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**SOCIALLY VULNERABLE GROUPS: SELECTED ISSUES: ENHANCING THE
SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS WITH A VIEW TO
ACHIEVING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

(Item 5 (c) of the provisional agenda)

**ENHANCING THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS:
CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

Social integration is an integral part of social development, of which equality of opportunity is a central issue. Fostering social integration to achieve a society for all requires a people-centred approach to development, the coherence between principles and practice, and effective social policies to ensure the rights and opportunities in society of various population groups, especially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, and in such areas as education, employment, social protection and social service provision.

The present document reviews the demographic dynamics in the Asian and Pacific region and highlights key challenges in the regional implementation of the commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, and other relevant international and regional commitments. The document also analyses specific issues in enhancing social protection and meeting the challenges faced by people with disabilities, older persons, youth and families. Measures and policy options are recommended with a view to strengthening the social inclusion and development of these groups.

Countries may wish to share their experiences in strengthening the social integration and development of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. The Committee is invited to give substantive guidance to the secretariat on the regional follow-up to the relevant commitments made at the World Summit and initiatives and commitments adopted by its 5- and 10-year review meetings, the Shanghai Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Macao Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific, the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, the United Nations celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, and other relevant international and regional mandates, including the Millennium Development Goals. The Committee is also requested to consider and endorse the proposed strategy to be undertaken by the secretariat towards the mid-point review of the Decade, entitled the "Biwako plus 5: Forward-looking Strategies towards 2012".

The Committee may also wish to recommend to the Commission any future work in the area of strengthening the social integration of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, and any other relevant matters.

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Introduction

1. Social integration is an integral part of social development, of which equality of opportunity is a central issue. Fostering social integration to achieve a society for all requires a people-centred approach to development, the coherence between principles and practice, and effective social policies. At the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, States Member of the United Nations committed themselves to “promoting social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe, and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons”.¹ The Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000 embraced many specific social development objectives. The achievement of the Goals will advance the cause of social development, particularly in enhancing the social integration of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

2. The present document provides an overview of the demographic dynamics in Asia and the Pacific and discusses important relevant issues arising from the regional follow-up to the commitments made in the Copenhagen Programme of Action for Social Development and the further initiatives for social development adopted by its 5- and 10-year review meetings held in 2000 and 2005 respectively. The present document also analyses key issues and challenges relating to social protection in the region and to specific groups, including persons with disabilities, older persons, youth and families. Policy implications are also discussed and recommendations made with a view to strengthening the social inclusion and development of these groups within the context of achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

I. DEMOGRAPHIC DYNAMICS

3. The Asian and Pacific region, with a total population of nearly 4 billion in 2005, is home to two thirds of the world population. The region has witnessed a remarkable drop in the annual population growth rate of 1.6 per cent that prevailed a decade ago and is now increasing at the rate of 1.1 per cent a year. The decline in the population growth rate has been associated with the rapid social and economic development that has taken place in the region. However, as there are inequalities in social and economic development within the ESCAP region, there is also diversity in the demographic dynamics.

4. Disparity in the growth rate of population is largely the result of changes in fertility and mortality. During the past 10 years, the total fertility rate for the ESCAP region declined from 2.9 to 2.3 children per woman. In South and South-West Asia, the rate has declined to 3 children per woman in 2005, down by one child per woman a decade ago, while the rate has continued to decline from 1.9 to 1.7 in East and North-East Asia. North and Central Asia exhibited the fastest decline in

¹ *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8), annex I, Commitment 4.

fertility, from 3.2 in 1995 to 1.7 in 2005, reaching the same level as in East and North-East Asia. In South-East Asia, the total fertility rate dropped from 3.1 to 2.4 while in the Pacific it remained relatively constant at 2.3 children per woman.

5. The region has also seen a remarkable reduction in the infant mortality rate, dropping from 59 per 1,000 live births in 1995 to 50 in 2005. There has been a concomitant rise in the number of years a newborn baby is expected to live. During the past 10 years, while male life expectancy at birth rose marginally from 65 to 66 years, female life expectancy increased from 67 to 71 years. Life expectancy at birth of males and females has increased steadily in all subregions of ESCAP, except in North and Central Asia, which actually saw a decline in life expectancy from 67 to 60 years for males and from 73 to 71 years for females. This is related to the rise in mortality due to the economic downturn and reduction in funding for public health programmes in many of the Central Asian countries following independence.

