



# Economic and Social Council

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## Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

### Sixty-ninth session

Bangkok, 25 April-1 May 2013

Agenda item 8

### Policy issues for the Asia-Pacific region

## Draft report

### Policy statement by the Executive Secretary

1. The Executive Secretary commenced her statement by reminding the Commission how Asia and the Pacific had transformed itself, leaving well behind its past of poverty and violence, which had devastated large parts of the region, and disproving a world that had once been pessimistic about its prospects. Rapid economic growth and social development had made a real difference in the lives of people in the region, which was home to more than 60 per cent of the world's population. Four decades since the prediction of an Asian future of poverty and deprivation in Nobel Laureate Gunnar Myrdal's famous book *The Asian Drama*, the Asia-Pacific region stood firm as the engine not only of regional but also of global economic recovery, having created a growing middle class and having eliminated half the world's absolute poverty. The Asian development drama had been transformed from a potential tragedy into inspirational progress owing to the strong commitment of leaders to "meet together, hold together and to advance together" in the words of the former Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, at the first Asian Relations Conference, in 1947.

2. The Executive Secretary noted that the continued success of the region would demand a new pattern of growth, cooperation and partnership, instead of doing more of the same, in order to address the multiple risks and challenges it currently faced: increasing inequality within and between countries, which could undermine social cohesion and stability; intense competition for natural resources; climate change affecting weather patterns, threatening agricultural production, oceans and communities; weak governance and institutions, as well as daunting poverty; and lack of human security as a result of criminal, communal, ethnic, religious and gender-based violence.

3. The Executive Secretary emphasized that the region should rethink and reinvest in itself by addressing serious interlinked challenges and seizing emerging opportunities – turning stumbling blocks, where possible, into new building blocks. The region needed to look for new drivers of growth in the struggle to close infrastructure and development gaps, to address jobless growth and unemployment, especially among youth, and build stronger, more accountable institutions. The region also needed to strive to make its cities safer and more sustainable and to rebalance economies towards better quality

inclusive growth. Furthermore, the countries in Asia and the Pacific would need to improve energy and water efficiency, as well as governance of natural resources. They would also have to spend more on health, education and social protection in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

4. The Executive Secretary observed that the region's transformational change towards inclusive and sustainable development would demand even greater collective leadership. She added that success would depend on enlightened policy choices, deeper regional cooperation, global partnerships, strong institutions, democratic governance and the rule of law in order to address existing challenges and shared vulnerabilities. A way forward to maximize opportunities could be to shape a more resilient Asia-Pacific region, rooted in shared prosperity, social equity and sustainability, empowered by the creativity of people and valuing the gifts of the Earth.

5. The Executive Secretary underscored that ESCAP was already assisting member States advance that critical agenda by providing research and analysis, policy options, technical assistance and innovative solutions to improve the lives of people. That was why inclusive and sustainable development had driven annual Commission sessions and their resolutions since 2008, including the current year's theme on building resilience to multiple shocks and supporting the development needs of the Pacific island developing countries and the least developed and landlocked developing countries.

6. In consultations on the development agenda beyond 2015, it had become clear that the region was seeking a new social contract between States and their people and between States and markets. That social contract had to promote people's engagement, translating growth into productive employment for all. It also meant adopting policies for fairer distribution of wealth, economic assets and opportunities, better resource management and better financial governance, including at the global level. These policies should promote greater accountability of both the public and private sectors and provide better human security and high-quality services so that all people could live in dignity and freedom from want, from fear and from discrimination.

7. The Executive Secretary called for a new model of development, to be based on structural changes for equality, inclusiveness, resilience and sustainable development in shaping the development agenda beyond 2015. The means of implementation should address how to mobilize and harness partnerships for global public goods, including through fair trade, access to technologies for a greener future and a stable international financial system that served the needs of the real economy.

8. The Executive Secretary emphasized that the task of the Commission was to reset conventional thinking and create new policy frameworks and institutions as well as global partnerships to build together *the future we want*.

9. The Executive Secretary concluded by saying that countries gathered at the Commission as a community of the United Nations must continue to be guided by the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and by shared responsibility to the people of the region, to common humanity and to generations still to come.