stakeholders and action by governments. It is hoped that this mechanism will help to strengthen accountability of governments to the various commitments they have made towards the protection of the rights of women in Africa.

## Action Plan for Financing Investment in Africa

ECA convened a regional meeting on financing investment in Africa in Zanzibar, United Republic of Tanzania, from 24 to 25 April 2007, with the theme of "Capital Flows and the Development of African Economies: Towards an Action Plan for Financing Investment in Africa". Discussions focused on the following issues: capital market development, especially through regional integration; measures to support investment in Africa, including improving the investment climate; and recent trends in other financing instruments, such as options for SMEs, venture capital and pension funds in Africa.

Leaders of African stock exchanges and capital market authorities participated in the conference, as well as delegates from national governments, venture capital firms and the wider private sector, research institutions and specialists from the AUC, ECA, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and Africa's regional economic communities (RECs).

## African Network of the Global Alliance for ICT and Development launched

More than fifty representatives from African Governments, civil society organizations, private sector actors, academia and international organizations took part in the launch and first meeting of the African Regional Network of the UN Global Alliance for ICTs and Development (GAID) on 23 March. The launching of GAID reflects the UN's commitment to building an enabling environment in bringing together all stakeholders active in Information and Knowledge Economy in the pursuit of strategies to ensure the effective implementation of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) plan of action and the use of ICT for development, and the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

Ms. Renate Bloem, Executive President of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO), commended ECA's tremendous contribution to building the continent's Information Society and the timely launching of the African GAID network. Dr. Phillipe Mawoko, Programme Manager of the NEPAD e-Africa Commission, congratulated ECA for «the extraordinary work undertaken in coordinating the African position during the WSIS process and in supporting member States in developing their e-strategies».

## African Ministers Discuss a Continental Health Strategy

African Health Ministers began consideration on 10 April, in Johannesburg, of a draft African Health Strategy, which should contribute to Africa's socio-economic development by improving health services and ensuring access to essential care for all Africans by 2015. The draft strategy was presented to the 3rd Ordinary Conference of African Health Ministers, attended by delegates from over 30 countries, AUC's strategic partners, ECA and the AfDB, as well as development partners and civil society organizations.

Noting that Africa currently spends half of the required expenditure per capita on health, the strategy document calls on African countries to treat health systems financing as an exceptional case, removing budget caps and using time-bound renewable employment contracts. It calls on development partners "to move towards sector-wide approaches to ensure absorptive capacity and reduce transaction costs," and African countries to develop costed national human resources requirements which would include packages and incentives for working in disadvantaged areas.

ECA selected publications

**Economic and Social Conditions in North Africa: A Mid-Decade Assessment**

ECA-AN/TNG/PUB/01/05

**Sustainable Energy: A Framework for New and Renewable Energy in Southern Africa**

ECA/SA/TPUB/2005/6

**Strengthening internal accountability in the context of programme-based approaches in sub-Saharan Africa**

ISBN: 3-88985-307-2

**International Migration and Development: Implications for Africa**

ECA/SDD/06/01

**African Trade Policy Centre News, January 2007**

ATPC News, Vol. 2, No. 1



# Activities of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

ESCWA

## Two Important UN-ESCWA Events in Oman

Within the framework of the Oman Water Week organized by UN-ESCWA and the Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources, Muscat hosted two major events, namely: the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Legal and Institutional Reforms for the Implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management in the UN-ESCWA Region, from 18 to 20 March 2007, and the Seventh Session of the UN-ESCWA Committee on Water Resources, from 20 to 22 March.

Participants in the first meeting included a group of experts, consultants, academics, representatives of research centres concerned with water issues, as well as regional and international governmental networks. The second meeting was attended by government representatives of UN-ESCWA member countries who are also permanent members in the Committee on Water Resources, in addition to representatives of United Nations organizations and programmes, as well as NGOs accredited to ECOSOC.

