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**REVIEW OF ISSUES PERTINENT TO THE SUBSIDIARY STRUCTURE OF
THE COMMISSION: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

(Item 2 (g) of the provisional agenda)

**SUMMARY OF PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
RESOLUTIONS RELATING TO SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT ISSUES**

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

The present document summarizes the latest progress the secretariat has made in the implementation of the following Commission resolutions: (a) 63/8 on sustainable financing towards achieving universal health-care coverage in Asia and the Pacific; and (b) 64/9 on the midpoint review of the implementation of the Plan of Action on Population and Poverty adopted at the Fifth Asian and Pacific Population Conference.

The Commission may wish to review the progress achieved and provide the secretariat with comments and further guidance for enhanced and effective implementation of these resolutions.

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Introduction

1. The present document provides a brief update on the implementation of two Commission resolutions relating to social development, namely, 63/8 and 64/9, in accordance with the requests contained in each resolution that progress reports be submitted to the Commission at its sixty-fifth session.

I. RESOLUTION 63/8 ON SUSTAINABLE FINANCING TOWARDS ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL HEALTH-CARE COVERAGE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

2. In its resolution 63/8, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to, among other things: (a) assist members and associate members in their capacity-building on the provision of health financing with a view to achieving the goal of universal coverage and providing a platform for regional cooperation and exchange of experiences; (b) continue to analyse the situation of health financing within the overall development policies and planning of members and associate members, and its implications for the economic and social well-being of their citizens, including the transition to the achievement of universal health-care coverage, and outline the options available to countries in the region; (c) provide technical support, upon request, in the monitoring of progress towards the goal of universal coverage; and (d) organize and invite interested members to consultations at a senior level to discuss sustainable health-care financing in the region towards achieving universal coverage of health services.

3. Poverty and ill health have a cause-effect relationship. The poor are often denied access to appropriate health care, thus increasing the chances of ill health, which in turn limits their ability to engage in productive activities. At the same time, the costs of ill health, both in terms of medical expenditures and lost wages, have impoverishing effects, especially in the absence of appropriate social protection. In many countries of the Asia-Pacific region, this situation is exacerbated by heavy reliance on out-of-pocket payments to finance health expenditures. Especially in many Asian countries, the ratio of out-of-pocket expenditure to total health expenditure still exceeds 50 per cent. Such reliance can impede access to quality health-care services and pushes households further into indebtedness or poverty, especially when expenditures reach a catastrophic level.

4. In response to the aforementioned scenario, and recognizing that strengthening of social health protection, especially that of health financing mechanisms, requires the involvement of various stakeholders, the secretariat implemented two projects in 2007-2008, covering several pilot countries. The objective of both projects was to establish multisectoral dialogues on sustainable health financing. A situational review was conducted and a national workshop was held in each pilot country for representatives from various sectors dealing with health issues, including ministries of health, finance and planning, international organizations, and civil society entities.

5. In each country, in consultation with stakeholders, including ministries of health and the World Health Organization, the country-specific implementation focus was identified. In Cambodia, an implementation plan for the National Framework for Health Financing Strategy was reviewed; in China, schemes for purchasing health care and paying providers were reviewed; in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the challenges in four existing social health protection schemes were identified and analysed; in Mongolia, the current social health insurance scheme was assessed; and in Viet Nam, the financing of health promotion schemes was reviewed. In addition, in

each country, gender issues with regard to access to health-care services were examined.

6. Under the two above-mentioned projects, the secretariat held the Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting on Promoting Sustainable Social Protection Strategies to Improve Access to Health Care in Bangkok from 23 to 25 July 2008. A total of 60 representatives from countries in the ESCAP region participated. To achieve meaningful multisectoral dialogue, the participating countries were represented by ministry officials both from health and non-health sectors. Other United Nations agencies, including country and regional offices of the World Health Organization, the International Labour Office and the World Bank and development agencies, also participated and provided their inputs on strengthening health financing mechanisms and health systems. Following presentations on the situations in specific countries and work done by other stakeholders, a series of recommendations were developed, outlining ways to: (a) increase domestic public spending on health; (b) ensure the appropriate role of external funds in national health financing; and (c) increase the coverage and equity of risk-pooling schemes. The meeting acted as a useful platform for regional cooperation and exchange of experiences.

7. The specific country studies and the regional meeting recommendations were used as a base for a publication entitled *Promoting Sustainable Strategies to Improve Access to Health Care in the Asian and Pacific Region*. In addition, the work of ESCAP on health financing was acknowledged in meetings of the United Nations Regional Thematic Working Group on Health in Asia and the Pacific and in the University of Melbourne's 2008 Global Health Forum. It is also being used to inform the upcoming Regional Ministerial Meeting on Financing Strategies for Health Care of the Economic and Social Council.

II. RESOLUTION 64/9 ON THE MIDPOINT REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF ACTION ON POPULATION AND POVERTY ADOPTED AT THE FIFTH ASIAN AND PACIFIC POPULATION CONFERENCE

8. In its resolution 64/9, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to, among other things: (a) assist members and associate members in building their capacity to integrate population factors into development planning; (b) conduct analytical studies, compile and disseminate relevant demographic and population-related information and data with a view to identifying key demographic trends and emerging issues in the Asian and Pacific region; and (c) convene an expert group meeting in 2008 to review the implementation of the Plan of Action on Population and Poverty (E/ESCAP/1271, annex I) adopted at the Fifth Asian and Pacific Population Conference.

