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**REVIEW OF ISSUES PERTINENT TO THE SUBSIDIARY STRUCTURE OF
THE COMMISSION, INCLUDING THE PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE
REPORT FOR THE BIENNIUM 2008-2009 AND THE WORK OF THE
ESCAP REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

(Item 3 of the provisional agenda)

**SUBPROGRAMME OVERVIEW: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES
RELATED TO INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

The present document addresses issues and challenges related to inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific in the following eight areas: macroeconomic policy and inclusive development; trade and investment; transport; the environment and development; information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction; social development; statistics; and subregional activities for development. It highlights the steps taken by the secretariat to support member countries in their quest to achieve inclusive and sustainable development through research, policy analysis and technical cooperation.

* The late submission of the document was due to the need to collate inputs from all subprogrammes.

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Introduction

1. The present document addresses development issues and challenges in the substantive areas covered by the eight subprogrammes of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the support that the secretariat is providing to member countries in the form of strategic analysis, policy options and technical cooperation to address those challenges. It also brings to the attention of member States important issues relating to the work of the secretariat.

2. The eight sections are as follows:

(a) *Macroeconomic policy and inclusive development.* With a focus on sustaining the region's recovery from the global economic crisis and inclusive development in the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, the policy options outlined include the rebalancing of the region's economies in favour of greater domestic and regional consumption through enhancing social protection, promoting agricultural and rural development and deepening regional economic and financial cooperation, and increased flows of official development assistance and enhanced South-South cooperation;

(b) *Trade and investment.* Recent developments and issues are outlined, including private sector development in the region, with particular emphasis on the recovery from the current economic crisis. Key areas of policy action that countries need to pursue, including a more consistent and coordinated approach to trade policy, trade facilitation reforms, business survival and development, deeper regional integration and reinforcing the primacy of the multilateral trading system in order to stage a trade-led recovery, are examined;

(c) *Transport.* Connectivity across borders brings the benefits of improved competitiveness of production networks, better trade flows and reduction in development gaps between countries, all of which contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The ongoing and proposed responses of the secretariat in supporting member countries in achieving the long-term vision of an international, integrated, intermodal transport and logistics system are outlined;

(d) *Environment and development.* Given that none of the developing countries in the region will meet the poverty- and environment-related Millennium Development Goals, policy options that could support economic growth and reduce poverty while seeking to minimize environmental impacts are highlighted. The role played by ESCAP in supporting member countries by advocating the green growth development approach is emphasized;

(e) *Information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction.* With a view to promoting digital opportunities, connecting the unconnected, building information and communications technology (ICT) capacity and protecting development gains from disasters, the secretariat's initiatives include ICT connectivity, capacity-building and the preparation of the Asia-Pacific disaster report and an online platform to facilitate the sharing of information and best practices on disaster risk reduction;

(f) *Social development.* New and emerging challenges in the area of population and development are examined and the policies implemented by countries in the region, as well as the role played by the Asian and Pacific Population Conference in this regard, are outlined. The Commission's guidance and advice are sought on the holding of a sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference;

(g) *Statistics.* Specific areas of official statistics that need to be improved in order to make national policies more inclusive are highlighted, including measuring the contribution that the informally employed make to the economy; monitoring progress towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities; and analysing and collecting data pertaining to violence against women;

(h) *Subregional activities for development.* Recognizing member countries' different stages of economic and social development and diverse needs and capacities as they endeavour to attain the Millennium Development Goals, ESCAP has initiated a new subprogramme on subregional activities for development in order to support countries' efforts toward building resilient economies and societies. In addition to the current ESCAP Pacific Operations Centre in Fiji, three new offices, covering East and North-East Asia, North and Central Asia, and South-West Asia will be established in Incheon, Republic of Korea, Almaty, Kazakhstan, and New Delhi, respectively, while ESCAP headquarters will handle the work for the South-East Asian subregion.

I. MACROECONOMIC POLICY AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

A. Introduction

3. As the global financial and economic crisis deeply impacted the development process of the Asia-Pacific countries during 2008-2009, the subprogramme focused on assisting the Governments in facing the resultant challenges. It monitored the impact of the crisis on economic performance and outlook, including with regard to progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), identified the immediate and medium-term policy responses to the crisis, with a particular

emphasis on countries with special needs, and assisted in the sharing of country experiences and capacity-building. As the region begins to recover from the crisis, the focus of the subprogramme in the biennium 2010-2011 will be on policy approaches for sustaining the recovery and maintaining macroeconomic stability while reducing poverty and achieving the MDGs with the aim of promoting inclusive development. It will also cover policy lessons for deepening regional economic and financial cooperation and South-South cooperation, in addition to assisting the region to develop its perspective on global processes in various forums, including the United Nations and the Group of 20 (G-20). It will pay special attention to the obstacles faced by countries with special needs in meeting the MDG targets by 2015, as well as to the strengthening of the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Secondary Crops Development in Asia and the Pacific (CAPSA), given the importance to many developing countries of agriculture for inclusive development.