The EGM was held in cooperation with the German Government represented by the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR) and the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ), and aimed to review and discuss the UN-ESCWA Guidelines for Legislative and Institutional Reforms Needed for the Implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) at the National Level. The meeting concluded with a set of region-specific recommendations, which were raised at the Seventh Session of the UN-ESCWA Committee on Water Resources, held under the theme «Institutional and Legal Reform for the Implementation of IWRM in the UN-ESCWA Region». At the end of the Session, the participants came up with a set of recommendations addressed to member countries and to UN-ESCWA. They requested member countries to carry on their efforts in developing and enhancing the institutional framework for achieving IWRM as part of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and pursuant to the Millennium Development Goals.

## Developing the Arab ICT Strategy

UN-ESCWA participated in the tenth meeting of the Arab Working Group (AWG) on the Arab Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Strategy, organized by the League of Arab States in Cairo on 13 and 14 March 2007. The meeting was attended by representatives of ten Arab countries, namely Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Syria, as well as representatives of regional and international organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union-Arab Office, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, the Arab Business Forum, and the Technical Secretariat of the Arab Telecommunication and Information Council of Ministers.

Participants in the meeting discussed the formulation of the general Arab ICT strategy for the period 2007-2012. The strategy highlights the Arab vision for building the Information Society entitled «Building an Integrated Arab Information Society by Maximizing the Benefits of ICT and Establishing an Arab Industry to Promote Sustainable Socioeconomic Development». The strategy also identifies three main goals for building an Arab Information Society and developing the ICT industry. The final formulation of the Arab ICT Strategy was submitted to the Arab Telecommunication and Information Council of Ministers for approval in June 2007.

## The Director General of AIDMO Visits UN-ESCWA

UN-ESCWA Executive Secretary Ms. Mervat Tallawy met on 12 March with the Director-General of the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO), Mr. Mohamed Bin Youssef. The aim of his visit was to discuss the strengthening of cooperation between AIDMO and UN-ESCWA as well as the possibility of signing a new comprehensive and qualitative agreement on the close cooperation between the two organizations that began in the 1970s in the area of industrial development and mining.

## Regional Framework to Integrate Demographic Transition in Development Plans

ESCWA, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Higher Population Council in Jordan, organized an Expert Group Meeting to discuss a regional framework for integrating demographic transition in development plans and programmes in the Arab countries. The meeting was held in Amman on 3 and 4 April 2007 under the patronage of H.E. Ms. Suhair El Ali, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation. In addition to ESCWA experts, there were 30 eminent regional experts in the fields of population, economy, sociology, and demography, among which were government officials, researchers and academia.

The meeting was conducted in line with ESCWA's continuous efforts in the area of integrating population issues with development, in particular integrating the changing age structure of population in the process of social and economic development. It aimed at adopting a pilot framework, which comprises the major steps required for integrating demographic transition in the development process. In its concluding session, participants called upon ESCWA to maintain its pioneering role in perceiving and analysing the implications of the demographic transition and in providing supporting conditions to ensure that the outcome of the demographic transition would not be a foregone conclusion, but would be an opportunity to achieve the MDGs. They recommended that ESCWA should continue its role in disseminating wide range demographic knowledge, and in enhancing national capacity to take advantage of this emerging regional opportunity.

## Eighth Session of UN-ESCWA Transport Committee

Under the auspices of Minister of Public Works and Transport Mr. Mohammad Assafadi, the Eighth Session of the UN-ESCWA Transport Committee was launched in Beirut on 27 March 2007 and continued until 29 March. One of the main issues discussed by the Committee was the follow-up on the implementation of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM). ITSAM is based on a set of agreements and components, namely: the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq; Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq; Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation in the Field of Maritime Transport in the Arab Mashreq; National Transport and Trade Facilitation Committees (NTTFCs); road traffic safety; ITSAM Methodological Framework; ITSAM Geographical Information System; and international multimodal transport. The Session also reviewed transport related projects being executed by UN-ESCWA.

Discussions focused on the proposed Agreement on International Multimodal Transport of Goods in the Arab Mashreq. The approved agreement will be presented to the twenty-fifth Ministerial Session of UN-ESCWA scheduled in April 2008, for adoption and signature by the member countries in accordance with the UN applicable procedures. At the conclusion of the Session, the participants also recommended the adoption of the action plan for the implementation of the MoU on Cooperation in the Field of Maritime Transport in the Arab Mashreq.

