



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Fifty-eighth session
16-22 May 2002
Bangkok

**EMERGING ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENTS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL:
SOCIO-ECONOMIC MEASURES TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY
IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS**

(Item 6 (c) of the provisional agenda)

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC MEASURES
TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS
ON ITS FOURTH SESSION**

SUMMARY

At its fourth session the Committee reviewed progress in the regional implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration, Copenhagen +5 and the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region. It emphasized that as economic growth rates had slowed owing to the 1997 Asian financial crisis and the current global downturn, strategies to distribute economic growth more widely were needed in tackling poverty. Adequate allocation and efficient management of public expenditures, and the participation of poor and vulnerable groups, were needed to alleviate poverty.

The Committee reviewed the potential uses of information and communication technologies for rural poverty alleviation. It also considered trends in the urbanization of poverty and approaches to prevent or reduce poverty in urban areas.

The Committee requested ESCAP to assist members and associate members through exchanges of country experiences, information dissemination, advisory services, capacity-building and projects designed to replicate good practices.

The Committee endorsed the proposal to hold the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons at Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture, Japan from 25 to 28 October 2002.

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**I. MATTERS CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE COMMISSION OR
TO BE BROUGHT TO ITS ATTENTION**

**A. Recommendations and decisions concerning regional implementation of the
Copenhagen Declaration, Copenhagen +5 and the Agenda for
Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region**

1. The Committee endorsed the recommendations in the report of the Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on Regional Implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region, held at Bangkok from 17 to 19 September 2001, as contained in document E/ESCAP/SOCEM(4)/2.
2. The Committee endorsed with warm appreciation the offer of the Government of Japan to host the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons at Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture, Japan from 25 to 28 October 2002. The Committee welcomed the opportunity for the participants to view the many initiatives being taken by Shiga Prefecture to equalize opportunities for people with disabilities. It encouraged members and associate members in the region to participate in the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting and to assist in developing a framework for action following the Decade.
3. The Committee requested the secretariat to strengthen its technical assistance programmes for developing countries in implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, Copenhagen +5, the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region and the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The Committee recommended that the secretariat continue to mobilize resources for the organization of training programmes, advisory services, policy dialogues, demonstration projects and documentation of best practices in addressing the issues and goals contained therein. Particular attention should be given to the critical issues of social protection, gender, health and education in partnership with other United Nations agencies.
4. The Committee requested that the programmes of ESCAP should be directed on a priority basis towards least developed countries and economies in transition and take better account of the situation of Pacific island countries, including their size and remoteness, their evolving governmental structures and their level of economic and social development.
5. The Committee recommended that women's health be accorded higher priority as a strategy for poverty reduction. It further recommended that the secretariat should strengthen the population components of poverty alleviation strategies, as access to quality reproductive health services could contribute to a reduction in the incidence of poverty.
6. As economic growth rates had slowed owing to the 1997 Asian financial crisis and the current global downturn, strategies to distribute economic growth more widely were needed in tackling

poverty. The Committee stressed the continuing importance of the role of the State in the provision of basic social services, especially for the poor and vulnerable groups.

7. The Committee urged Governments to ensure allocation of adequate resources and more efficient management of public expenditure for social development and poverty alleviation.

8. The Committee recommended that Governments should enhance the positive impact of public expenditure aimed at poverty alleviation through inculcating good governance practices and strengthening of institutions.

9. The Committee recommended that ESCAP should support the Governments' efforts by conducting research and demonstration projects on appropriate development models, both public and private, promoting community-based savings, investment and production. The Committee also recommended that ESCAP give greater attention in its programme planning to the role of civil society, the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), working in cooperation with Governments, in strategies and programmes to reduce poverty.

10. The Committee noted that the influence of women in poverty alleviation programmes would result in sustainable poverty reduction for both the rural and urban poor.

B. Recommendations and decisions concerning emerging issues in poverty alleviation

11. The Committee fully endorsed the recommendations on the roles of ESCAP and Governments in ensuring that the rural poor benefit from the information and communication technologies (ICT) revolution, as contained in document E/ESCAP/SOCEM(4)/3.

12. The Committee recommended that ESCAP initiate programmes to promote regional exchange of country experiences and to disseminate information on best practices and successful models in the application of ICT for rural poverty alleviation in the region.

