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**PROGRAMME PLANNING AND EVALUATION: MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

(Item 7 (b) of the provisional agenda)

**REVIEW OF A SELECTED FLAGSHIP PROJECT**

*Note by the secretariat*

**SUMMARY**

The present document contains a qualitative assessment of the ESCAP flagship series of projects to support the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 2003-2012. It assesses the outcome so far of ESCAP work under this series of projects and highlights lessons learned for future project planning and implementation. The Committee is invited to review the present document with a view to providing further guidance to the secretariat on its work to promote the rights of persons with disabilities to and prepare a renewed strategy, entitled “Biwako +5: forward-looking strategies” for implementation during the second half of the Decade.

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## I. PURPOSE OF EVALUATION

1. In line with ESCAP's enhanced monitoring and evaluation of its programme activities, the present document constitutes an independent qualitative assessment by the Programme Management Division of an ESCAP intervention in a key area of its programme of work related to addressing emerging social issues: the participation and equality of persons with disabilities.
2. The report considers the secretariat's experience to date in implementing a flagship series of projects to support the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 2003-2012, under the Population and Social Integration Section, Emerging Social Issues Division. It assesses the outcome of ESCAP work under these projects and highlights the lessons learned for future project planning and implementation. The present document would also be an input towards the midpoint review of the Decade, which will take place during the fourth quarter of 2007.
3. The Committee is invited to review the document with a view to providing further guidance to the secretariat on its work to promote the rights of persons with disabilities and to prepare a renewed strategy entitled the "Biwako +5: forward-looking strategies" during the second half of the Decade.

## II. INTRODUCTION

4. The projects support the overall goal of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 2003-2012: towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.
5. The Government of Japan provided nearly US\$ 3 million and funded 15 single- and multi-year projects during the first Decade and the first three years of the current Decade. Governments in the region and partners from the private sector pooled resources to establish the technical cooperation trust fund for the Decade. By August 2005, contributions had amounted to over US\$ 500,000, with the Governments of China and Japan donating US\$ 10,000 each on an annual basis.
6. From the inception of the second Decade (2003-2012), the work of implementing the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific was undertaken within ESCAP by a very small but dedicated and committed team of Professional and support staff.
7. ESCAP provided technical support to Governments and civil society for implementing the Biwako Millennium Framework. The Framework contained seven priority areas and four strategies that affected disabled persons everywhere.
8. The projects also embodied a range of ESCAP core functions, including that of an issue-catalyst, a policy advocate, a regional convener, a knowledge hub and a central resource for national capacity-building.

### **A. The challenge**

9. Persons with disabilities are often unseen, unheard and uncounted. The stigma of disability and discriminatory practices against persons with disabilities are deeply rooted in Asian and Pacific societies. Their freedom of movement in society is often constrained by adverse social, economic, physical and political conditions that render them multiply handicapped. As a social group, persons with disabilities also tend to be excluded from mainstream development opportunities.

10. Persons with disabilities are among the most marginalized social groups in Asia and the Pacific, but they are by no means the minority, as approximately 400 million of the world's 600 million disabled persons reside in this region. An estimated 40 per cent of all disabled persons in the region live below the poverty line. Less than 10 per cent of children and youth with disabilities attend school.

### **B. ESCAP response**

11. The projects were conceived in response to a series of global calls for action. The first United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, 1983-1992, marked the beginning of serious attention being paid to disability issues by the international community. This global initiative helped to raise international awareness on disability and the plight of disabled persons; this awareness, however, was not fully translated into action.

12. The Commission adopted resolution 58/4 of 22 May 2002 on promoting an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region in the twenty-first century. That resolution, inter alia, proclaimed the extension of the previous Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, for another 10 years, to give Governments further impetus to promote the rights of persons with disabilities and to respond to the new dynamism at the global level.

#### **1. Project strategy**

13. As the regional arm of the United Nations, ESCAP is the only intergovernmental body covering the entire Asian and Pacific region. The ESCAP region is the first in the world where Governments made a collective commitment to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. The projects are outcomes of the power of ESCAP to convene and mobilize regional commitment to a global issue. They also give a regional perspective to a global issue that concerns the difficult plight of disabled persons.

14. As the principal regional forum for discussion and setting norms, ESCAP is well-placed to advocate and support countries in developing and implementing policies and plans.

