



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Committee on Emerging Social Issues

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Bangkok

**SOCIALLY VULNERABLE GROUPS: SELECTED ISSUES: REPORT OF THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIALLY VULNERABLE GROUPS
ON ITS FIRST SESSION, 13-15 SEPTEMBER 2004**

(Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda)

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

This document presents the report of the Subcommittee on Socially Vulnerable Groups on its first session, held in Bangkok from 13 to 15 September 2004. It highlights the regional review of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly. The regional review, which focused on the three key areas of poverty alleviation, employment general and social integration, shows that while the region has made steady progress in poverty reduction, it is unlikely that some countries in the region will achieve the goal of reducing by half the percentage of the population living in poverty by 2015. The report stresses the need for better integration of economic and social policies and mainstreaming gender dimensions.

The report examines the emerging demographic dynamics in the context of international migration and population ageing. It notes that, while international migration is beneficial to sending and receiving countries as well as to migrants and their families, this population group may be vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and discrimination. It also notes that, owing to the low levels of fertility and mortality, especially in more developed economies, the percentage of older persons in some countries of the region is rapidly increasing, which has implications for economic and social development.

While reviewing the progress in the region in 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, the report suggests key areas that require concerted action in order to reach the goal of creating an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for all.

The report also provides highlights of the report on the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes.

The Committee is requested to endorse the recommendations and conclusions as contained in the report. It may wish to provide guidance to the secretariat and make further recommendations for action in connection with the work of the Subcommittee and related action.

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I. PROCEEDINGS

A. Implementation of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

1. Regional review

1. In considering the report prepared by the secretariat on the subject (E/ESCAP/SVG/1), the Subcommittee reviewed the regional implementation of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly. It recalled that the Programme of Action adopted by the World Summit had focused on poverty reduction, employment generation and social integration.

2. The Subcommittee noted that the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth special session had adopted the global target of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, a goal that was later enshrined in the Millennium Declaration. It noted that, when extreme poverty was defined as living on less than one purchasing-power-parity United States dollar per day, more than two thirds of the world's poor lived in Asia and the Pacific. In the region as a whole, the incidence of poverty had decreased from 37 per cent in 1990 to 25 per cent in 1999, according to estimates by the World Bank. In 1999, however, about 767 million persons in the region were still living on less than one dollar a day. Achievements in poverty reduction had been uneven across the region, with greater success recorded in East and South-East Asia.

3. The Subcommittee observed that, when the poverty line was set at two dollars per day, three fourths of the world's poor, or 2 billion persons, lived in the Asian and Pacific region. The region had reduced the absolute number of persons living on less than two dollars a day by 100 million between 1990 and 1999, however.

4. The Subcommittee noted that most countries in the region had developed national poverty reduction strategies and programmes and that a number of them were preparing poverty reduction strategy papers. Several Governments had established inter-ministerial coordinating committees to devise and implement coordinated strategic national plans and actions aimed at achieving poverty reduction and other social development targets.

5. The Subcommittee noted that a number of countries had achieved or were likely to achieve the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. Major poverty reduction strategies employed by Governments included expanding the basic social infrastructure; increasing productivity and income in the relevant sector, viz. agriculture; increasing the number of opportunities for intersectoral labour mobility; addressing priority areas and target groups with a high incidence of poverty; and working in partnership with civil society and the private sector.

6. The Subcommittee noted with concern, however, the likelihood that several countries would not be able to achieve the MDGs related to poverty. The Subcommittee noted that lack of achievement in terms of the MDGs was attributable to an absence of clear targets, strategies and accountability measures. Additionally, social development efforts did not match economic development programmes in scope or intensity. The Subcommittee recommended that domestic and external resources be mobilized and utilized on a continuous and sustainable basis to optimally achieve the goals of the Summit.

7. The Subcommittee noted that, as measures to reduce poverty, Governments had enhanced the capacity of planners and implementers through improved human resource management, project monitoring and training. Relevant branches of government had to be reformed to deliver social services effectively. One untapped resource was public-private partnerships on social projects, especially the social infrastructure. Additionally, the success of poverty eradication was due to the catalytic role of Governments, cooperation with non-governmental organizations and the private sector and investment in rural development. Successful initiatives were also characterized by good governance at the national and local levels.