13. The Committee recommended that ESCAP establish a network on ICT for rural poverty alleviation, organize training workshops on implementing pro-poor rural ICT services and provide advisory services to members and associate members. It further recommended that ESCAP provide technical assistance to members and associate members in developing guidelines and manuals for implementing demand-driven pro-poor rural ICT projects.

14. The Committee urged Governments to provide basic ICT infrastructure in rural areas, particularly in disadvantaged areas that were not serviced by the market. It also recommended that ICT be adequately applied in disaster forecasting and management towards alleviation of poverty caused by man-made and natural disasters. Particular attention should be paid to the use of ICT among women in rural areas as an effective means of women's economic participation as well as disaster prevention.

15. The Committee stressed the importance of developing appropriate and affordable ICT content and services, keeping the rural poor as the focus in order to ensure sustainability. In that regard, the Committee strongly recommended that proper needs-identification be undertaken to address the demand of the target beneficiaries.

16. The Committee, noting the multisectoral and cross-cutting nature of poverty, recommended that Governments adopt a coordinated and integrated approach to poverty alleviation, involving all stakeholders such as NGOs, community-based organizations and the private sector, and recommended that ESCAP continue to provide assistance to Governments in their efforts to alleviate poverty. Such assistance should be provided by ESCAP itself or through other regional or international organizations as well as donor countries.

17. The Committee recommended that ESCAP facilitate the sharing of experiences in poverty alleviation in urban and rural areas between countries in the region through the identification, documentation, dissemination and replication of good practices whenever possible through pilot projects.

18. The Committee expressed support for the establishment of exchange mechanisms such as Internet-based regional resource facilities so that Governments and other interested parties could learn from each other and have easy access to information on issues related to urban and rural poverty and poverty alleviation. Such facilities should be available on a sustainable basis.

19. The Committee recommended that Governments pay more attention to the development of small and medium-sized towns and build the capacity for poverty alleviation of local governments in those towns in order to reduce the pressure on mega-cities and primate cities. It urged ESCAP to provide technical assistance in that area. The Committee recognized the crucial role of gender in local governance.

20. The Committee also recommended that quality of life in rural areas be improved so that rural-to-urban migration could be reduced.

21. The Committee recommended that ESCAP, Governments, donors and other technical agencies rely more on local knowledge and harness traditional support systems to alleviate poverty in urban areas. It also recommended that any poverty alleviation effort should respect the dignity and the self-esteem of the poor.

22. The Committee, noting with appreciation the completion of phase 1 of the project “The Human Dignity Initiative”, expressed support for the implementation of the follow-up phases of the project.

23. The Committee recommended that the secretariat provide technical support to its members through the organization of workshops and seminars and by the provision of advisory services on various aspects of urban poverty reduction, including the application of best practices.

II. PROCEEDINGS OF THE SESSION

A. Regional implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration, Copenhagen +5 and the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region

24. The Committee had before it two documents, "Regional implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration, Copenhagen +5 and the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region: review of progress in implementation" (E/ESCAP/SOCEM(4)/1) and "Report of the Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on Regional Implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region, Bangkok, 17-19 September 2001" (E/ESCAP/SOCEM(4)/2). It noted that ESCAP had played an active role in forging a regional consensus on specific goals and time-bound targets to address critical social development concerns resulting in the adoption of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region. The Agenda for Action had served as the regional position at the World Summit for Social Development, held at Copenhagen in March 1995. The United Nations General Assembly had conducted a review of implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action at its twenty-fourth special session, held at Geneva in June 2000, popularly known as Copenhagen +5.

25. As part of its mandated periodic review and monitoring of progress in regional implementation of global and regional commitments in the area of social development, ESCAP had convened the Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on Regional Implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region, at Bangkok in September 2001. The Chairperson of the Expert Group Meeting, the Director-General of the Department of Social Welfare of Malaysia, participated in the Committee session as resource person and introduced the report and recommendations of the Meeting. The Committee endorsed the recommendations made by the Expert Group Meeting for addressing the five critical areas of immediate concern: poverty and vulnerability, social integration, social protection, international migration and the role of the private sector.

26. The Committee noted with interest and appreciation the innovative measures being taken and the progress achieved by the delegations towards attaining the goals emanating from Copenhagen through implementation of the regional social development agenda. It expressed concern that the Asian financial crisis, social tensions, natural disasters and other destabilizing factors had had serious negative repercussions on the progress towards achieving the targets set for poverty reduction, employment expansion and social integration.