15. The Biwako Millennium Framework was developed through the ESCAP forum to guide national-level action towards the attainment of the Decade's overall goal. Through advocacy and

implementation of the Framework, ESCAP supported the introduction of policy and programme measures that directly benefited persons with disabilities.

16. Regional coordinating mechanisms played an important role in coordinating activities and mobilizing support for the implementation of particular areas of the Framework. ESCAP cooperated closely with these structures to promote and review the targets and strategies of the Framework.

17. Following the inception of the new Decade, the Thematic Working Group on Disability-related Concerns was sustained and its membership included some 60 NGOs, 20 government representatives, the Asian Development Bank and several United Nations agencies.

## **2. Project activities**

18. ESCAP carried out a wide range of activities to encourage and support national implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework. These included policy advocacy; public awareness; networking and coalition-building; technical exchange; information dissemination and identification of good practices; training and capacity-building; and advisory services.

19. ESCAP advocated and assisted Governments to develop approaches that promoted the participation of persons with disabilities in the development process. Extensive support was also given to NGOs and other civil society organizations advocating for the rights of and services for disabled persons in the region.

20. Although ESCAP undertook complementary activities in all seven priority areas and four strategies of the Framework, two major issues became flagship components of the ESCAP disability projects during the first three years, (a) the promotion of rights-based approaches to disability issues, including regional and international initiatives towards a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, and (b) poverty alleviation through capacity-building, sustainable livelihood programmes and community-based rehabilitation.

## **3. Monitoring the implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework**

21. The importance of regular monitoring was recognized as a key to the successful implementation of the Decade. Regular review meetings are to be held biennially during the current Decade to assess progress and to help steer the course of the Decade's implementation, taking into consideration challenges and dynamics that had occurred in the disability field. The Executive Secretary will subsequently report the related findings and recommendations to the Commission and other intergovernmental bodies. The first such meeting was held in 2004.

#### **4. Partners and target beneficiaries**

22. With a view to avoiding duplication of development efforts in the field, ESCAP activities focused on areas of the Biwako Millennium Framework that were not covered by the mandates or expertise of other United Nations bodies and agencies.

23. In 2004, the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) jointly published a position paper on community-based rehabilitation, entitled *CBR: A Strategy for Rehabilitation, Equalization of Opportunities, Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities* and provided a new dynamic concept of rights-based community-based rehabilitation.

24. Since the inception of the second Decade, the Statistics Division and the Emerging Social Issues Division, in collaboration with WHO, have organized a series of workshops to promote the application of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, which was adopted in 2001, reflecting the recent paradigm shift from a “medical model” of disability to a “social model”.

25. With ILO, ESCAP co-organized two workshops on disability and development in 2005, one on community-based rehabilitation for poverty alleviation and the other on multinationals, promoting employment of persons with disabilities. Several multinational corporations discussed with participating Governments and NGOs a set of strategies concerning the hiring of qualified disabled workers in their operations.

26. With the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), ESCAP collaborated in promotional activities concerning poverty reduction and the rural employment of persons with disabilities. With UNESCO, knowledge-sharing and advocacy on education for children and youth with disabilities have taken place through a task force under the Thematic Working Group on Disability-related Concerns and the UNESCO-led Thematic Working Group on Education for All.

27. The target beneficiaries of the projects were relevant government, NGO and private sector personnel, which indicated the initiative of ESCAP to enlarge consultation and collaboration with its stakeholders and to enhance public-private partnerships. The projects involved persons with disabilities at all levels of planning and implementation.

### **III. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **A. Scope**

28. The report broadly reviews the implementation and achievements of the current Decade, 2003-2012, as at mid-2005.

## **B. Methodology**

29. In preparation for the Regional Workshop on Monitoring the Implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok in October 2004, an extensive review was undertaken by ESCAP, in close consultation with its partners, to assess the collective achievements in the implementation of the Framework. An extensive desk review of the workshop documentation and other relevant materials was conducted as inputs into the present document.

30. The desk review was supplemented by survey questionnaires administered to members of the Thematic Working Group, members and associate members of ESCAP. The survey largely sought information on the effectiveness of particular modalities employed by ESCAP in support of the Decade's targets and strategies. In addition, in-depth interviews and stakeholder consultations were conducted with responsible project officers and persons with disabilities who worked closely with ESCAP to gain additional insight into the role of the secretariat concerning the implementation of the Framework.