6. The demographic dynamics discussed above have clear linkages with the prospects for achieving the Millennium Development Goals in the Asian and Pacific region, as these demographic changes affect prospects for sustained improvement in the alleviation of poverty. The qualitative dimensions of poverty are often most evident in the mortality rates of a society. It has been observed that countries with higher levels of socio-economic development and lower levels of poverty tend to have lower mortality rates. In terms of the Goal of reducing child mortality by two thirds, although the ESCAP region has demonstrated significant improvement in child mortality levels, a majority of countries are falling behind. Hence, the key to achieving the Goals of reducing child mortality and improving maternal health lies in the socio-economic development of the most vulnerable groups in society, such as the poor, marginalized and disadvantaged, including women, older persons and persons with disabilities.

7. Although the Goals do not make explicit reference to fertility, three health-related goals, concerning child mortality, maternal health and HIV/AIDS, are directly related to fertility decline and the goal of reducing gender inequality is a key component of fertility decline. It has been observed that high fertility increases poverty by slowing economic growth and skewing the distribution of consumption against the poor. However, reducing fertility, by reducing mortality, increasing female education and improving access to services, especially reproductive health and family planning, counters both of these effects.

8. It has been noted that parents with fewer children have a significantly better chance of escaping poverty than do those with large numbers of children. While larger families dilute the assets of poorer households and unwanted births deepen household poverty, smaller families allow for greater investment in the nutrition and health of children. Falling fertility rates are critical in reducing poverty in that women are freed from the fetters of household tasks, thus facilitating their engagement in wage work. When poor families in developing countries are given opportunities, coupled with

adequate access to reproductive health services, they choose to have fewer children than their parents did.

9. Most importantly, declines in fertility and increases in life expectancy at birth, resulting in slower population growth, temporarily increase the relative size of the workforce, opening a historic one-time only “demographic bonus”. This has been utilized effectively by several East Asian countries to spur economic growth. Hence, countries experiencing a rapid decline in fertility will have the opportunity to take advantage of this “demographic bonus” for economic development. Once this demographic bonus closes within a generation, as the large group of the workforce moves to older age groups, countries begin to face the irreversible phenomenon of population ageing. In other words, the demographic bonus provides an opportune time for countries to prepare for ageing issues.

II. REGIONAL FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

10. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action adopted by the World Summit for Social Development marked an important shift to a coherent people-centred approach to development. What was unique to the Summit was the political will mustered by all Governments to give integrated treatment to the social challenges of development and an internationally agreed understanding that social development was much more than the aggregate result of social policies.

11. This commitment was taken further at the forty-third session of the Commission for Social Development, held in New York in February 2005, in the context of the review of the outcome of the Summit and its five-year review at the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, in 2000, as well as its contribution to the high-level event to review implementation of the Millennium Declaration, to be held in September 2005. Governments reaffirmed that the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and the further initiatives for social development emanating from the five-year review constituted the basic framework for the promotion of social development for all at the national and international levels. It was recognized that the implementation of the Copenhagen commitments and the attainment of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, were mutually reinforcing. It was further stressed that policies and programmes designed to achieve poverty eradication should include specific measures to foster social integration, inter alia by providing marginalized socio-economic sectors and groups with equal access to opportunities.

12. At the regional level, at the first session of the ESCAP Subcommittee on Socially Vulnerable Groups, held in Bangkok from 13-15 September 2004,² Governments in Asia and the Pacific reviewed the regional implementation of the Copenhagen Programme of Action and the further initiatives for social development adopted by the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth special session. It was

² For the report of the Subcommittee, see document E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/1.

observed that many countries in Asia and the Pacific had made important progress in the three core areas of the World Summit for Social Development, namely eradicating poverty, promoting full employment and enhancing social integration. There had been notable progress in the formulation and revision of policies and programmes aimed at enhancing opportunities for vulnerable groups and the poorer segments of their populations, and improving their access to basic services. However, the efforts made and progress achieved in economic and social development in the region have produced mixed results. Situations of inequality remain which have a direct impact on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups such as youth, women, older persons, persons with disabilities and migrants.