27. While the Committee focused on issues of social development and poverty reduction, it noted that international trade was a potential source for such development if developing countries and countries with economies in transition had access to world markets on a fair and equitable basis. In developing countries in the region and particularly in countries with economies in transition, the role of the private sector and NGOs was becoming increasingly important in solving social problems.

28. The Committee stressed that official development assistance (ODA) continued to play a major role for the developing countries in sustainable social and economic growth. It noted that Japan had been the largest provider of ODA for 10 consecutive years and that it provided about one quarter of the total ODA of the advanced industrial countries. The Committee also noted that the Japanese economy was expected to begin a recovery in 2002 as a result of structural reform initiatives and anti-deflationary policies implemented by the Government. Such a recovery would benefit other economies in the region.

29. As economic growth in the region was likely to remain slow in the near future, the Committee emphasized that efforts for poverty reduction and social development would require strong political will and commitment, institutional reform, better management of public expenditures and reform of legal systems to eliminate biases against the poor and other vulnerable groups.

30. The Committee highlighted the Millennium Declaration goal to implement national strategies for sustainable development by 2005 so as to reverse the loss of environmental resources by 2015. It recommended that Governments should reassess and implement national strategies for sustainable development, with a provision for public participation, especially with regard to strategies for sustainable use of natural resources and protection of ecosystems so as to maintain and improve the core base for rural people's livelihood. It called for harnessing biotechnology to improve productivity and income, particularly of the poor.

31. The Committee stressed that strategies to reduce poverty needed to be closely interlinked with those to promote the social integration of the most vulnerable groups. Social services should be targeted to those most in need and incorporate social networks and community participation.

32. The Committee welcomed and endorsed the offer of the Government of Japan to host the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons at Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture, Japan from 25 to 28 October 2002. It noted that three international meetings of NGOs concerned with people with disabilities would be held in other cities in Japan prior to the Otsu meeting. Holding the High-level Meeting in Shiga Prefecture would permit the delegations to observe the implementation of the many innovative measures taken by the Prefecture and Otsu City, including the promotion of best practices in the field, zoning of the Prefecture according to the welfare needs of its citizens and support for people with disabilities to live independently in the local community.

33. The Committee emphasized the importance of human resources development (HRD) as a means of reducing poverty and promoting human development. With the global economic slowdown, the Committee was of the view that Governments should exert greater efforts to ensure better access of the poor to basic social services, particularly through institutional reform and capacity-building of social service providers. In terms of HRD-related basic social services, the Committee highlighted the importance of the provision of education and health, both of which were seen as the cornerstones of development. The secretariat was urged to accord priority to the provision of technical assistance to members and associate members in addressing critical education and health issues, in partnership with other United Nations agencies.

34. While recognizing the roles of non-State actors, the Committee stressed that the primary responsibility for the provision of basic social services, such as education and health care, should rest with the State. The importance of education and health as key elements for poverty reduction was stressed. The Committee also called for the use of ICT to improve access of the rural poor to information vital for health care and education.

35. In emphasizing the connection between health and poverty reduction, the Committee noted that the Millennium Declaration goals attached importance to health-related issues. The Committee urged members and associate members to pay particular attention to health issues such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and reproductive health. For example, one delegation noted that although HIV/AIDS was not a problem in its country, preventative measures were in place. The Committee recognized that women disproportionately bore the burden of ill health, partially reflected in high maternal mortality ratios, and recommended that their health should be accorded higher priority as a strategy for poverty reduction.

36. The Committee welcomed the valuable contributions to its deliberations made by the representatives of intergovernmental organizations, United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and NGOs, including the Asian Development Bank, Mekong River Commission, Forum Secretariat, World Health Organization and ATD Fourth World Movement.

B. Emerging issues in poverty alleviation

37. The Committee had before it two documents, “Emerging issues in poverty alleviation: main issues relating to the use of information and communications technology for rural poverty alleviation” (E/ESCAP/SOCEM(4)/3) and “Emerging issues in poverty alleviation: urbanization of poverty” (E/ESCAP/SOCEM(4)/4). The Committee expressed its full satisfaction with regard to the usefulness of those background documents prepared by the secretariat.