In preparation for the Session, and under the patronage of Egyptian Transport Minister, Mr. Mohammad Mansour, UN-ESCWA held an "Expert Group Meeting Towards the Implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Transport Cooperation in the Arab Mashreq: The Role of Governments and Private Sector in Activating Shipping Traffic and Application of Information and Communication Technology in the Seaports of UN-ESCWA Member Countries" from 12 to 14 February 2007 in Cairo. The meeting was part of UN-ESCWA efforts to develop cooperation and integration ties between the countries of Western Asia and all Arab countries and to enhance the role of maritime transport, notably in facilitating and supporting foreign and intraregional trade.

## Abu Dhabi Hosts UN-ESCWA Forum on Energy

UN-ESCWA organized the "Arab Regional Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development: Strategies, Policies and Plans", held in cooperation with the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, the CAMRE Technical Secretariat and UNEP/ROWA in Abu Dhabi, on 1 February, following the International Conference on Integrated Sustainable Energy Resources in Arid Regions, held from 28 to 31 January.

The Forum brought together a wide range of national officials, experts and professionals with representatives and experts from the regional organization to review and update the current plans and progress achieved on energy for sustainable development and related environmental issues. Participants included national experts from UN-ESCWA member countries; national focal points of the "Regional Mechanism on the Development of Energy Uses for Sustainable Development"; members of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR); representatives from the concerned United Nations bodies, Arab regional organizations (Arab League and its subsidiary bodies), UNEP/ROWA representatives and international agencies.



## UN-ESCWA and Alcatel-Lucent Launch a Joint Report on Broadband for Development

In the presence of Jordanian Minister of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Mr. Basem Rousan, UN-ESCWA and Alcatel-Lucent (Euronext Paris and NYSE: ALU) made public on 28 February a joint report on «Broadband for Development in the UN-ESCWA Region: Enhancing Access to ICT Services in a Global Knowledge Society» during a press conference at the Jordanian Ministry of Information and Communication Technology in Amman. The report is available on the following websites:

[http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/lib/Uploads/ESCWA\\_ALCATEL\\_2007.pdf](http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/lib/Uploads/ESCWA_ALCATEL_2007.pdf)

<http://www.alcatel-lucent.com/digitalbridge>

### Review of Information and Communications Technology and Development, Issue No. 6

Sales No. A.07.II.L.4 - ISBN: 92-1-128309-4

### External Trade Bulletin of the ESCWA Region, Fifteenth Issue

E/ESCWA/SCU/2006/3 - ISBN: 92-1-128304-3

### Workshop on the Implementation of Good Practices in Road Traffic Safety

E/ESCWA/GRID/2006/1

### Regional Cooperation between Countries in the Management of Shared Water Resources: Case Studies of Some Countries in the ESCWA region

E/ESCWA/SDPD/2005/15 - New York, 2006



# Surveys of the regional commissions

ECE

## Economic Situation and Outlook in the UNECE region

The UNECE region, which accounts for 48.5 per cent of global GDP on a purchasing power parity basis, achieved a growth rate of 3.6 per cent in 2006 but this is expected to fall to 3.0 per cent in 2007 which is what it has averaged over the last 8 years. All the economies of the region had positive growth in 2006 and all are expected to do so again in 2007 although growth in Iceland may be close to zero. The fastest growth occurred in the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) which grew at 7.7 per cent, with Russia, now the world's tenth largest economy, experiencing growth of 6.7 per cent in 2006 which is equal to its average growth rate over the last seven years; Russia has now experienced its longest period of sustained growth since the breakup of the Soviet Union. The EECCA region minus Russia now ranks amongst the fastest growing in the world having achieved a 9.7 per cent increase in GDP in 2006 and was led by Azerbaijan's 31.0 per cent increase in GDP which makes it the world's fastest growing economy. Growth throughout the EECCA region has been stimulated by high commodity prices. Inflation however, remains significant although it is down considerably from previous years.