31. A standard set of evaluation criteria was applied as the basis to assess the specific role and contribution of ESCAP to the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 2003-2012. The criteria address the following aspects of the projects: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

## **IV. FINDINGS AND RESULTS**

32. The findings indicate that ESCAP played a key and critical role in supporting the targets and strategies of the Biwako Millennium Framework. These specific roles for the first three years of the Decade included the following:

- ESCAP was both catalyst and chief policy advocate in raising the issue of disability on the agendas of Governments, United Nations agencies, NGOs and the private sector.
- ESCAP was the foremost regional forum for Governments and NGOs to congregate, in many cases as equal partners, to discuss issues, share technical information and set norms and standards.
- ESCAP was the regional focal point for disability and thus the principal resource for related knowledge and capacity-enhancement of Governments, NGOs and the private sector in the region.
- ESCAP was the regional engine to promote support to the region-wide process towards a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, including the development of anti-discrimination laws or other rights-based legal framework.

### **A. Relevance**

33. The ESCAP disability projects were conceived as a regional solution to a global challenge. In mid-2005, the projects are still responding to a gap in the region's mainstream social development agenda that exclude the concerns of disabled persons.

34. Disability was of particular relevance to the region, given the overwhelming proportion of disabled persons that resided in the region. The added challenges posed by the effects of widespread poverty, gender inequality, digital divide and natural disasters also exacerbated the situation of disabled persons.

35. Despite the reality, however, disability was generally not recognized as a priority development issue in the ESCAP region. In this region, where two thirds of the world's disabled persons resided, largely in poverty, the first Decade, 1993-2002, did not fully achieve equality for persons with disabilities or create an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society.

36. Thus, the extension of the current Decade was the result of partnership and synergy among Governments, civil society and the private sector, in particular with regard to advocacy and efforts to change popular mindsets, on the part of ESCAP and supportive Governments in the region. The extension of the Decade and the follow-up activities expressed the voices and concerns of a socially excluded group and created enduring forums to discuss and improve issues.

37. The first Asian and Pacific Decade has influenced developments at the international level and it was replicated as a good practice. The African Decade of Disabled Persons (2000-2009) was formally proclaimed in Lomé in 2000, and the Arab Decade of Disabled Persons (2004-2013) was formally proclaimed at the summit meeting of the Arab League, held in Tunis in May 2004. In addition, the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability started its operational projects in 2003 and the Center's fully accessible building was completed in July 2005. The Center is a technical cooperation project of the Government of Thailand and the Government of Japan through the Japan International Cooperation Agency with a regional mandate of implementing the Biwako Millennium Framework. In July 2005, ESCAP and the Center co-organized a workshop on south-to-south cooperation, with the participation of about 130 people from the Asian and Pacific, Arab, African, and Latin America and Caribbean regions.

38. Issues relating to persons with disabilities are important concerns to be addressed in realizing the globally agreed Millennium Development Goals and other development initiatives. The Biwako Millennium Framework was designed as a tool to promote disability mainstreaming in developmental initiatives, particularly in the areas of eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

39. Increasingly the link between poverty and disability and the unmet needs of the majority of disabled persons living in rural areas is being recognized. The capacities of persons with disabilities

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must be developed so that they may contribute to community-based solutions to the particular problems that they face. ESCAP organized a series of workshops on disability, poverty and development in 2004 and 2005, targeting multiple sectors and global partners.

### **B. Efficiency**

40. The projects illustrate the value and utility of complementary partnerships and synergies in action among development partners in the region.

41. In implementing the Biwako Millennium Framework, ESCAP focused on the policy areas that were not covered by the expertise of other United Nations bodies and agencies. ESCAP maintained its primary areas of intervention in certain areas of the Framework, but it also cooperated with a range of United Nations agencies with specific mandates to achieve value-added outcomes in other policy areas. ESCAP collaborated with WHO, ILO, FAO and UNESCO through the organization of workshops and forums for constructive dialogue. Such partnerships and harmonization of efforts allowed agencies to tap each other's networks, products and expertise that resulted in greater efficiency in the use of resources. Furthermore, during the first three years of the Decade, ESCAP collaborated with new partners and key players in the private sector, particularly multinational corporations.