9. The secretariat continues to provide technical support and advisory services to members and associate members in building their capacity to integrate population factors in development planning. In this regard, the secretariat assisted the Statistical Institute for Asia and Pacific, based in Japan, in delivering lectures on demographic analysis and population projection from 16 to 20 February 2009 in the Fourth Group Training Course in Modules on Fundamental Official Statistics, held from 29 September 2008 to 13 March 2009. In their evaluations, participants reported that they found the lectures highly effective in enhancing their understanding regarding the interlinkages of population variables with development planning and in building their capacity as regards integrating population concerns into development planning.

10. The secretariat remains committed to assisting members and associate members in creating an enabling environment that addresses persistent and emerging issues on population and development. ESCAP, in collaboration with the Health Bureau of the province of Anhui, China, held a workshop entitled: “Addressing Multisectoral Determinants of Maternal Mortality in the ESCAP Region” in Hefei, Anhui, China from 20 to 22 October 2008. The workshop was organized under the project of the same name, which is funded by the Government of China. The project focused on the problem of high maternal mortality in four target countries, namely, Bangladesh, China (Anhui province), Nepal and Viet Nam, two of which are least developed countries (Bangladesh and Nepal). The main objective of the workshop was to discuss the findings of national-level studies in order to share experiences of reducing maternal mortality and develop country-level action plans to reduce maternal mortality. The workshop adopted policy recommendations to address medical and non-medical factors in this area. The recommendations were derived from the national-level studies and the workshop deliberations, highlighting regional examples of good practices in reducing maternal mortality that could serve as references for intercountry learning and emulation.

11. The secretariat has undertaken a number of activities to obtain the most up-to-date information on migration and development and to deepen the understanding of the linkages between migration and development. The social dimension of international migration, despite its importance, often receives marginal attention in the migration debate. It is also often overlooked by the policy framework. ESCAP produced a report entitled: “Looking into Pandora’s box: the social implications of international migration in Asia”. The report, published as part of the *Asia-Pacific Population and Social Studies* series in September 2008, highlighted the increasing scale of female migration and migration of highly skilled professionals in the region. It also addressed critical issues, such as the protection of the rights of migrants and the provision of access to basic social services, with a view to addressing the concerns of both countries of origin and destination.

12. Most recently, ESCAP and the United Nations Population Division jointly organized the Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok on 20 and 21 September 2008. During the meeting, experts from academia and practitioners from non-governmental institutions and organizations of the United Nations system discussed migration trends and patterns in Asia and the Pacific, migration policies and cooperation mechanisms, labour migration, and the interlinkages between international migration and development. Participating experts also examined the availability of data concerning migration and agreed that large data gaps remain to be filled. In discussing the possible links between migration and development, participants emphasized that those links were not straightforward. Discussion also evolved around the management of migration, in particular, that of labour migration.

13. ESCAP also took the lead in a situation analysis undertaken by the Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration including Human Trafficking. The Group joined efforts in identifying the most recent levels and patterns of international migration at the national and subregional levels, ultimately producing the *Situation Report on International Migration in East and South-East Asia*. The report, which was launched in October 2008, provides an overview of the multidimensional aspects of international migration, thereby indicating the scope and status of knowledge on the issue. It provides a regional perspective on migration, including comparative information and statistics, and covers cross-cutting topics, such as gender, health and regional cooperation.

14. ESCAP provides a wealth of policy-relevant information on population issues, including fertility, population ageing, migration and reproductive health, through the publication of a professional journal. The *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, in print since 1986, is a highly respected publication in which leading population experts share opinions and action-oriented research findings and provide clear policy recommendations regarding population and development issues in the region. Completely revamped in 2005, this peer-reviewed publication reaches a broad audience of decision-and policymakers, programme planners and programme administrators, as well as researchers in over 75 countries worldwide. During 2008, ESCAP published two regular issues of this publication, as well as an additional issue funded through extrabudgetary resources. The two regular issues, published in April and August 2008, have brought forward research articles on topics relevant to the pursuit of the goals of the Fifth Asian and Pacific Population Conference. Available online and in full text at www.unescap.org/appj.asp, articles address, among other things, issues such as: HIV/AIDS prevention among young people in East and South-East Asia; reproductive health-related challenges; migration and urbanization; population ageing; gender and remittance flows; and fertility transition. In particular, one article published in the August 2008 issue tackles the critical question: “Are the goals set by the Millennium Declaration and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development within reach by 2015?”

15. In order to monitor and disseminate the most up-to-date data on demographic and socioeconomic indicators, the secretariat published the *ESCAP Population Data Sheet 2009*, part of its annual series. It also established a database on labour outflows from a few selected countries, in order to closely monitor migration flows occurring within the region. Depending upon the data availability, attempts will be made to compile the data, classified by sex and skill level of migrants, and destination of migration.

16. The secretariat held an expert group meeting to assess the progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action on Population and Poverty in Bangkok from 3 to 5 February 2009. The meeting was organized in collaboration with the Asia and Pacific Regional Office of the United Nations Population Fund. It was attended by experts and government representatives from 14 countries in Asia, as well as by representatives of various non-governmental organizations active in the field of population and United Nations agencies, such as the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the United Nations Children’s Fund. In its progress assessment, the meeting made particular note of the contribution the implementation of the Plan of Action has made to the advancement of the Millennium Development Goals. The meeting provided renewed impetus for the full implementation of the Plan of Action as a crucial means to achieve the Goals, thereby further fostering the integration of population concerns into development planning and strategies. It recommended priority actions for further implementation of the Plan of Action.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

17. The Commission may wish to review the progress achieved and provide the secretariat with comments and further guidance for enhanced and effective implementation of these resolutions.

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