Growth in South-East Europe averaged 5.9 per cent in 2006 despite significant uncertainty surrounding the outcome of a number of important developments such as the future political status of Kosovo, the prospects for EU membership for most of the economies in the region, or the political direction of Turkey. The largest economy in the region, Turkey, continued its five-year expansion following the financial crisis in 2001 by growing 6.1 per cent in 2006; this is that country's longest period of stable growth since 1970. Economic growth in the EU's New Member States (NMS) continued to be quite high averaging about 6.3 per cent for 2006 although it should moderate to about 5.7 per cent in 2007. Growth has been particularly high in the Baltic economies, especially Estonia and Latvia. EU accession for Bulgaria and Romania, which joined in 2007, has generally proceeded smoothly. Unemployment, which has been quite significant in many of the NMS for over a decade, has finally begun to decline substantially. Economic policy in these economies is generally being geared towards satisfying the Maastricht criteria for euro accession; Slovenia adopted the euro in January of 2007 and Cyprus and Malta are scheduled for January 2008. For the remaining countries, however, their dates for entry are being pushed back due to

difficulties in satisfying the inflation and fiscal targets. An area of particular macroeconomic vulnerability for all of the post-transition economies has been the relatively rapid growth of domestic credit as financial markets have developed considerably in recent years.

Growth picked up considerably in Western Europe in 2006 to its best level since 2000, however it should moderate considerably in 2007 by returning to approximately its longer-run trend level. The economic expansion of 2006 was particularly strong in Germany. Euro area unemployment which has been relatively high, continued its recent downward trend by falling to 7.2 per cent in March 2007. This is the lowest unemployment for the eurozone since Eurostat began publishing data on this in 1993. Growth picked up slightly in North America in 2006 to 3.3 per cent although it has slowed down considerably and is projected to be only about 2.2 per cent in 2007. Higher interest rates, especially as they impact housing markets, are the most important factor in explaining the expected slowdown in 2007 in the US and Western Europe. Financial imbalances remain a significant concern for the region as the US continues to be the largest importer of capital and Russia is the third largest exporter.

ESCAP

## Surging Ahead in Uncertain Times

The Economic and Social Survey of the Asia and Pacific, 2007, entitled, "Surging ahead in uncertain times", examines both the social and economic aspects of development. It looks at the challenges and risks faced by countries in the region. The Survey reveals several risks tied to global economic trends and possible events, including failure to manage exchange rates, an oil price shock, cooling of housing markets in the United States, a possible slow down of the Japanese economic recovery; and economic "overheating" in China and an avian flu pandemic.

The Survey highlights gender discrimination as one of the region's most serious socio-economic issues. The region is losing \$42-47 billion a year due to restrictions on women's access to employment and \$16-30 billion per year because of gender gaps in education. According to the Survey, if women's participation in the workforce was on a par with developed countries, such as the United States, India's gross domestic product would augment by 1.08 per centage points, a gain to the economy of \$19 billion. If the countries of the region increase education for women by one per centage point, gross domestic product could

grow at a rate of almost 0.2 per cent faster than it is currently. The Survey notes that some measures to ensure gender equality in the region were under way, as Governments launched action plans to attain the MDGs. The Survey recommends ending gender-based restrictions to certain professions and providing free primary education.

The report examines the challenges of "green" growth in the Asia-Pacific region, where many countries are struggling to balance rapid growth and urbanization with environmental protection and the use of clean energy technologies. There is evidence that the region is facing severe environmental degradation in some areas and is en route to becoming a major greenhouse gas emitter. The Survey recommends a multi-track approach to ensure "greener" growth, including "green taxation", or higher taxes tagged to fossil fuel use, building more sustainable infrastructures, promoting sustainable, climate-friendly production and consumption patterns, providing incentives for "green" business practices, and improving the monitoring of environmental protection plans and initiatives.

The Survey includes an evaluation of subregional performance and a discussion of policy issues such as monitoring vulnerability to currency crisis, increasing domestic demand through private investment, especially in East Asia, and managing urban growth. It also examines how the Central Asian countries cope with the appreciation of their currencies in the light of rising oil prices.