8. The Subcommittee noted that poverty reduction programmes initiated by Governments included microfinance, farmer debt moratoriums, greater health coverage, housing schemes, people's banks, social safety nets programmes and special schemes for neglected and disadvantaged groups, including children, women, youth, older persons and people with disabilities. Specific programmes had also been implemented for the rehabilitation of prisoners and drug users.

9. The Subcommittee noted the crucial importance of integrating economic and social policies. An integrated socio-economic approach to poverty eradication involved giving priority to the provision of public goods and services, governance and empowerment of the people (especially the socially vulnerable) in the same manner as prioritizing trade and investment, private sector development and technology transfer.

10. The Subcommittee took note of the technical difficulties in defining and measuring employment and unemployment. It observed that some of the more developed economies in East Asia had achieved a situation of full employment, and the number of foreign workers in those economies actually indicated a situation of labour scarcity. Rates of unemployment varied widely among countries in South-East Asia.

11. Although recorded unemployment rates in the economies in transition were generally low, disguised unemployment was prevalent and those economies did not have full employment. A similar situation prevailed in countries of South Asia and in the Pacific, where large proportions of the labour force worked in agriculture or in the urban informal sector.

12. The Subcommittee noted that recorded labour force participation rates were universally lower for women than for men. The differential was lowest among the economies in transition and greatest
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in South Asian countries. In many cases, women's employment in agriculture was not recorded owing to data collection procedures. Women constituted increasing proportions of international labour migrants and were the majority of migrants from a few countries in the region.

13. The Subcommittee expressed concern at the high rates of unemployment among youth, which were twice as high as for adults, on average. Roughly 10 million young persons in the region were estimated to be unemployed.

14. The Subcommittee welcomed the many steps that Governments had taken to promote social integration, particularly for socially vulnerable groups. Many countries had formulated and implemented comprehensive social development programmes. Many had also revised existing laws or introduced new legislation to strengthen measures for vulnerable groups. Many countries had made institutional arrangements and established focal points and coordinating bodies to supervise and monitor governmental and non-governmental social development activities.

15. The Subcommittee noted, however, that many social development goals had not been achieved in most countries of the region, including education for all, health for all, shelter for all and the creation of a barrier-free physical environment. It emphasized that promoting the mobilization of the poor and disadvantaged and their effective participation in community and national life was necessary for economic and social integration. It stressed that the involvement of socially vulnerable groups in decision-making was essential for their effective participation and mobilization.

16. The Subcommittee noted with concern the factors that contributed to the increasing social vulnerability of certain population groups. Rural-to-urban migration, an increase in non-communicable diseases, growing unemployment, especially among youth, and the emigration of skilled workers have, in some cases, hampered the implementation of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development. Additional obstacles were created by planning constraints, which included weak linkages in policy and planning linkages between the local and international levels and insufficient data for planning and monitoring.

17. The Subcommittee recommended that the ESCAP secretariat provide technical assistance and expertise on collection of data at the request of member countries. It also requested that ESCAP advance capacity-building in economic and social management in the context of the integration of economic and social policies. In that regard, the Subcommittee also noted that Governments had carefully reviewed the concepts, definitions and methodology of poverty measurement, which reflected country ownership of the strategies to achieve the MDGs.

18. The representative of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs informed the Subcommittee of the process for the review of implementation of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development. The Commission for Social Development, as the intergovernmental body entrusted with the primary responsibility for follow-up to the Summit, would
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conduct the global review at its forty-third session, to be held in New York in February 2005. In July 2004, the Economic and Social Council had adopted resolution 2004/58, in which it had underlined the significance of the forty-third session of the Commission, which would mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action. The Council had decided, *inter alia*, that the Commission for Social Development should convene, during its forty-third session, high-level plenary meetings open to all States Members of the United Nations and observers. Additionally, the Council had requested the Chairman of the forty-third session to transmit the outcome of the review, through the Council, to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session, including the Assembly's high-level event on the review of the Millennium Declaration, to be held in September 2005.