13. Three key issues have emerged from the 10-year review of the Copenhagen commitments requiring the attention of Governments: (a) the social aspects of globalization, particularly the negative impacts of globalization on social development; (b) the contribution of macroeconomic policies to social development goals and the compatibility of the two; and (c) the capacity of national Governments to define and implement their own social policies.

14. It is essential that efforts continue to be made in the implementation of the commitments of the Summit. Continued implementation should dominate and shape national, regional and international agendas on development issues in order to foster the attainment of the goals of the Summit and those of the Millennium Declaration, especially as several social development objectives have been incorporated into the Millennium Development Goals. It is important that eradicating poverty, promoting full employment and fostering social integration continue to be central in policy decision-making.

15. Addressing the root causes of poverty requires the collective efforts of Governments, international organizations, civil society and other partners. Specific policy measures should guarantee and enhance access by marginalized groups to assets and opportunities, particularly education, land, capital, technology and basic services. Employment policies should promote decent work under conditions of equity, security and dignity and incorporate job creation into macroeconomic policy. As the rate of unemployment among youth in the region remains high as compared with other groups, priority should be given to addressing this issue. It is critical that policies aimed at fostering social integration seek to reduce inequalities, eliminate discrimination, empower individuals and increase the participation and inclusion of youth, women, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants and other vulnerable groups.

16. Member countries may wish to further exchange views and experiences and provide guidance to the secretariat on issues related to the regional implementation of the commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development and its review meetings in 2000 and 2005, in tandem with the other internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and other relevant matters.

III. ENHANCING SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

17. Enhancing social protection for vulnerable groups has been at the heart of social policies and social development goals. The financial crisis that embraced much of Asia in the late 1990s and the recent tsunami disaster that struck countries in the Indian Ocean in December 2004 brought to the fore the vulnerability of the poor and the need to provide adequate social protection to the population, especially the more vulnerable groups.

18. The World Summit for Social Development stressed the importance of equity, participation, empowerment and solidarity and a more inclusive approach to social protection. Commitment 2(d) of the Copenhagen Declaration³ emphasized the need to develop and implement policies to ensure that all people had adequate economic and social protection during unemployment, ill health, maternity, child-rearing, widowhood, disability and old age. The importance of establishing or improving social protection systems as well as sharing best practices in this field was underscored at the five-year review of the Copenhagen commitments in 2000.

19. The functions of social protection can be seen in four dimensions: (a) as proactive primary coverage to protect people against contingencies and risks; (b) as a sustaining function aimed at the provision of basic needs such as health care and housing; (c) as a development function aimed at capacity-building; and (d) as a social justice function aimed at social solidarity and integration. All these are closely connected, even though they may rely on different instruments. Further, such instruments as social assistance and social services can be used effectively to fulfil various functions.

20. A comprehensive approach to social protection requires careful consideration of its key aspects: (a) its policy basis, and long-term and short-term considerations, (b) the design, targeting, accessibility and administration of the social protection system, (c) its financing and sustainability, and (d) institutional arrangements. The role of the State is particularly important in this regard since it must ensure the existence of adequate institutional and regulatory frameworks and create an enabling environment for the development of a sustainable social protection system. It is incumbent upon Governments to ensure that people are aware of their rights and entitlements in this field.

21. Countries in Asia and the Pacific are diverse in traditions, cultures and development levels as well as social and organizational structure, and have taken different approaches to the provision of protection to their population. Formal systems of social protection have been developed and/or reformed in many countries in response to demands for efficiency, better coverage and financial viability. In some countries, especially those with developing economies, informal arrangements, including community-based mechanisms, are encouraged. While this approach may be valid, it should not be seen as a substitute for a formal system and public action in providing basic protection, especially in the context of growing global economic integration and population ageing, which are

³ See note 1 above.

having an impact on many parts of Asia and the Pacific. The role of the private sector acting in partnership with other stakeholders is important for efficient social protection. At the same time, notwithstanding its changing nature, the family in the region continues to be a central and crucial element insulating the individual against major contingencies.