ECLAC

## Accelerating Africa's Development

The Economic Report on Africa, 2007, entitled, "Accelerating Africa's Development", which for the first time was produced in partnership with the African Union Commission, reveals that the African economies continued to sustain the growth momentum of previous years, recording an overall real GDP growth rate of 5.7 per cent in 2006, with 28 countries recording higher economic growth rates in 2006 than 2005. The recent growth can be attributed to improvements in macroeconomic management for major African export commodities which resulted in high export prices for crude oil, metals, and minerals. The economies are projected to grow at 5.8 per cent in 2007.

The report enumerates some of the factors that are likely to impede growth in the future such as lack of diversification of production and exports, instability and vulnerability to shocks, and the increasing spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which undermines labour supply and labour productivity. In

addition, inefficient public infrastructure and unreliable energy supply at the national level and poor integration of transportation and energy networks at the regional level will continue to undermine the productivity and international competitiveness of African economies.

The report calls for new growth policies that go beyond the traditional focus on the second generation of reform policies pressed on Africa by international financial institutions. It argues that, in spite of progress made in the previous generations of reforms, Africa has to embark on more systematic efforts to diversify its economies. The diversification process in Africa is highly influenced by investment, per capita income, the degree of openness of trade, macroeconomic policy and the institutional framework. The report recommends diversification policies for Africa which can operate at three levels: macroeconomic policies to support diversification; trade and sectoral policies to deepen diversification; and strengthening institutions to enhance diversification efforts. African countries need to increase financing for research and development to encourage innovation, increase productivity, and accelerate economic growth.

The report highlights that African countries continue to face the challenge of other deadly diseases, especially malaria, which remains the number one killer on the continent. Investment in insecticide-treated nets has proved to be a successful approach to preventing malaria, but more is still needed to win the war against this and other preventable and curable diseases such as tuberculosis.

ECA

## Economic Situation and Outlook in LAC

In 2006, the Latin America and the Caribbean region witnessed remarkable economic growth. According to ECLAC's Economic Situation and Outlook in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2006-2007, the regional GDP increased to 5.6 per cent over the year. This signifies the fourth consecutive year of economic growth, and the third consecutive year of rates exceeding 4 per cent, after an average annual growth rate of only 2.2 per cent between 1980 and 2002. All the countries in the region posted positive growth rates, higher than or similar to those of 2005. Chile showed a GDP expansion of 4 per cent over the year, down from 5.7 per cent in 2005. The highest rates were posted in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 10.3 per cent, the Dominican Republic, 10.7 per cent and Argentina, 8.5 per cent. Costa Rica, Panama and Peru grew at rates of around 8 per cent, Uruguay at 7 per cent and Colombia at 6.8 per cent. The lowest figures were for

Haiti 2.5 per cent and Brazil 3.7 per cent. The English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean countries as a group had a growth of 7 per cent.

The survey indicates that the favourable international environment allowed the region as a whole to achieve an increase of 7.5 per cent in the volume of its exports, as well as a terms-of-trade improvement of more than 7 per cent over the previous year. In 2006, for the region as a whole, growth in national income exceeded GDP growth by almost two percentage points. This was broadly attributable to improved terms-of-trade and increased remittances from abroad. Public spending rose as a result of a higher level of investment in physical and social infrastructure. In most countries, inflation decreased from 6.1 per cent in 2005 to 4.9 per cent in 2006. Many countries faced downward pressure on exchange rates because of large inflows of foreign currency from stronger export prices or remittances, and took measures to contain the impact. But, overall, most local currencies appreciated slightly. It is important to note that due to favourable external conditions and the implementation of macro-economically sustainable domestic policies, the region's economic growth has been accompanied by a rising current account surplus and a gradual strengthening of public accounts. These developments are reducing the region's vulnerability to external shocks.

The survey reveals that economic growth boosted job creation throughout the region. A large proportion of recent job creation has been in waged employment. In all the countries for which data are available, employment rates in the construction sector were higher than the equivalent rates for the economy as a whole. Employment in the tertiary sector also expanded rapidly. In contrast, employment in manufacturing increased at below-average rates, in a context of growing international competition. The analysis of employment quality shows uneven result. Job creation has reacted rapidly to economic growth, with a notable increase in formal employment. In many countries, however, the urban formal sector accounts for only a minority of the workforce. Accordingly, even with that sector posting high rates of job creation, the increase in formal employment has often been limited in absolute terms and in relation to the population's needs. Additional measures are thus needed to boost the creation of productive jobs.