19. To that end, the Secretary-General had addressed a note verbale to all Member States and those with observer status inviting them to participate in the high-level segment of the forty-third session of the Commission for Social Development. During the high-level segment, the Commission would convene three round tables addressing the three core issues of the World Summit for Social Development and their linkages to the MDGs. As a regional dimension was crucial to the success of the review process, the Commission would also convene a panel discussion with the executive secretaries of the five regional commissions.

20. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs was preparing the report of the Secretary-General on the review of the World Summit for Social Development. Equity and inequalities were the underlying themes of the report, which would stress that the Summit had advocated placing people at the centre of development. In that regard, three issues had emerged that would merit particular attention in the context of the 10-year review of the Summit: (a) the social aspects of globalization; (b) the contribution of macroeconomic policies to social development goals and the compatibility between the two; and (c) the capacity of national Governments to define and implement their own social policies.

21. Another important issue in the context of the 10-year review was the coherence of social policies from the viewpoint of promoting social development, which would be evident on three levels: (a) the coherence of policies in relation to the goals and objectives of social development; (b) the coherence and integration of economic and social policies; and (c) the coherence between national and international cooperation for development policies.

2. Social development in the Pacific

22. In considering document E/ESCAP/SVG/2, the Subcommittee observed that Pacific island developing countries faced a number of obstacles in achieving the goals of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development. Many of them were sparsely populated, contained small land masses and were spread over vast distances in the Pacific Ocean. They were particularly

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vulnerable to natural disasters and environmental threats. Many Pacific island developing countries had small market economies with substantial subsistence elements. They were generally less affected by income poverty than by the poverty of opportunity. The possibility of attaining high levels of education and productive employment was limited.

23. The Subcommittee noted with concern the situation of a number of Pacific island developing countries, in which political and economic instability compounded the situation of low productivity and high unemployment. Unemployment was especially severe among the youth.

24. Formal employment in the Pacific island developing countries often occupied only about one fifth of the labour force. Income and employment statistics were frequently unreliable, owing to the number of persons engaged in semi-subsistence agricultural employment. Opportunities for employment were limited not only by the narrow island economies but also by the standard of education available. Although school enrolment rates were generally high, the quality of education was sometimes considered inferior to that in the developed Pacific Rim countries.

25. The Subcommittee noted that Pacific island developing countries confronted marked disparities between the capital or main island and the outer islands. The outer islands were generally small, isolated and resource-poor. The possibility of developing viable cash economies on some of them was limited.

26. Conversely, migration from the outer islands and from rural to urban areas was placing pressure on the capital cities. The Subcommittee noted that there was a need for improved urban management in order to cope with rapid population growth, unemployment, housing shortages and patterns of land use. It called for capacity-building so that the Pacific island developing countries could formulate effective policies for dealing with those and other social development issues.

27. The Subcommittee noted that there was no clear or widespread abject poverty in the Pacific island developing countries. However, many of the populations were suffering from poverty of opportunity. Little or no access to transport, health services and education reflected that situation of poverty of opportunity. ESCAP and the international community were urged not to neglect that situation lest the poverty of opportunity become abject poverty.

28. The Subcommittee noted that a major limitation for several Pacific island developing countries was the lack of statistics vis-à-vis the MDGs. The Subcommittee recommended that ESCAP and its Pacific Operations Centre address that problem by organizing a subregional workshop on the subject. Additionally, there was a need to address the MDGs in the specific context of the situation of the Pacific island countries.

29. The Subcommittee was informed that, according to a study by the Asian Development Bank, at least 20 per cent of households in several Pacific island developing countries suffered from basic needs poverty, i.e. an inability to meet the costs of food and other basic needs and services.

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Additionally, data from national household income and expenditure surveys had revealed that countries with a strong subsistence agriculture sector and active local produce markets for income-producing opportunities had a lower incidence of rural as compared with urban poverty. Countries that lacked those features had a higher rate of poverty in rural areas than in urban centres.

30. The Subcommittee noted that the issue of population growth was critical for some Pacific island developing countries. The countries that recorded negative per capita income growth rates had the higher rates of population growth. The challenge of meeting poverty reduction targets was particularly difficult for those countries. Poverty and hunger were also linked to increased urbanization and, in some instances, significant depopulation of rural areas. Urbanization increased income inequality between urban and rural areas.