22. In most countries, social protection objectives include short-term and long-term considerations. The short-term measures embrace protective measures to take care of immediate contingencies, such as natural disasters, and direct social assistance given to help the poor to come out of the above contingencies. It is important that Governments develop a national preparedness programme for disaster management with the involvement of civil society to ensure that the programmes reach the poor and vulnerable groups, as the lesson of the 2004 tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean and other similar experiences has pointed out. Ensuring protection against health-related risks due to illness, injury, disability and old age are among the central components of the social protection system. Long-term policy measures of social protection should focus on increasing individual capabilities, inter alia through health, education, employment and skill training, to reduce inequalities.

23. It is important to stress the gender dimension in social protection, as in many societies women experience unequal treatment under existing social protection systems. Their home-making and childcare duties, their unequal access to productive resources and inferior access to health, education and training place them in a disadvantaged position in the labour market where women predominate in low-pay, part-time or contractual work that offer limited social security coverage. Mainstreaming gender equality into social protection policies will help to enhance social integration and achieve the development goals.

24. In recent years, the secretariat has undertaken various technical assistance projects in collaboration with other United Nations agencies, including the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), on strengthening social safety nets and improving social service provision to the disadvantaged groups, with particular focus on the lessons learned from the financial crisis in the region in the late 1990s. Comparative analysis was undertaken with regard to the various systems of social protection and social service provision, the results of which were disseminated to countries in the region.

IV. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

25. An estimated 400 million persons live with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. While their capacity to contribute to national development has been increasingly recognized, many of them still lack the opportunity to realize their potential and fully enjoy the rights and freedoms to which they are entitled. Persons with disabilities are likely to be excluded from education, employment and other socio-economic opportunities.

26. In its resolution 58/4 of 22 May 2002, the Commission decided to extend the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons for another decade, 2003-2012. The new Decade is expected to promote a rights-based approach to protect the human rights of persons with disabilities. The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, adopted by Governments in the region at the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, held in October 2002, set the regional policy guidance for the new Decade. The Biwako Framework was designed as a tool to promote the mainstreaming of disability-related issues into development initiatives, particularly in such areas as the eradication of poverty and hunger, the achievement of universal primary education and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. In its resolution 61/8 of 18 May 2005, the Commission decided to convene in 2007 a high-level intergovernmental meeting to undertake the mid-point review of implementation of the Decade.

27. The Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons and the Biwako Framework have provided valuable support and inputs for activities relating to disability issues in other regions of the world, especially in West Asia. Furthermore, at the global level, the Ad Hoc Committee established by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/168 of 19 December 2001 has continued its consideration of the draft Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities. Many countries of the region have been participating actively in the regional and international process of elaborating the draft convention. The ESCAP secretariat has been providing assistance to member countries in the process of drafting the text by organizing a series of regional workshops on the subject.

28. There has been increasing recognition of the link between poverty and disability and the unmet needs of the majority of disabled persons living in rural areas. The capacities of persons with disabilities must be developed so that they contribute solutions to the particular problems that they face. To promote the “twin-track approach” of a rights-based approach to the empowerment of persons with disabilities, and “disability mainstreaming” into pro-poor development projects (e.g. a national poverty reduction strategy), ESCAP organized a series of workshops on disability, poverty and development in 2004 and 2005, targeting multiple sectors and global partners. ESCAP has worked to promote activities related to community-based rehabilitation and income generation for persons with disabilities. A growing number of countries in the region, including China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam, have adopted community-based rehabilitation approaches in providing rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities, often in collaboration with NGOs.

29. Strategies to promote self-employment and income generation through small grants, microcredit and loans have been reported in many countries, with a specific focus on the employment of people with disabilities in rural areas. Nevertheless, persons with disabilities remain

disproportionately undereducated, untrained, unemployed, underemployed and poor, which renders them disadvantaged in the labour market.