The survey forecasts that the international environment during 2007 will continue to be positive for Latin America and the Caribbean. Continued regional GDP growth for 2007 depends on a sound domestic macroeconomic environment and the impact that sustained growth will have on domestic demand. This is a promising development, as the region has suffered previously from a high

degree of macroeconomic volatility which discouraged investment and the possibility of achieving sustained growth. However, the region needs to increase productivity and strengthen policy instruments at the national level to guarantee fiscal stability and minimize vulnerability to fluctuating economic cycles.

## ESCWA Economic and Social Developments in ESCWA's Region

The ESCWA region experienced another year of robust economic expansion, with the exception of Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, which were embroiled in regional conflicts and political instabilities. According to the Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA's region, 2006-2007, the current favourable external economic conditions due to high oil prices continued to lift the region, and growth rates were high in most ESCWA member countries in 2006. Average GDP growth for the ESCWA region was estimated at 5.6 per cent for 2006, down from 6.9 per cent in 2005. It is expected to further decrease to 5.1 per cent in 2007.

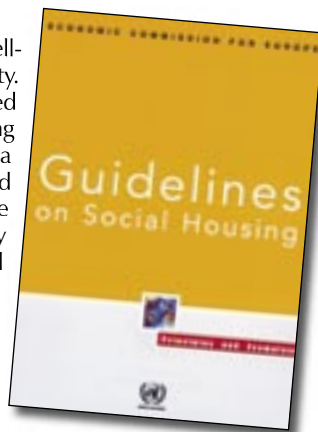
The Survey cautions against creating rich countries with poor people. It provides policy guidelines on how to avoid the effects of the "Dutch Disease, whereby the abundance of natural resources undermines overall economic performance and the competitiveness of the tradable sector. The survey examines the monetary and financial policy implications of the boom for different countries in the region and how the resources can be deployed in order to achieve pro-poor growth. It explores the policy landscape and recommends ways to retain financial and human resources in order to meet the requisites of development as a human right and to achieve the MDGs.

Despite continued economic growth, unemployment and underemployment are major socio-economic challenges in the region, with youth and female unemployment remaining exceptionally high in the region. In a positive development, the survey reveals that in 2006, there was a great focus on the rights of foreign workers in the region within the framework of labour law reforms, especially in countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Recent initiatives include regulating the rights and duties of foreign housemaids, protecting foreign workers in qualified industrial zones, and an increase in minimum wages for foreign nationals.

# Flagship Publications of the Commissions

## UNECE Guidelines on Social Housing: Principles and Examples

The availability of affordable housing is vital for individuals' well-being and for ensuring social cohesion and economic productivity. In recent years, countries of the UNECE region have experienced a widening gap between income and housing prices thus making housing less affordable. Many countries in the region witnessed a diminishing role of the state in the housing sector and increased reliance on market forces to satisfy housing demand. As a result, the housing needs of the poor and vulnerable are often inadequately addressed. Countries of the UNECE region are realizing the need for a renewed and stronger role of the state in the provision of social housing. However, in order for the provision of social housing to be efficient and effective, countries have called for a better sharing of experience on social housing policies and practices as well as improved guidance to policymakers through well-documented information on these policies and practices.

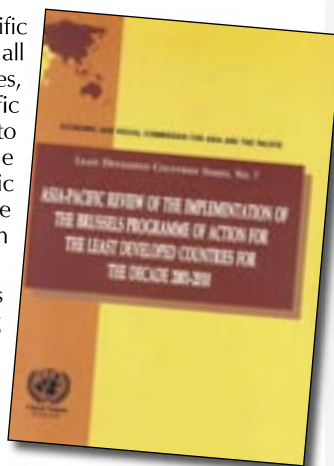


The UNECE Guidelines on Social Housing are designed to enable policymakers to assess the various policy options that are currently available for the provision of social housing. The publication addresses the institutional, legal and economic frameworks for social housing and experience with social housing design. The analysis includes the role of social housing policies for society at large and provides well-researched information on instruments available for the financing and provision of social housing.