31. The Subcommittee was informed that the World Conference on Disaster Reduction would be held in January 2005 and hosted by the Government of Japan as part of measures to assist countries to realize sustainable development.

B. Emerging demographic dynamics: international migration and population ageing

32. The Subcommittee considered document E/ESCAP/SVG/3 and observed that international migration from and within the region had increased rapidly over the previous three decades. That increase had resulted from disparities in the levels of development of countries of origin and areas of destination. Demographic dynamics were also an important determinant of rising migration trends. The national labour force was declining or growing only slowly in the more developed economies of the region whereas it was expanding rapidly in the main origin areas of international labour migration. Governmental and private labour recruitment and deployment agencies had institutionalized international labour migration and it was likely to continue to grow in volume and importance in the near future.

33. The Subcommittee noted that, while labour migration was increasing in importance in both areas of origin and areas of destination, systems of social protection for migrant workers often remained inadequate. Undocumented migrants, women migrants and unskilled migrants were sometimes vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, with limited means of recourse.

34. The Subcommittee highlighted challenges and problems faced by foreign workers in such areas as non-fulfillment by the employer of contractual obligations under a foreign service agreement (FSA); unhygienic living conditions; lack of collective bargaining agreements, arbitration and trade unions; and absence of agreements or memorandums of understanding with labour-receiving countries on the employment and welfare of overseas workers. The Subcommittee called for increased protection of the rights of migrant workers. It also raised the issue of the health conditions of migrants, irrespective of migrant status, because of the significant numbers of people crossing borders to seek employment.

35. Migrants in an irregular legal situation were particularly vulnerable to exploitation. They often worked in difficult or dangerous jobs and generally had no social protection, such as health care or pension systems. Both regular and irregular migrants often lacked access to the State health care system in the area of destination, except on an emergency basis.

36. The Subcommittee observed that women constituted an increasing share of the international labour migrants in the region. Women constituted the majority of migrants from some countries. While women migrants worked in the full range of occupations, they were concentrated in domestic service. Because domestic service workers worked in individual settings, they were particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, without the means to seek redress. In many countries of the region, labour regulations did not cover domestic servants.

37. The Subcommittee noted that the families left behind by international migrants faced a number of stresses. Gender and family relationships were altered by migration, with both positive and negative consequences for the family. The Subcommittee stressed that policy-relevant research on the impact of international migration on families was lacking.

38. The Subcommittee called for more research on migration and development and urged that the results be factored into national policy formulation. In that regard, migration mapping was a valuable tool. The Subcommittee also called for expanded data collection on migration.

39. The Subcommittee encouraged the international community to develop adequate frameworks for enhanced international cooperation and coordination on skilled labour migration, which should be of benefit to both the sending and receiving countries. It suggested that countries consider ratifying the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families and the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children.

40. The Subcommittee noted that both countries of origin and areas of destination had taken many steps to improve social protection for migrant workers, for example, by specifying working conditions and wages.

41. The Subcommittee recommended that ESCAP members and associate members formulate policies and strategies towards effective management of international migration. Donor countries and international organizations were called upon to lend their valuable support to that effort.

42. The Subcommittee called upon ESCAP to play an active role in promoting and coordinating regional initiatives on the issues of gender and children in international migration, particularly in combating the trafficking of women and children and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

43. The Subcommittee recommended that ESCAP organize an international forum for agencies involved in the countries of origin and of destination concerned to discuss the possibility of creating

or strengthening employment units and developing memorandums of understanding among interested countries for the benefit of migrant workers in terms of job opportunities and well-being.

44. The Subcommittee requested ESCAP to organize capacity-building programmes for developing countries on migration issues. It indicated that ESCAP should include the Pacific subregion in such programmes.

45. The Subcommittee stressed that there were linkages between population ageing and international labour migration. In many of the more developed economies in East and South-East Asia, life expectancy was high and fertility rates had fallen to low levels; consequently, the proportion of the population in older age groups was increasing rapidly. In those economies, the proportion of the population that was of working age was declining; in some cases, the absolute number of working-age people was declining as well. Many of those economies had responded by employing foreign workers, particularly in such physically demanding sectors as agriculture, fishing, construction, manufacturing and domestic service. The Subcommittee observed that the increased need for caregivers in ageing populations was likely to stimulate further international labour migration within the region.

