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Committee on Emerging Social Issues

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**PROGRAMME PLANNING AND EVALUATION: REVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC
FRAMEWORK FOR THE BIENNIUM 2008-2009 IN RESPECT OF
SUBPROGRAMME 3: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT,
INCLUDING EMERGING SOCIAL ISSUES**

(Item 7 (a) of the provisional agenda)

**ESCAP PROGRAMME OVERVIEW IN CONNECTION WITH THE DRAFT
STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE BIENNIUM 2008-2009**

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

The present document contains the draft programme overview as a guideline for the preparation of the ESCAP strategic framework for the biennium 2008-2009. The programme overview provides the basis for the further development of the ESCAP subprogramme on social development, including emerging social issues.

The Committee is invited to review and comment on the document.

1. Asia and the Pacific is a region of diversity and disparity. The region has some of the world's fastest growing economies, largest production bases and consumer markets, and most active trading partners. It has accumulated huge financial resources in domestic savings and foreign exchange reserves. It has achieved a spectacular reduction in income poverty. However, national averages obscure inter- and intra-country disparities, including gender disparities. The economic prosperity and dynamism of parts of the region conceal the destitution of the 680 million people who constitute two thirds of the world's poor. Moreover, the region is frequently affected by natural disasters, which threaten efforts towards economic growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development.

2. While the region has made rapid progress towards achieving many of the Millennium Development Goals, no one country is expected to meet all the Goal-related targets, although no country is performing badly on all 18 targets. The targets of particular concern in the region are those for maternal health, child mortality and environmental sustainability.

3. Nearly one in two children aged under five is underweight in South Asia. South Asia alone accounts for 30 per cent of the world's total maternal deaths, with 20 women dying every hour from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. South Asia also experienced a ninefold increase in HIV prevalence between 1990 and 2004. South-East Asia experienced the world's fastest loss of forest cover (9.3 per cent) between 1990 and 2000.

4. Countries that are off track on many Millennium Development Goal indicators often lack the necessary finance and opportunities to harness growth. This is particularly true of the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries. Greater regional cooperation can increase the resources at their disposal in a number of ways: by expanding trade and increasing foreign direct investment, and through official development assistance, and by strengthening transport and other cross-regional infrastructures. Institutional change in all these areas can help to accelerate growth and reduce poverty, while also boosting government revenues that can be invested in better services for the poor. For the rapidly growing economies in the region, the key challenge will be to reduce intra-country disparities, especially income and gender disparities, proactively.

5. In the second review of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific (2004-2005),¹ it is recognized that, in order to reduce poverty and meet the needs of current and future populations, the countries of the region will need to pursue greater economic growth. It will also be vital to ensure that more of each country's resources are targeted towards achieving the Goals. Just as important, however, is the need to consider the way in which these resources are invested and how progress towards the Goals is shaped by the nature of national institutions.

¹ ESCAP/UNDP/ADB, *A Future Within Reach: Reshaping Institutions in a Region of Disparities to Meet the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific* (United Nations publication, sales No. E.05.II.F.27).

6. Institutional change at all levels will be required to ensure more efficient and effective delivery of essential services to the region's growing population, which over the next 10 years is expected to expand by 415 million, adding to the demand for adequate food, clothing, housing, water, energy and transport infrastructure, along with other basic needs.

7. A key challenge lies in finding ways to achieve sustainable growth while limiting the use of natural resources, reducing pollution, mitigating the impact of natural disasters, and generally keeping within the region's ecological capacity. This will mean moving on from the conventional approach of "grow first, clean up later" to one that promotes a knowledge-based economy and harmonizes economic growth with environmental sustainability.

8. The Shanghai Declaration, adopted by the Commission in its resolution 60/1 of 28 April 2004, emphasizes the need for regional cooperation and capacity-building to meet development challenges in an era of globalization, including those pertaining to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal targets by 2015. Moreover, it reaffirms the importance of focusing the work of ESCAP on the three thematic areas of poverty reduction, managing globalization, and addressing emerging social issues, as well as efforts to improve the delivery of basic services.