30. Understanding the necessity of capturing the ongoing process of globalization and promoting a disability-inclusive response to globalization, ESCAP and ILO jointly organized a workshop in Bangkok on 7 July 2005, on unlocking the potential of persons with disabilities, and a multinational corporation round table on disabilities and employment. A number of multinational companies discussed with participating Governments and NGOs strategies for hiring qualified disabled workers in their operations.

31. With regard to disability statistics, there are wide discrepancies in the reporting of the prevalence of disability, which has resulted from the different conceptual framework adopted and the lack of common definitions and classifications. In this regard, four regional workshops on improving disability data for policy use were organized by ESCAP in 2004 and 2005. These workshops recommended initiating the application of the WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) for conceptualizing and measuring disability with a view to creating a common framework for national disability information systems.

32. A number of countries in the region have adopted national legislation, policies and programmes with a view to eliminating discrimination against people with diverse disabilities and empowering disabled citizens and their organizations. Australia, Hong Kong, China, and the Philippines have already adopted anti-discrimination laws and institutionalized national monitoring mechanisms for their implementation, such as a national equal opportunity commission. The establishment of stricter mechanisms for the enforcement of legislation and the application of penalties for non-compliance remain a challenge. Several countries in the Pacific, such as Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, have made considerable progress towards reviewing policies relating to persons with disabilities.

33. Another challenge is the creation of a unified regional stance to make use of the momentum on the elaboration of a new international human rights convention for persons with disabilities and its speedy ratification and implementation, and perhaps the development of an anti-discrimination law or other forms of rights-based laws for disabled citizens.

34. Achievement of the goals of the new Decade is still at the initial stage. The progress made during the first three years of the Decade has been uneven. During the period 2005-2007, the ESCAP focus on disability will be geared towards the “Biwako plus 5: Forward-looking Strategies towards 2012” and preparations for the planned intergovernmental meeting on the mid-point review of the Decade in 2007. Strong commitment on the part of Governments in the region and regional cooperation are needed to review the existing gap in the achievement of the goals. To formulate a set of action-oriented strategies for the second half of the Decade, Governments are invited to provide inputs to the process towards the “Biwako plus 5: Forward-looking Strategies towards 2012”.

V. POPULATION AGEING

35. Population ageing has brought new demands for social services and long-term health care. Addressing the issue of ageing is an important element in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. The report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing stated: "It is ultimately crucial that ageing ties into the Millennium Development process in which Governments selected, within Goal 1, the target of halving, by 2015, the proportion of the world's population whose income is less than \$1 a day".⁴ Without taking account of the plight of elderly persons, it is unlikely that this objective will be achieved in an ageing society.

36. Today, 52 per cent of the world's elderly population lives in Asia and the Pacific, and this is projected to increase to 59 per cent by 2025. Hence, ageing has emerged as a challenge for both Governments and financial institutions which calls for re-examining the existing social protection systems and carefully designing policies to provide improved protection for older persons. It is expected that social security institutions will make more efforts to formulate and implement concrete strategies to facilitate access to old-age pensions.

37. Recent debates on ageing issues in low- to medium-income countries have focused on the non-contributory pension schemes implemented in several developing countries, the coverage of which meets only a fraction of what is needed. Some countries have taken measures to improve access to entitlements, while others are tackling ageing issues by providing formal support to families to enable them to care for their older members. It has been seen that, although such approaches may be sustainable, they require investment in training and long-term care assistance to build more supportive societies for all. Widespread local implementation of such an approach is urged through global and regional instruments which call for moving away from a welfare approach to a development approach.

38. Such ideas are also mirrored in the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, which identifies three priority areas concerning ageing: (a) integrating older persons into development; (b) advancing their health and well-being; and (c) ensuring enabling and supportive environments. The Plan signifies a move away from a "welfare approach" to a "rights-based approach" that enables older persons to participate actively in policies and programmes.

39. There are some demographic and social factors which are critical for future initiatives aimed at improving the well-being of older persons. First, the majority of older persons will continue to be women and the fastest growth will take place among the "oldest-old", 80 years old and above, who numbered 70 million in 2000; this figure is projected to increase fivefold, reaching 350 million by 2050. Clearly, older females and the "oldest-old" are among the most vulnerable subgroups of the population; more of them are in Asia and the Pacific than elsewhere and this trend will continue.