46. The Subcommittee recalled that the Plan of Action on Population and Poverty adopted by the Fifth Asian and Pacific Population Conference included a number of recommendations concerning international migration. The Plan of Action recommended that Governments regularize desirable migration through a number of administrative actions. It also called for combating trafficking in persons, especially women and children. It urged strengthened regional cooperation on those issues.

47. The Subcommittee observed that population ageing in Asia presented a significant challenge for social development policies, especially concerning health and education, and for social security arrangements. It noted, however, that population ageing was not considered a serious problem in South Asia or the Pacific owing to the continued strength of family and community support for older persons.

48. The Subcommittee emphasized that, in Asia and the Pacific, the majority of older persons lived in rural areas, where access to adequate social services, health care, income security, shelter, work opportunities, family or community support, protection from abuse and other basic services was much more restricted than in urban areas. Much of the elderly rural population was poor and disadvantaged. Women constituted the majority of older persons as females lived longer than males on average. Older women were particularly disadvantaged because they were much more likely to be widowed. The rural poor elderly population was particularly affected by migration. Outmigration of young working adults left behind higher concentrations of older persons and, notwithstanding the volume of remittances from migrants, migration resulted in an erosion of intergenerational responsibilities towards older persons and in the capacity of rural communities to support older persons.

49. In response to the challenges of ageing, most countries in the region had established national policies or plans of action on ageing, the majority of which focused on identifying and addressing the economic and social consequences of declining fertility and increasing life expectancy. Some countries had aligned their national plans of actions on ageing with international mandates on ageing, such as the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Shanghai Implementation Strategy for the Macao and Madrid plans of action on ageing. Doing so was seen as necessary to promote consistency and efficiency in empowering older persons.

50. The Subcommittee noted that many countries had responded to population ageing by enacting legislation, strengthening coordination among national focal points on ageing issues, promoting the participation of older person in decision-making, extending social protection and security coverage (including non-contributory schemes) and supporting networks of older citizens' groups. Furthermore, some countries were providing financial support for non-governmental organizations that focused their work on ageing issues, providing vulnerable populations with financial assistance, tapping the skills of retired professionals to assist the development process, establishing day care centres, providing assistance for those living alone, and exploring social health arrangements and long-term health care. The Subcommittee noted that some countries promoted in their policy approaches intergenerational solidarity through traditional support, and religious and educational systems.

51. The Subcommittee recommended that ESCAP undertake more research to assess the extent of ageing issues and to promote evidence-based policy development, implementation and monitoring. There was a strong need to increase capacity-building, for example in the area of mainstreaming population ageing in national development policies and programmes. Training of national staff was required to facilitate the implementation of such ageing-related mandates as the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Shanghai Implementation Strategy. Furthermore, training to enhance the capacity of community-based support systems for older persons was emphasized. Because community care was considered important in addressing the long-term care needs of old persons, it was necessary to develop national, non-governmental and community health policies that prepared people for healthier ageing throughout life. The Subcommittee stressed the need to promote a positive image of older persons to change the negative and discriminatory attitudes against them sometimes displayed by the media and the public at large.

C. Empowerment of persons with disabilities

52. The Subcommittee had before it document E/ESCAP/SVG/4, which contained a review of the activities of Governments and civil society in the region and of the ESCAP secretariat aimed at mainstreaming disability concerns into development and promoting the empowerment of persons with disabilities. The Subcommittee reviewed progress in the region in the implementation of the Biwako

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Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. That Framework had been adopted by Governments in the region in 2002 and served as the main guideline for the renewed Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 2003-2012. The Subcommittee welcomed the firm commitment of Governments to further implementation of the Framework and the new paradigm of a rights-based approach to the empowerment of persons with disabilities.

53. The Subcommittee noted the appropriateness of a dual-track approach, which would address the specific needs of persons with disabilities in addition to mainstreaming disability issues into all areas of development and services. In that regard, the Subcommittee reviewed the progress made by Governments in mainstreaming disability concerns into such areas as infrastructure and architectural development, health services, education and training, gender empowerment, employment, social security, poverty alleviation, rural development and protection of human rights.