38. The Committee expressed its appreciation for the inclusion in the agenda of ICT for rural poverty alleviation. It endorsed the recommendations contained in document E/ESCAP/SOCEM(4)/3

on the roles of ESCAP and Governments and actions to be taken towards ensuring that the rural poor benefited from the ICT revolution for achieving poverty alleviation and socio-economic development in poor rural areas in the region.

39. The Committee recognized the unique advantage of ESCAP in promoting the regional exchange of country experiences and providing information on best practices and successful models in the application of ICT for the alleviation of rural poverty in the region. It strongly supported the present and potential role of ESCAP in providing technical assistance to members and associate members to enable them to integrate themselves fully into the knowledge-based global economy, and in strengthening their capacities in building up human resource capabilities.

40. The Committee recognized the critical role of Governments in providing basic ICT infrastructure in rural and remote areas where market forces were unable to serve. It stressed the importance of developing appropriate and affordable ICT content and services, keeping the rural poor as the focus. It further emphasized the need to create ICT awareness and develop skills in rural areas. It stressed the need to make ICT hardware and software affordable for the poor. The Committee recognized that coordinated efforts by Governments, NGOs, community-based organizations and the private sector were critical in achieving that goal. The Committee further stressed that the private sector should be involved as part of its social obligations and that Governments should provide the appropriate environment for the private sector to be increasingly involved.

41. The Committee recognized that existing pro-poor ICT initiatives were mainly supply-driven and recommended that in order to assess the demand side, proper needs identification should be undertaken, addressing the demands of the target beneficiaries, for the ICT programmes to be fully effective.

42. The Committee was in full agreement that ICT offered vast opportunities for economic growth and social development in the Asian and Pacific region and it recognized the important role that the use of ICT could play in rural poverty alleviation in developing countries. The Committee noted the important potential to use ICT as an effective tool for creating job opportunities, enhancing the business prospects of the rural poor, providing education and training and improving access to health information, micro-credit and other government services. The Committee also stressed other important applications of ICT, such as the promotion of good health, prevention of ill health and disaster prevention.

43. The Committee emphasized that ICT could not by itself make an immediate impact on the problem of poverty and therefore should not be a substitute for existing development efforts, but should be employed to complement and enhance those efforts.

44. While considering the rapid advancement and spread of ICT as a positive achievement, the Committee was deeply concerned about what it saw as the growing gap in ICT access between the
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rich and the poor. It recognized that concerted efforts at the national, regional and international levels were imperative for bridging the “digital divide” and putting ICT at the service of development for the rural poor.

45. The Committee noted with interest the efforts of various Governments in promoting ICT for rural development and poverty alleviation and developing human resource capability on ICT among their citizens, including those in rural and disadvantaged areas, through deployment of ICT technicians, provision of online ICT training, mobilization of media to create awareness of ICT and introduction of ICT in primary and secondary schools.

46. The Committee emphasized that modern ICT opened new prospects for economic and social development, including HRD. Several examples of HRD activities utilizing ICT were highlighted, including computerizing schools, virtual libraries, long-distance learning and interactive training online for people living in rural and remote areas. Women should be targeted as important users of ICT; they could, for example, use ICT to obtain information on basic health care and better prevent such diseases as diarrhoea in their families. The role of the State in setting up ICT programmes in rural areas and in HRD-related activities was underscored.

47. The Committee acknowledged the efforts of NGOs in establishing rural ICT services. However, it stressed the importance of coordinating the efforts of Government, NGOs and the private sector. The sustainability of those services to the rural poor was an important issue that needed to be tackled. The Committee stated that national programmes for putting ICT at the service of development must be integrated into national development strategies.

48. The Committee was concerned that the tools of modern ICT, such as computers and the Internet, were not readily available in most rural areas and were expensive. The Committee emphasized the importance of integrating the new technologies with traditional modes of communication, such as television, radio and print media, in providing information and communication services for rural poverty alleviation.

49. Document E/ESCAP/SOCEM(4)/4 indicated that the Asian and Pacific region was rapidly urbanizing and by 2025 half of the region’s population would live in urban areas. As countries urbanized, the urban share of poverty was also expected to grow. It was therefore important to understand the exact nature and magnitude of urban poverty and the urbanization of poverty, because that would have a profound effect on poverty alleviation efforts.

50. Several delegations described experiences in addressing different aspects of urban poverty and its alleviation in their countries. The Committee recognized that the sharing of experiences and achievements could assist efforts to reduce urban poverty in member countries. ESCAP could develop mechanisms for the replication of successful experiences. That contribution was especially

relevant for small and medium-sized towns, as few of them had the resources to deal with the urbanization of poverty.