42. The related capacity-building activities of ESCAP have largely been in the form of regional and subregional workshops and seminars. In addition to the opportunity for intercountry networking among Governments, NGOs and individuals, such group training activities have proved to be more cost-effective per beneficiary than capacity-building through a series of individual national-level workshops. However, the benefits of specially tailored national-level capacity-building and advisory services, and local initiatives targeting grass-roots and self-help organizations, should not be overlooked for greater impact and country-specific relevance.

43. The regional coordination mechanisms ensured an efficient and coherent approach to programme planning, steering and implementation and a participatory and consultative approach to identifying and responding to emerging issues related to disability.

### **C. Effectiveness and impact**

44. The assessment revealed that ESCAP has made a significant contribution to the achievement of targets under the Biwako Millennium Framework in many countries in the region. Its contribution has also led to marked improvements in the quality of life of persons with disabilities and their families.

45. Responding Governments and NGOs to the survey questionnaire identified the following areas under the Framework in which ESCAP has had the most impact: the international convention, women with disabilities, accessibility (built environment) and access to information. In addition,

ESCAP helped to promote the participation of self-help organizations in decision-making and the development process at the community level.

46. Furthermore, the recommendations made at the first session of the Committee on Emerging Social Issues, held in Bangkok from 4 to 6 September 2003, and the sixty-first session of the Commission, held in Bangkok from 12 to 18 May 2005, indicated that enhanced regional cooperation, promotion of self-help organizations, public awareness and supportive legislations are appropriate modalities to further promote the implementation of the Framework. These are elaborated below.

*(a) Result 1. Enhanced regional cooperation*

47. ESCAP played a critical role as the linchpin of regional cooperation that supported and facilitated national-level action. This role was indispensable to the successful implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework.

48. Regional coordinating mechanisms, including the Thematic Working Group on Disability-related Concerns, also brought together United Nations agencies, NGOs, Governments and private sector representatives, and sustained momentum towards the achievement of the targets and strategies of the Framework. Such mechanisms were significant in the development, implementation and monitoring of policy tools to support the achievement of the Decade's goal in the region.

49. The regional forums and workshops also facilitated direct contact between those in need of information, advice and encouragement and those who were in a position to meet such needs. The broad-based participation in the regional workshops and forums organized by ESCAP also encouraged the development of advocacy and mutual support networks. These networks were nurtured in the early stages of their development and continually supported by ESCAP.

50. Respondents to the questionnaire suggested that the current mechanism could be more structured and needed to broaden its membership to include generic development agencies and donor agencies to promote disability mainstreaming into the development agenda. ESCAP will take these factors into consideration in the preparation of a set of updated strategies entitled "Biwako +5: forward-looking strategies" for implementation during the period 2008-2012.

*(b) Result 2. Empowerment of persons with disabilities*

51. Self-advocacy is difficult to undertake. Persons with disabilities need to be empowered and encouraged as agents of change in the region's disability movement. They find strength and inspiration in solidarity through intercountry mutual support networks.

52. In 2005, the leadership of the disability movement is still limited to mostly men from urban areas. Recognizing this disparity, ESCAP should seek to broaden participation of the marginalized groups such as women with disabilities, grass-roots self-help organizations and psychiatric service users in ESCAP meetings and conferences.

53. The discrimination against women in societies across the region is common. This discrimination is compounded by disability in the case of women and girls with disabilities who are often overlooked or marginalized in mainstream disability and gender-empowerment programmes. As women are seldom consulted, the presence of gender-insensitive features may render it difficult for women to participate in training programmes that are largely designed for men with disabilities. As the regional convener, ESCAP has succeeded in mainstreaming and empowering women with disabilities within the disability community. However, mainstreaming them into organizations focusing on gender equality issues is still a serious challenge.

54. ESCAP conducted leadership training and capacity-building workshops in which disabled persons were employed as resource persons. It also ensured their participation in all ESCAP meetings. Through the organization of regional meetings and capacity-building workshops, ESCAP encouraged and strengthened the mutual support networks of self-help organizations. During the first three years of the new Decade, such organizations were formed in 32 countries and territories in the region.