54. The Subcommittee commended the secretariat for the activities that it was implementing to promote access to information and communication technologies, assist women with disabilities, improve access to built environments, address poverty and disability, improve disability statistics and promote regional and interregional collaboration on disability matters. The Subcommittee recommended that ESCAP provide further technical expertise in capacity-building for, inter alia, policy makers, national coordination councils, non-governmental organizations and self-help groups by organizing regional and subregional training on the implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework and the formulation of appropriate policies.

55. The Subcommittee noted with appreciation the important role of the newly established regional training centre, the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability, in promoting the empowerment of persons with disabilities and encouraged its participation in training at the subregional level.

56. The Subcommittee reviewed progress in the elaboration of a comprehensive and integral international convention to promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. It expressed appreciation to the secretariat for organizing a number of workshops and seminars designed to strengthen national capacity to participate in the global process of elaborating the convention.

57. The Subcommittee reviewed recent progress in strengthening existing national legal frameworks and national policies to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. It noted with appreciation the ongoing efforts by some countries in the region towards adoption of new anti-discrimination laws and policies with enforcement mechanisms.

58. The Subcommittee recommended that ESCAP member countries take an active part in drafting the international convention on the protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Society should change its attitude towards such persons so as to create a harmonious and friendly environment for them.

59. The Subcommittee recommended that capacity-building in respect of persons with disabilities should be further strengthened with a view to facilitating their participation in the decision-making process at various levels.

60. The Subcommittee recommended that the secretariat carry out future activities to promote universal design and access to information, assist women with disabilities, address poverty and disability (particularly in rural and remote communities and in collaboration with the United Nations agencies concerned and international and regional development banks), form self-help groups, improve disability statistics, facilitate regional dialogue on the international convention and promote subregional, regional and interregional collaboration on disability matters. The Subcommittee requested the secretariat specifically to expand and strengthen its subregional activities in the area of disability. Interregional collaboration could be addressed through the exchange of information on regional decades of disabled persons.

**D. Report on the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review
Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action
and Its Regional and Global Outcomes**

61. The secretariat reported on the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes, held at Bangkok from 7 to 10 September 2004.

62. The High-level Intergovernmental Meeting had reviewed gains, gaps and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, held in 2000. Furthermore, the Meeting had discussed strategies and approaches for creating an enabling environment designed to achieve gender equality.

63. The High-level Intergovernmental Meeting had adopted by consensus a report containing the Bangkok Communiqué, which would constitute the contribution of the Asian and Pacific region to the global review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action to be carried out by the United Nations in New York in March 2005. In the Bangkok Communiqué, Governments reaffirmed their commitment to the consensus of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. They acknowledged the gains made and the gaps still existing and recognized the need to address a number of remaining challenges. Furthermore, they underscored the importance of ensuring linkages and cross-fertilization in the efforts to implement the various outcomes and agreements emanating from international conferences, such as the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, and such human rights instruments as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as well as Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000 for the effective realization of women's human rights and gender equality.

E. Programme matters

1. Review of programme performance for 2002-2003

64. The Subcommittee observed that a results-based approach had been introduced in the review of programme performance for 2002-2003 in the area of social development, including persistent and emerging social issues. It noted with appreciation that the secretariat had successfully implemented its programme of work on social development during the previous biennium and had assisted Governments through technical assistance, capacity-building, training and the dissemination of successful practices as well as the establishment and expansion of information networks.

2. Priority areas for inclusion in the programme of work for 2006-2007

65. The Subcommittee reviewed document E/ESCAP/SVG/6, which contained the biennial programme plan for the work of ESCAP for the period 2006-2007 with regard to subprogramme 8, Social development, including persistent and emerging issues, as incorporated in the proposed strategic framework for ESCAP for the period 2006-2007 (A/59/6 (Prog.15)). It noted that the draft strategic framework for the period 2006-2007 had been endorsed by the Commission at its sixtieth session in April 2004, and, following the recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, would be considered by the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. The Subcommittee requested the secretariat to focus its social development activities during the next biennium on gender issues, international migration, population ageing, disability, poverty reduction, employment generation, HIV/AIDS and violence against socially vulnerable groups. The secretariat would compile the results of the questionnaires completed by the delegations, identifying priority areas, including outputs, activities and suggested modalities for delivery, on which they wished the secretariat to focus in the programme of work for the biennium 2006-2007. The secretariat agreed to share the results of the exercise with the United Nations ESCAP Pacific Operations Centre (UN-EPOC).