9. The overall objective of ESCAP in the strategic framework for 2008-2009 will build on the direction adopted for the 2006-2007 biennium, namely to promote equitable access to opportunities for both men and women, communities and economies, leading to the region's economic and social advancement. Its emphasis for the 2008-2009 biennium will be on strengthening institutional capacities to serve the rights of the people and address their aspirations and needs. All kinds of institutions, governmental and non-governmental, formal and informal, have an impact on the achievement of the Goals. There is a need to change not only the quantum of Goal-related investments, but also the governance of resource utilization.

10. ESCAP will pursue the above objective by continuing to focus on its three thematic priorities, namely: (a) poverty reduction; (b) managing globalization; (c) addressing emerging social issues, as reaffirmed by the Shanghai Declaration.

11. In terms of focus, ESCAP will endeavour to support countries of the region in building national capacities in: (a) strengthening and implementing equitable and sustainable economic and social development policies and programmes, including regulatory and institutional frameworks; (b) preparing for, participating in and benefiting from multilateral and regional trade, transport and information and communication technology partnerships and agreements; (c) building effective partnerships with civil society entities and the private sector; and (d) reviewing progress in achieving the internationally agreed development goals and targets adopted at global and regional conferences. The diversity of the region is one of its strengths, and opportunities to explore enhanced regional cooperation to strengthen markets and improve competitiveness will be promoted. Interventions will include policy consultation and advocacy, knowledge sharing, training and advisory services.

12. In supporting regional efforts and actions on commitments made at global and regional conferences in connection with the Millennium Development Goals, ESCAP will focus on issues, goals and targets that are most effectively addressed through regional cooperation, including:

- Harmonization of legal and regulatory frameworks;
- Networking of national, subregional and regional organizations;
- Addressing areas of common concern among countries that would benefit from an exchange of experiences, the sharing of good practices, mutual technical support and agreement on joint action;
- Creating an enabling environment for South-South cooperation;
- Identifying and facilitating actions on emerging trends that require advocacy, dialogue and negotiation.

13. The ESCAP programme of work will provide an integrated framework through which normative, analytical and technical cooperation work will be undertaken. ESCAP will strengthen regional-level analysis, including a review of socio-economic performance in the region to identify trends, highlight good practices and foster regional cooperation. Technical cooperation activities will be designed to facilitate the implementation of norms and standards agreed by ESCAP members and associate members to assist countries in the region in achieving internationally agreed goals and targets.

14. One priority will be mainstreaming gender concerns across subprogrammes to promote gender equality. Particular attention will be given to promoting, in diverse development sectors, a rights-based approach to the participation of vulnerable groups, especially the poor, women, youth, people with diverse disabilities, older persons and people living with HIV/AIDS.

15. ESCAP will pay attention to the specific needs of least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and countries with economies in transition by mainstreaming those needs across subprogrammes and according priority to them in technical cooperation. Given the special geographical situation and needs of the Pacific island developing countries and territories, ESCAP will pay particular attention to strengthening their capacity to develop and manage economic and social policies and programmes.

16. ESCAP will use its convening authority and mobilize its networks in diverse development sectors to promote multilevel and multisectoral responses for sustainable development, with a focus on strengthening institutional capacity for more equitable access to and utilization of services and opportunities.

17. To ensure coherence across the United Nations system, ESCAP will work in close cooperation and coordination with other multilateral bodies and specialized agencies, especially with

members of the United Nations Development Group through such modalities as the Regional Coordination Meeting, which is chaired by ESCAP and comprises all regional United Nations entities in Asia and the Pacific. As an active member of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, ESCAP will seek greater clarity in the roles and responsibilities of global and regional bodies with regard to the follow-up to the outcomes of major global conferences. Particular emphasis will be placed on collaboration with other regional intergovernmental organizations.

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