51. The Committee noted that the problem was not only urbanization itself, but also the lack of capacity, and to some extent, willingness and inadequate resources of Governments, in particular local governments, to manage urbanization. It was emphasized that poverty was not just a lack of money but had economic, social, environmental and political dimensions and was a cross-cutting issue.

52. The Committee also emphasized that urban poverty alleviation required the removal of barriers that stopped the poor from seizing opportunities for upward social and economic mobility, securing access to social and economic services and physical infrastructure so that the poor could improve their quality of life.

53. The Committee stressed that there was a need to address the economic, social, political and environmental problems of the poor in an integrated manner, owing to the interrelated nature of those dimensions of poverty. At the same time, it called for an urban poverty reduction approach with a human face.

54. The Committee noted that rural-urban migration was one of the main causes of urbanization; efforts to alleviate poverty in urban areas should therefore be accompanied by improvements in the standard of living in rural areas.

55. The Committee recognized that the urban informal sector was one of the main providers of employment for the urban poor. Therefore, there was a need to support that sector through the implementation of micro-finance and micro-credit schemes to provide loans for self-employment, housing acquisition and improvements, and establishment of micro-businesses with special emphasis on women and single parents. Furthermore, it was indicated that formal systems of social protection could be expanded to cover people working in the informal sector.

56. The Committee noted that partnerships should be built with the poorest and most vulnerable groups of the population to enable them to take part in decision-making. The Committee stressed that participation by the poor was one major way to ensure that the needs and problems of the poor were properly addressed. In addition, other stakeholders, including the private sector, could make significant contributions in areas such as housing and land development.

57. The Committee recognized that increased access to information on social services was an important factor in efforts to alleviate urban poverty. That was seen as particularly relevant to issues related to family planning and reproductive health. The Committee also noted the direct links between the health and productive capacity of the poor. It urged members and associate members to broaden schemes to alleviate urban poverty to include access to health care facilities (including

adequate, safe and high-quality reproductive health services) and preventive health measures (including environmental health, particularly clean water supply and basic sanitation).

58. The Committee recognized that many of the problems of the urban poor were local in nature and generally the solutions should also be local in nature and approach. The devolution of authority through the establishment of mechanisms for city-level coordination and the harnessing of traditional systems of support were seen as some of the processes that could be used for that purpose.

C. Programme planning and implementation

59. The Committee had before it two documents, "Programme planning and implementation: review of the major accomplishments and implementation of the ESCAP subprogrammes on social development and on population and rural and urban development, 2000-2001" (E/ESCAP/SOCEM(4)/5) and "Programme planning and implementation: proposed programme changes, 2002-2003" (E/ESCAP/SOCEM(4)/6) and the corrigendum thereto. The Committee noted that during the biennium 2000-2001 the secretariat had carried out a wide range of activities designed to build capacity at the national and subnational levels. It had provided technical assistance and policy guidance to Governments, promoted policy-oriented research and disseminated information on effective development strategies and programmes.

60. The Committee observed that ESCAP had identified a well-defined niche for its activities in providing a proactive perspective, information exchange, advisory services and capacity-building for members and associate members. Consequently, the catalytic role played by ESCAP had resulted in policy reformulation, more synergistic programme and project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Those improvements had had an impact on poor households in the Asian and Pacific region.

61. The Committee expressed its appreciation of the secretariat's work in the implementation of the programme of work for 2000-2001 in the subprogrammes on social development and on population and rural and urban development. The Committee recommended that future reports on the accomplishments of the subprogrammes should not only highlight successful activities but should also cover those that were less successful and indicate the reasons they had not achieved the intended results.

62. In response to various comments on the exchange and application of best practices on poverty alleviation among the countries of the region, the secretariat presented a brief account of the Human Dignity Initiative project, being implemented with the generous financial support of the Government of Japan through the Trust Fund on Human Security. It was reported that phase I of the project had been completed and the release of funds by the Trust Fund was being awaited for phases II and III of the project.

63. The Committee endorsed the proposed programme changes for the respective subprogrammes presented in document E/ESCAP/SOCEM(4)/6.