## Asia Pacific Review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010

There are 14 least developed countries in the Asian and Pacific region which account for over 37 per cent of the population of all least developed countries (LDC). These 14 least developed countries, which are located in South Asia, South-East Asia, and the Pacific consist of four landlocked and seven small island countries. Due to their diversity, their experiences also differ. Although several of the Asian and Pacific LDCs have made progress in their socio-economic development, others have failed to achieve similar results. These countries face constraints due to geography, limited human resources and economic and environmental vulnerabilities.

The report presents a review of the progress towards attainment of internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. It also includes recommendations based on the Programme of Action to ensure that these countries are able to reach the Goals by 2015. The report reviews the implementation of the Programme of Action in the specific Commitments which are especially relevant to the LDCs of Asia and the Pacific and where regional cooperation can be most effective. This includes, financing for development; trade, migration and technology transfer; environment; and conflict prevention and security. The report makes recommendations on these issues as adopted at the Asia-Pacific Review of the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the LDCs for the Decade 2001-2010 held in Bangkok, Thailand, on 14-15 March 2006. This meeting was attended by high-level representatives of all 14 LDCs of the region, ESCAP member countries, international organizations and NGOs.



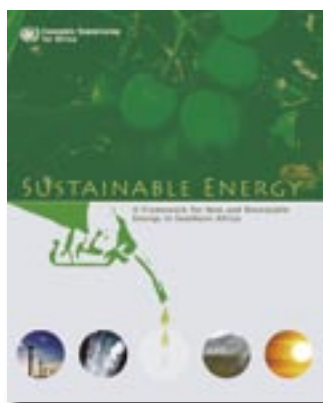


## Sustainable Energy: A framework for New and Renewable Energy in Southern Africa

The development of a harmonized subregional policy framework for new and renewable energy is an important step towards the realization of the goal of subregional integration and the harmonization of national policies and strategies in all sectors in Southern Africa. The focus of the framework for new and renewable energy in Southern Africa is to create an enabling environment for private sector participation in the development of appropriate renewable energy technologies and to facilitate the supply of these technologies to communities at affordable prices. The framework highlights the importance of energy as a factor of production for purposes of economic empowerment and diversification of economic activities in rural areas. The policy framework is underpinned by the important relationship between access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy and social and economic progress.

The publication provides recommendations on how member States should align their policies, develop and enhance their skills in renewable energy, pool resources for development of appropriate renewable energy technologies, and facilitate trade in these technologies. The aim is to increase access to affordable energy services in Southern Africa in order to promote sustainable development.

The report also highlights the constraints to renewable energy development in the subregion including, inadequate policies, legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks and limited financial flow for the development and provision of sustainable energy.



## The ESCWA Technology Centre for Development

Science, technology and innovation (STI) policies have become the interface between socio-economic needs and knowledge producers, and new institutions are vital for research, training, and development of small and medium-sized enterprises. The promotion of the application of science and technology is necessary to meet the MDGs. Due to lack of regional cooperation and synergies among Arab States in STI, institutions must be upgraded and new Research and Development (R&D) institutions should be created in industrial, technical, and engineering. Furthermore, there is an acute need to create linkages between academic institutions and R&D centres, and between those with ideas and innovative projects. There is an additional need to strengthen the demand side of technology and match it with the supply side.

The study outlines the vision for the ESCWA Technology Centre (TC). The TC will focus on STI capacity-building as a tool for achieving sustainable development, enhancing growth, competitiveness, economic diversification, employment creation and poverty reduction, and address gender-related issues. It will also coordinate regional and subregional cooperation and encourage the pooling of resources when major regional technology-based projects are being considered. The Centre will promote the acquisition and use of modern technologies to achieve sustainable development at the national and regional levels, improve productivity, and adherence to international quality standards, thereby increasing member country competitiveness. Its activities would ensure that international cooperation is promoted in a manner to respond to national needs. In order to sustain operations of the Technology Centre, the study recommends the establishment of an endowment Fund of \$20 million, providing an annual return on investment of some \$1 million.