⁴ A/58/160, para. 28.

Second, women's ability to secure a livelihood in old age is determined by their limited opportunities and poverty constraints. Women are, in general, less able to secure a stable income than men. The incidence of HIV/AIDS, widowhood, conflict and natural disasters exacerbates these difficulties.

40. At its sixty-first session, the Commission urged the secretariat to continue to provide technical assistance and advisory services aimed at helping countries in the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action and, in particular to focus on the following areas: (a) assessment of future fiscal requirements of social and health services, income and pensions; (b) policy-oriented research and analysis; (c) tracking progress in the implementation of the Plan; (d) exchanging practical information and good practices; (e) fostering enabling and supportive environments; and (f) strengthening international and regional cooperation.

41. In response to those requests, ESCAP sought increased resources for its programme of work, 2005-2006, on population ageing and was successful in receiving donor support to implement two technical assistance projects. The projects will focus on enhancing the skills of government officials to review and appraise national policies and programmes on ageing and improving the quality of consultations between policymakers and civil society groups, including NGOs.

42. The activities of ESCAP were programmed in the context of demographic changes and emerging social problems, which the secretariat believes helped to raise the awareness of Governments and civil society groups about the challenges of population ageing. Facts and figures were tabulated, summarized and presented at various meetings, workshops and seminars on ageing during the biennium 2004-2005 to capture the attention of the participants. During the same period, which coincided with the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals by ESCAP, the secretariat highlighted the fact that the first Goal, halving the incidence of poverty by 2015, was less likely to be met in those countries where poverty among persons above the age of 60 had not been reduced.

43. In line with the road map in the report of the Secretary-General on the Follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing, ESCAP developed a bottom-up methodology for the review and appraisal of policies and programmes. This was considered to be a viable approach for linking local and national activities with other levels, including those at the international level. ESCAP also developed a framework of instrumental and outcome indicators for measuring performance and assessing impact. Both the methodology and framework of indicators were piloted and tested in Bangladesh, China and Sri Lanka.

44. At the Regional Seminar on Follow-up to the Shanghai Implementation Strategy for the Madrid and Macao Plans of Action on Ageing, held in Macao, China, in October 2004, Governments and civil society groups acknowledged the rapid pace of ageing in the region. While not all countries in the region have experienced the demographic transition in the same way, almost all of them are facing a weakening of the traditional support systems which had ensured social cohesion in the past.

45. In the more affluent countries of the region, the rapid pace of ageing will require Governments to re-evaluate their social security and health-care arrangements. In contrast, developing countries still have a window of opportunity of 10 to 15 years to better prepare for the onset of ageing. Formal social security coverage reaches a small percentage of the older persons in most developing countries. While social, economic and human rights protection is defined and legal remedies exist, access to legal services is practically non-existent. Although many countries provide for social services, these entitlements remain inaccessible to many, especially those who need it the most.

46. There is, therefore, a need to build formal schemes, based on existing informal support systems, to create a balanced and comprehensive social protection system that includes health care, access to entitlements, human rights protection and lifelong learning. To mitigate the uncertainties associated with the family and community care systems, social security benefits and health-care services to older persons should be extended and provided on the basis of needs and means.

47. Other key issues relate to political and public commitments to support the implementation of existing social security arrangements and develop new schemes to extend coverage. In this respect, Governments are urged to do more, for example, by promulgating or amending existing legislation to support social security and social protection of older persons, ensuring the effective implementation of legislation related to the abuse or neglect of older persons and other social protection rights. Social protection measures for older persons should also be incorporated into the analysis and poverty reduction strategies of the Millennium Development Goals.

48. While a growing number of studies on ageing have attempted to shed light on the interaction between ageing and development, research on the subject remains limited, especially in the areas of the health and livelihood of older persons in rural settings. More studies need to be carried out on how to better utilize existing health and long-term care systems for older persons in the rural poor and those whose traditional support systems are strained. In addition, support is needed for caregivers of older persons in the form of training, and providing practical assistance and emotional support. These measures would improve the quality of care and harmonize relations between caregivers and care-receivers. More specifically, research is needed in the areas of activities of daily living disabilities and long-term care for older persons, and health promotion and access to health care. Intergenerational issues should also be explored.