F. Other matters

66. No matters for consideration were brought before the Subcommittee under the agenda item.

II. ORGANIZATION OF THE SESSION

A. Opening and duration

67. The Subcommittee on Socially Vulnerable Groups held its first session in Bangkok from 13 to 15 September 2004.

68. The Deputy Executive Secretary and Officer-in-Charge of the secretariat opened the first session of the Subcommittee. She delivered a statement on behalf of the Executive Secretary. In the statement, the Executive Secretary noted that ESCAP had made poverty reduction its overarching goal. The Executive Secretary had established a Millennium Development Goals Centre in his office with a mandate to review achievement of those goals and targets. The Centre assessed progress and issued periodic reports for the region.

69. The session was inaugurated by Ms. Kanda Vajrabhaya, Inspector-General, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Government of Thailand. She delivered a statement on behalf of Mr. Sora-at Klinpratoom, Minister of Social Development and Human Security. In the statement, the Minister informed the Subcommittee that the Government of Thailand was increasingly pursuing a developmental approach rather than a welfare approach in meeting the needs of the people. In doing so, it was attempting to place people at the centre of development.

B. Attendance

70. The session was attended by representatives of the following members and associate members of ESCAP: Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tonga and Viet Nam.

71. The session was also attended by an official of the United Nations Secretariat, representing the Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

72. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies attended: United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Development Fund for Women and Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

73. Representatives of the following United Nations specialized agencies attended: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; World Health Organization; and United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

74. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented at the session: Colombo Plan Secretariat and Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

75. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations attended the session: Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development, Disabled Peoples' International Asia-Pacific, International Movement ATD Fourth World, International Planned Parenthood Federation and Zonta International. Representatives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Philippine Retirement Authority Members Association attended the meeting.

C. Election of officers

76. The Subcommittee elected Honourable Amberoti Nikora (Kiribati) Chairperson; Mr. Aleem Mahmud (Pakistan) and Mr. Khasanov Amunullo (Tajikistan) Vice-Chairpersons and Ms. Norhayati Sulaiman (Malaysia) Rapporteur.

D. Agenda and organization of work

77. The Subcommittee adopted the following agenda:
1. Opening of the session.
 2. Election of officers.
 3. Adoption of the agenda.
 4. Implementation of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
 - (a) Regional review;
 - (b) Social development in the Pacific.
 5. Emerging demographic dynamics: international migration and population ageing.
 6. Empowerment of persons with disabilities.
 7. Report on the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes.
 8. Programme matters:
 - (a) Review of programme performance for 2002-2003;
 - (b) Priority areas for inclusion in the programme of work for 2006-2007.
 9. Other matters.
 10. Adoption of the report.

E. Documentation

78. The documents that were before the Subcommittee at its first session are listed in the annex to the present report.

F. Adoption of the report

79. The Subcommittee adopted the report on its first session on 15 September 2004.

Annex

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Provisional agenda	E/ESCAP/SVG/L.1/Rev.1
Annotated provisional agenda	E/ESCAP/SVG/L.2/Rev.1
Implementation of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:	
(a) Regional review;	E/ESCAP/SVG/1
(b) Social development in the Pacific	E/ESCAP/SVG/2
Emerging demographic dynamics: international migration and population ageing	E/ESCAP/SVG/3
Empowerment of persons with disabilities	E/ESCAP/SVG/4
Report on the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes	E/ESCAP/SVG/5
Programme matters:	
(a) Review of programme performance for 2002-2003;	E/ESCAPSVG/7
(b) Priority areas for inclusion in the programme of work for 2006-2007	E/ESCAP/SVG/6
Draft report	E/ESCAP/SVG/Rep.

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