ESCWA

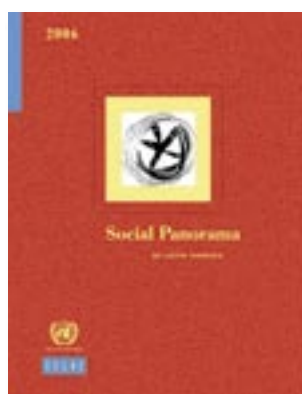
## Social Panorama of Latin America 2006

Latin America has witnessed its best performance in the last four years in economic and social terms. A number of countries in the region have experienced a reduction in poverty, declining unemployment, and improved income distribution. Most recent estimates of poverty conducted by ECLAC indicate that the number of poor people in the region declined from 209 million in 2005 to 207 million in 2006.

The report tracks the evolution of poverty, inequality in income distribution, and changes in the labour market focusing particularly on the performance of urban employment especially the participation of women in the work force. The quality of waged employment is discussed in the context of trends in real wages, type of contract, and social security coverage. It concludes that the upswing in employment and wages in the last two years has not improved the quality of new jobs.

The report provides a socio-demographic overview on indigenous people. It addresses the emergence of indigenous people as active social and political actors, and the consolidation of the international standards of their rights. Emphasis is accorded to the persistent inequity and inequality that indigenous people face in many countries in the region, and to the challenges facing the States in their efforts to narrow gaps in the implementation of indigenous people individual and collective rights.

With regard to the international social agenda, the report summarizes the agreements and recommendations emanating from the thirty-first session of ECLAC in which the main theme was social protection.



ECA

ECLAC

# Regional Commissions in partnership with Civil Society Organizations to achieve the MDGs

In tackling development challenges, the regional commissions continue to coordinate and set in motion economic and social policies aiming to ensure that the poor people share, in an equitable manner, the fruits of a sustained economic growth, and that the marginalized and vulnerable groups are not left behind in the strive to scale up efforts to achieve the MDGs. With Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) playing an important role in service delivery, especially in the social sector, the regional commissions are partnering with CSOs to promote gender mainstreaming, good governance, economic reconstruction, improving the environment, and meeting the MDGs challenges. Support is provided to CSOs through operational activities, encouragement of networking and collaborative action, identification and sharing of good practices, as well as through advisory services. CSOs are also invited to actively participate in briefings, events, and conferences organized by the regional commissions.

As an illustration of this partnership during 2007, ECA held the African Civil Society Forum to raise awareness on the MDGs. The Forum focused on the theme of "democratizing governance at regional and international levels to achieve the MDGs". It was attended by 200 Civil Society representatives from across Africa, including from the Conference of NGOs in Consultative relationship with the United Nations (CONGO) and the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), who joined in the organization of the Forum. ECLAC, in collaboration with the Network of Latin American and Caribbean Social Institutions, invited the general public to participate in a virtual forum on «Effective Community Responses to Domestic Violence». Through the forum, grassroots women lead the way in showing how attitudes to violence can change, and how victims of violence can defend themselves in the legal arena. Since the project's inception, the number of local groups involved in defending women from domestic violence has increased from eight to 38, mostly in rural areas.

As part of the efforts to address the threat of ethnic and sectarian tensions in its region, ESCWA invited representatives of Iraqi NGOs, together with officials from the Iraqi Ministries of Education, Human Rights, Youth and Sports to discuss a project on "Enhancing the Peaceful Coexistence in Iraq through Informal and Non-Formal Education." The project targets mainly Iraqi youth between 12 and 18 years. ESCAP, in collaboration with the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU), provided recently specialized training programme to Television Broadcast journalists from 13 Asia Pacific Countries to enhance their skills in reporting on the MDGs, including by producing feature length news items and public service announcements on the MDGs. While ECE, as part of operationalizing the Aarhus Convention on environmental rights, has opened new avenues for public access to environmental information and participation in environmental decisions using an electronic portal which will enable the use of ICT to provide the public with access to environmental information in an equitable manner. The regional commissions remain fully committed to their partnership with CSOs as an effective strategic means to achieve the MDGs.



## Regional Commissions Home Pages

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