64. The secretariat clarified that the refocusing of the work programme on poverty alleviation was based on priorities in the Millennium Declaration goals. The grouping of some individual programme elements was suggested in order to focus the work better and address more effectively the changing requirements of members and associate members. The secretariat also clarified that the establishment of regional resource centres aimed at urban poverty alleviation would require minimal resources, as they would function as virtual centres based on web-site information exchange.

65. The Committee requested the secretariat to consider the needs of all members and associate members in determining the venue of its activities. The Committee recommended that relevant subregional activities should be held in the Pacific in order to increase the participation of Pacific island countries.

66. The Committee expressed deep gratitude for the generous funding, in kind support and other facilities provided to ESCAP by bilateral donors, developing members and associate members, United Nations agencies, other intergovernmental bodies and NGOs to realize the effective implementation of its programme of work.

D. Other matters

67. No other matters were raised by the Committee under this agenda item.

E. Adoption of the report

68. The Committee adopted its report on 13 December 2001.

III. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

A. Opening, duration and organization of the session

69. The Committee on Socio-economic Measures to Alleviate Poverty in Rural and Urban Areas held its fourth session at Bangkok from 11 to 13 December 2001. The meeting was opened by the Deputy Executive Secretary and Officer-in-Charge, a.i., of the Commission. She stressed that the Executive Secretary had directed the secretariat to focus its efforts on three main themes: poverty reduction, managing globalization and emerging social issues. Under the theme of emerging social issues, ESCAP would concentrate on tackling the rising threats to human security in the region. Its resources would be directed to (a) empowering women and mainstreaming gender in development, (b) human resources development of youth, (c) equalizing opportunities for people with disabilities and (d) planning for the consequences of rapid population ageing.

70. The Deputy Executive Secretary stressed that ESCAP actively encouraged the use of ICT for reducing poverty and promoting rural empowerment in the region. Such technology had the potential to help the rural poor to clear some of the traditional barriers to development by improving access to information, markets and employment opportunities. She emphasized that the urban share of poverty would expand and that in 2025, when the majority of the population of the region would be living in urban areas, two thirds of the region's poor could be urban dwellers. She called upon Governments, particularly local governments, NGOs and poor urban communities to work together to tackle the issue of urban poverty effectively.

71. H.E. Ms. Ladawan Wongsriwong, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Government of Thailand, delivered an inaugural address. She noted that the Government was devoting attention to the use of ICT in order to promote the economic and social well-being of the rural poor. She emphasized that effective use of ICT required education and training, including lifelong learning. She also noted the importance of targeting such disadvantaged groups as female workers, older persons and persons with disabilities.

72. The Deputy Minister outlined the strategies that the Government of Thailand was following in order to reduce poverty. Those strategies were designed to support strong family ties and strong communities. The Government had, among other measures, granted a three-year grace period for farmers to repay government loans. It had established a village revolving fund scheme, a people's bank, a bank for small- and medium-sized enterprises and the "one village, one product" project. The Deputy Minister announced that from April 2002 social security would be extended to companies with as few as one employee.

B. Attendance

73. Representatives of 16 members and associate members of ESCAP attended the meeting: Bangladesh, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Fiji, France, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Russian Federation, Thailand and Viet Nam.

74. In addition, nine United Nations bodies and specialized agencies attended: United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Fund for Women, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations International Drug Control Programme, International Labour Organization, International Telecommunication Union, United Nations Industrial Development Organization and World Health Organization.

75. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: Asian Development Bank, European Union, International Pepper Community, Mekong River Commission and Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

76. The following NGO in general consultative status was represented: International Council of Women. The ATD Fourth World Movement was also represented.

C. Election of officers

77. Ms. Veronica Fenix Villavicencio (Philippines) was elected Chairperson, Mr. Abdolreza Ghofrani (Islamic Republic of Iran) Vice-Chairperson and Mr. Pakorn Amornchewin (Thailand) Rapporteur.

D. Agenda

78. The meeting adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Regional implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration, Copenhagen +5 and the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region:
 - (a) Review of progress in implementation;
 - (b) Recommendations.
5. Emerging issues in poverty alleviation:
 - (a) Main issues relating to the use of ICT for rural poverty alleviation;
 - (b) Urbanization of poverty.
6. Programme planning and implementation: review of the major accomplishments and implementation of the ESCAP subprogrammes on social development and on population and rural and urban development, 2000-2001, and proposed programme changes, 2002-2003.
7. Other matters.
8. Adoption of the report.

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