55. As the Biwako Millennium Framework affirms that persons with disabilities and their self-help organizations are best equipped and best informed to speak on their behalf and can contribute to solutions on issues that concern them, ESCAP plans to include in its annual Framework monitoring workshop in 2006 this priority theme of self-help organizations of persons with disabilities and their families. The technical agenda should include issues concerning the participation of persons with disabilities in policymaking, their political representations and capacity-building.

56. Respondents to the survey and questionnaire considered that ESCAP support for self-help organizations has significantly helped to change the attitude of Governments. It has also led to the increased government recognition of the importance of adopting a twin track approach: a disability-focused perspective and a mainstreaming disability perspective into a pro-poor developmental agenda. This recognition would also help pave the way for the integration of disabled persons in the larger development process.

57. Despite focused outreach efforts, it was felt by some that the projects largely neglected persons with intellectual disabilities, partially because they often could not adequately represent themselves in meetings and conferences. The need for broadened participation of persons with intellectual disabilities, however, was recognized by ESCAP and thus included as one of the targets and recommendations under the Framework. ESCAP will ensure that increased efforts are made to involve persons with intellectual disabilities in all its activities during the implementation of the new Decade.

58. Community-based initiatives, including community-based rehabilitation, were reaffirmed as a key strategy for providing services to persons with disabilities at the grass-roots level. However,

some respondents felt that the evolution of the community-based rehabilitation concept from a medical model to a rights-based one has triggered a difficult debate over its application. Thus, the focus on community-based rehabilitation has diminished over the first three years of the Decade. ESCAP will strengthen coordination efforts with other relevant agencies and organizations to refocus attention on community initiatives, at the same time avoiding contentious discussion, in order to optimize efforts towards extending services to the majority of persons with disabilities living in remote and rural communities.

*(c) Result 3. Increased public awareness on disability*

59. From 2003, a fully accessible and non-handicapping web page and CD documentation on the disability subsection, including information on a series of meetings and workshops on disability-related matters organized by ESCAP, were made available. This enabled access by a wider range of end-users, including persons with visual impairment and other disabilities. This modality was regarded by the respondents as having contributed the most towards mobilizing public awareness and support on disability issues in the region.

60. The respondents of the review strongly supported ESCAP activities in support of the global process towards a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, which was undertaken in accordance with one of the Framework strategies, namely, promotion of a rights-based approach to disability issues.

*(d) Result 4. Development of supportive legislations*

61. Legislation is often a first step towards real change and impact. Throughout the first three years of the Decade, significant progress has been made. A number of countries in the region adopted national legislation, policies, programmes and projects to eliminate discrimination against people with diverse disabilities and to empower disabled citizens and their organizations. Australia, the Philippines and Hong Kong, China have already adopted anti-discrimination legislation and institutionalized a proper monitoring mechanisms, such as a national equal opportunity commission, for its implementation.

62. Through the United Nations ESCAP Pacific Operation Centre (UN-EPOC), Vanuatu adopted a national disability policy in 2004 and established a focal point on disability issues under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2003, Cook Islands passed a comprehensive rights-based national policy on disability and action plan. In 2005, Solomon Islands adopted a national policy on disability, with reference to the Biwako Millennium Framework. In 2005, Papua New Guinea started the process of drafting a national policy on disability based on the Framework and in consultation with disabled peoples' organizations and various stakeholders. To follow up on these developments, the Pacific Islands Forum, which officially endorsed the Framework in 2003, UN-EPOC and ILO co-

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organized the Pacific Regional Workshop on Disability, in Nadi, from 1 to 4 August 2005 to review existing disability policies and the gaps in the subregion.

63. Furthermore, in 2005, there was a similar development in Timor-Leste. With the assistance of an international consultant funded by USAID and with ESCAP's technical advisory service, the first draft of a comprehensive national policy on disability, with reference to the Biwako Millennium Framework, was developed in close consultation with disabled persons and civil society at the grass-roots level in all districts of the country, and has been submitted to the Council of Ministers for endorsement.

64. Despite progress, there is concern as to whether legislation has been sufficiently enforced in the region. The enforcement of legislation could be encouraged, for example, by monitoring national-level implementation.