49. As recommended by member countries, ESCAP will organize a high-level regional review meeting on the status of implementation of the Shanghai Implementation Strategy in Macao, China, in September 2006, with support from the government of Macao, China. The outcomes of the review meeting are expected to constitute regional inputs into the five-year global review of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action which will take place in 2007.

VI. PROMOTING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

50. The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond was adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/81 of 14 December 1995. Since then, in 10 years, the global youth population, defined as persons between 15 and 24 years of age, has grown from 1.0 billion to 1.2 billion. Today, young people account for 18 per cent of the world population, of whom 85 per cent live in developing countries. It is also estimated that currently almost 209 million young people, or 18 per cent of all youth, live on less than one US dollar a day, and 515 million young people, nearly 45 per cent, live on less than two US dollars a day. South Asia has the largest number of youth living below these two poverty lines, while the same figures for East Asia and the Pacific stand at 46.5 million and 150.5 million, respectively.

51. The 10 priority areas identified in the World Programme of Action particularly poverty, education and employment, remain valid, while new challenges have arisen, such as the impact of globalization, information and communication technology, the rise in conflicts and the dramatic spread of diseases and epidemics such as HIV/AIDS. The current generation of young people is facing ever more complex challenges and these call for renewed commitment to the goals of the World Programme of Action.

52. For countries in Asia and the Pacific, eliminating poverty among young people should remain a high priority, as demonstrated in the regional assessment of progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, including Goal 1 on halving extreme poverty by 2015. There is a strong need to scale up investments in youth, through education, employment, skill training and access to opportunities. The achievement of the Goals will have enormous benefits for young people. There is great value in the integration of policies for children and youth. Young people should be viewed as partners in achieving the Goals. In this regard, it would be necessary to develop indicators for measuring progress in various countries in key areas of youth development, with data on education, employment, income, health and other fields.

53. Promoting youth employment is another critical priority which is closely related to the achievement of the goal of full employment of the Copenhagen Programme of Action. Since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, the urgency of the commitment to give young people everywhere access to decent and productive work has increased. Young people in the region face the challenges of unemployment, underemployment and obstacles such as lower skill levels and a higher rate of HIV/AIDS infection, making them vulnerable. A number of countries in the region have made efforts to increase the employability of young people and create employment opportunities in emerging sectors in their economies, such as tourism, information and communication technology and environmental conservation. Youth employment issues have also been mainstreamed into local economic development initiatives.

54. Governments are encouraged to consider youth employment as integral to their overall strategies for development and key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and policies to foster employability and entrepreneurship must be accompanied by measures to stimulate demand and create additional employment while providing opportunities for skill upgrading.

55. Youth policies are sometimes driven by negative views against young people, relating them to drug abuse and delinquency. It is important that Governments at all levels develop and implement integrated youth policies, making linkages between the different priority areas for youth development. There is also a continued need to pay special attention to various disadvantaged groups among young people. Governments should continuously evaluate their youth policy and involve young people in the evaluation, which would in turn increase the commitment of young people to the policies that affect them and create greater opportunities for youth participation and cooperation.

56. In the past few years, the secretariat has provided technical assistance and implemented a number of projects in various countries in the region on a range of issues relating to youth development. These include youth policy review, substance abuse, commercial and sexual exploitation of youth and children, life skills training and youth health-related issues. It is expected that in the coming years these activities will continue to be implemented and, depending on the availability of funds, activities will also be undertaken in the areas of youth unemployment, youth and globalization, and enhancing investment in youth.

VII. STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY INSTITUTION

57. Across all cultures, religions and regions of the world, it is universal that the family, as the basic unit of society, provides a natural framework in which individuals can receive the emotional, spiritual and material nourishment and support that is indispensable to their development. A strong family structure is conducive to the well-being of its members and of society at large. The everyday work of the family is ultimately extended to the broader community and lays the foundation for social integration and the enhancement of social cohesion.

58. The family institution has been affected by social change such as population ageing, changing family structures, the smaller size of households and delayed marriage and childbearing. Moreover, external factors such as war, natural disasters, poverty, environmental degradation, drug abuse and diseases such as HIV/AIDS have placed a very heavy burden on families in some countries. While many families have been empowered by global integration, others are trying to cope with rapidly changing values, traditions and lifestyles.

59. In Asia and the Pacific, the caregiving role of the family is on the decline with the rise of the nuclear family as the norm, the growing participation of women in the labour market and the increased rural-urban migration of young people in search of employment. However, despite their

devastating impact on societies and families, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the recent natural, social and economic disasters have proved an important point: families remain remarkably resilient and indispensable. The family and its networks were instrumental in helping individuals and communities to cope with the disease and disasters and their consequences, as well as to weather other economic and social challenges. The family remains the first line of defence in the care of its members, albeit to a varying and decreasing degree.

60. The tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004 provided an important opportunity to give new impetus to the development and enhancement of the family in its fulfilment of its developmental and societal functions. It is necessary to examine the impacts of globalization, information and communication technology, migration, population ageing and the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the family.

61. Policies aimed at strengthening the family should also take into consideration its gender dimension, and integrate issues relating to poverty reduction, social inclusion, social protection, ageing, youth, disabilities and intergenerational issues. This integrated approach will help to ensure that the well-being of the family is linked to those of its members and to the broader developmental goals.

62. It is crucial to build up the partnership between Governments, civil society, the business sector and communities. Governments should be encouraged to strengthen the capacity of national institutions to formulate and implement effective social policies that encourage family growth and social cohesion. Governments can take the lead in regulating employment standards that promote a work-life balance and encourage the growth of families, such as family-friendly conditions of work, facilitating access to social services and affordable health care and education. Strong and cohesive communities provide an enabling environment for healthy families. Social networks, especially communities, can be a source of powerful social capital that serves as a cushion to lessen the impact of the negative influences affecting families.

63. The International Day of Families, which falls on 15 May every year, provides an opportunity for Governments and others concerned to push forward efforts to strengthen the family institution and related policies and programmes. ESCAP, in cooperation with the Government of Thailand and major NGOs, has facilitated the observance of the International Day of Families for several years. The observance of the Day in 2005 focused on the theme of “HIV/AIDS and family well-being”.

64. There is a need for further understanding of intergenerational linkages, the effects of new challenges, such as globalization and technology, on the family, and the economic and social functions of the family. Governments may wish to provide the secretariat with further guidance on priority areas related to the family as an important social institution and on other relevant matters.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

65. The present document has reviewed the demographic dynamics in the Asian and Pacific region, and highlighted key challenges in the regional implementation of the commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development and other relevant international and regional commitments. The document has analysed specific issues and challenges in the promotion of social protection and the challenges faced by people with disabilities, older persons, youth, families and other groups. It has also suggested measures and policy options to promote the social inclusion and development of those groups.

66. Noting that equality of opportunity is crucial to social integration and building “a society for all”, the document points out that fostering social integration requires more effective social policies and legal instruments to protect disadvantaged and vulnerable groups from discrimination and to ensure their rights and opportunities in society, particularly in such areas as education, employment, social protection and social service provision.

67. Countries may wish to share their experiences in strengthening the social integration and development of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, and may consider requesting the secretariat to provide technical assistance and other support in specific areas as it deems appropriate and necessary.

68. The Committee is invited to give substantive guidance to the secretariat on the regional follow-up to the relevant commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development and initiatives and commitments adopted by its 5- and 10-year review meetings, the Shanghai Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Macao Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific, the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, the United Nations celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, and other relevant international and regional mandates, including the Millennium Development Goals.

69. The Committee is also requested to consider and endorse the proposed strategies to be undertaken by the secretariat towards the mid-point review of the Decade, entitled the “Biwako plus 5: Forward-looking Strategies towards 2012”.

70. The Committee may wish to recommend to the Commission any future work in the area of strengthening the social integration of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and any other relevant matters.

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