*(e) Result 5. Mainstreaming disability*

65. ESCAP has recognized the need to mainstream disability issues into development efforts. It has promoted this through the encouragement of multisectoral collaboration and inter-agency coordination at both the national and regional levels. ESCAP has identified and advocated approaches to multisectoral collaboration in all stages of the policy process: planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

66. At the national level, ESCAP projects have involved the participation of multiple stakeholders from various ministries and professions to promote multisectoral collaboration around disability issues. It also encouraged the lead ministries, traditionally social welfare, to collaborate with other relevant departments to mainstream disability concerns into government projects and services. In addition, ESCAP projects have enhanced partnership with multinational corporations.

67. Through the organization of regional training workshops and seminars, ESCAP has sought to include disability concerns into its programme of work, including information and communication technology, statistics, poverty alleviation and gender-mainstreaming programmes.

68. Concerning statistics, the establishment of national databases is essential to provide accurate information on persons with disabilities and their situations, without which it is difficult to plan appropriate services and monitor their progress towards the achievement of full participation and equality. However, there are wide discrepancies in the reporting of disability prevalence, which resulted from the conceptual framework adopted and the lack of common definitions and classifications. The Government of Australia spearheaded the application of the WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) in the region, and others have recently started similar efforts. Further efforts are needed to enhance government capacity in ICF application and disability data collection.

69. Therefore, ESCAP will continue its efforts to develop a common and standardized system of defining, and classification of, disability. In this regard, in 2004 the Statistics Division and the Emerging Social Issues Division of ESCAP conducted workshops in accordance with the Biwako Millennium Framework and the WHO ICF. These workshops recommended initiating the application of ICF for conceptualizing and measuring disability, with a view to creating a common framework for national disability information systems.

#### **D. Sustainability and conclusion**

70. The review demonstrated that steady progress has been made in the first three years (2003-2005) of the Decade. However, there are various areas for further improvement, which ESCAP will address during the high-level intergovernmental meeting entitled “Biwako +5: forward-looking strategies” at the midpoint review in 2007.

71. It should be noted that issues such as creating “an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society” is a long-term process that often requires generations to be fully realized. The forthcoming international convention that Member States of the United Nations are currently drafting points to the usefulness and continued relevance of the framework of the Decade in the region and beyond.

#### **V. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

72. In broadly reviewing the experience of ESCAP in the implementation of its disability programme, there are a number of lessons learned that can be applied to future project planning in the area of emerging social issues.

73. The achievement of the themes and goals of the new Decade is still at the very initial stages. Progress made during the first three years of the Decade has been uneven and most of the key targets and strategies of the Biwako Millennium Framework will pose serious challenges in the years ahead. During the period 2005-2007, the ESCAP focus on disability must be geared towards the “Biwako +5: forward-looking strategies” and preparations for the planned intergovernmental meeting on the midpoint review of the Decade.

74. ESCAP has been organizing biannual sessions of the Thematic Working Group on Disability-related Concerns since the inception of the Decade. The latest session was held in Bangkok on 7 and 8 July 2005. The Working Group’s primary objective is to sustain the momentum towards the fulfilment of the Framework goals in the Decade. The membership has expanded to include 60 NGOs, some 20 government representatives and the Asian Development Bank. The Working Group had been active in setting targets for the final period of the first Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002) and in reviewing the achievements in the implementation of

the Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002. The Working Group was instrumental in advocating the extension of the current Decade, 2003-2012. Members were also actively engaged in assisting ESCAP in drafting the Biwako Millennium Framework. Thus, ESCAP plans to collaborate with the same mechanism to review existing gaps and formulate a new set of action-oriented strategies for the second half of the Decade.

75. The most serious challenge in the near future may be the creation of a unified regional stance to make use of the momentum on the elaboration of a new international human rights convention on persons with disabilities and its speedy ratification and implementation, and perhaps the development of an anti-discrimination law or other form of rights-based legislation to protect disabled citizens, a process which might take several years. The promotion of human rights is considered to be one of the three main pillars of the future work of the United Nations. ESCAP is fully committed to further promoting a rights-based society for persons with disabilities and the disability-specific human rights convention.

76. Towards 2007, a strong commitment by the Governments of the region with full regional cooperation is needed to review the implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework and formulate a set of action-oriented strategies for the second half of the Decade.

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