B. Macroeconomic policy issues

4. Since the third quarter of 2008, the economies of the Asia-Pacific region have been confronting the consequences of the global financial and economic crisis. Governments in the Asia-Pacific region responded to the recession with massive fiscal stimulus packages and an expansionary monetary policy. Growth in 2010 has rebounded from the trough of early 2009, supported by the resilient performance of the large emerging economies, those of China and India. The region is now entering a challenging policy environment, with rising inflationary tendencies, in particular increasing fuel and food prices, the build-up of asset bubbles and appreciating exchange rates in an environment of weak growth. There is a need to support the recovery of the region through greater regional cooperation, in particular with regard to economic, monetary and financial issues, so as to improve resilience to future crises while addressing development gaps. Structural transformation in Asian economies will be required by means of national and regional measures that favour the promotion of domestic and regional consumption to make up for the weaker demand in the advanced economies in the wake of the crisis.

5. With over 900 million people in poverty, the Asia-Pacific region has substantial headroom for augmenting domestic consumption by putting purchasing power in the hands of the region's poor. This can be done by designing and implementing ex ante social protection systems and fostering agricultural and rural development and financial inclusion. As the large economies of the region increasingly follow domestic-demand-led growth, regional economic cooperation that integrates smaller and hitherto marginalized economies needs to be accelerated, as these economies can be suppliers in the region's vertical production networks.

6. The crisis has given renewed impetus to opportunities for regional monetary and financial cooperation. A broader and inclusive institutional architecture is needed for promoting monetary and financial cooperation in Asia. One such opportunity is for an institutional mechanism to mobilize regional savings to foster an infrastructure development programme and other regional public goods to generate additional aggregate demand while servicing the huge investment needs of the region. Financial systems should be deepened through regional bond market development, capital market integration and cooperation among trade financing agencies. Exchange rate cooperation should be strengthened to prevent competitive devaluations, a particular risk during the recovery. Such cooperation can be a building block for a regional currency arrangement that would supplement global initiatives to increase reserve currencies. The crisis has demonstrated once again the risks to the region of volatile short-term capital flows. Mechanisms such as a regional Tobin tax might be one way to moderate the volatility of such flows, although ideally such measures should be coordinated at the international level. The subprogramme is closely following the

international policy debate in various forums, including the United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Development, held in New York from 24 to 30 June 2009,¹ and G-20 Summits on the reform of international financial architecture and regional cooperation with a view to assisting the member Governments in developing a regional perspective. It will also help in moving forward the agenda on these issues by organizing policy dialogue forums between regional experts and policymakers and providing analytical support through various publications. The main publications under the subprogramme include the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific*, the year-end update of the *Survey*, macroeconomic policy briefs and updates, the *Asia-Pacific Development Journal* and working papers.

C. Issues related to poverty and inclusive development policy

7. Before the recent global economic crisis, countries of the region had been making good progress in reducing poverty, which nonetheless continued to be a major challenge, with nearly 950 million poor in the Asia-Pacific region in 2005 (on the basis of the one-dollar-a-day poverty line) representing more than two thirds of world's poor. One of the major negative impacts of the economic slowdown has been the loss of employment opportunities. Projections by the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicate that 26.3 million jobs could be lost in the Asia-Pacific region as a result of the crisis, with many millions more slipping into underemployment and various forms of unstable and vulnerable employment. The poor, women workers in the manufacturing sector, the youngest and oldest populations and socially excluded groups are among the worst hit. Because rapid economic growth has played a major role in the reduction of poverty in the region, the consequences of the current crisis, in particular the slowdown in growth, is leading to a reversal of the development gains of the past. Not only are workers losing their jobs because of the crisis, but employment opportunities are being lost owing to the slower economic growth. Fewer employment opportunities will make it hard for developing countries to absorb an expanding labour force, exacerbating the unemployment situation. Millions of people will remain trapped in poverty. The crisis is also expected to adversely affect progress in the region towards achieving the MDGs.

8. The main challenge for policymakers now is not only to achieve a quick recovery, but to do so with a focus on the poor and the most vulnerable so as to make it more inclusive. To that end, investment in education, health and other social sectors would benefit all segments of society, in particular women and children. Most important, comprehensive social protection systems must be developed to deal with current and future crises. Because of their employment-generation potential, small and medium-sized enterprises should be supported to minimize job losses. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in rural areas, and the problem of poverty cannot be addressed without enhancing productivity in the agricultural sector. Physical infrastructure needs to be strengthened, in particular in rural areas if development is to be inclusive.

9. Enormous financial resources are needed to address the adverse consequences of the crisis and to finance long-term development. Domestic resource mobilization efforts through innovative approaches need to be intensified. Developed countries and other donors should ensure smooth flows of official development assistance (ODA) to developing countries. South-South cooperation can be an effective tool in enhancing the financial and technical assistance for countries in need in the region. Triangular development cooperation, whereby developed and

¹ For the Outcome of the Conference, see resolution 63/303, annex.

developing countries join hands, could provide much-needed additional resources for the implementation of development programmes. More analytical work on South-South cooperation and triangular development cooperation, as well as the organization of a regional policy dialogue, is planned in collaboration with Department of Economic and Social Affairs during the biennium 2010-2011, building on work already done.

D. Policy issues relating to countries with special needs

10. With the phasing out of the Multifibre Agreement (MFA) quotas under the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Textiles and Clothing, and given the rise in food and oil prices and the global financial crisis, the Asian and Pacific countries with special needs, including the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, are continuing to face tremendous challenges in maintaining their economic growth and further implementing poverty reduction programmes. This group of countries as a whole has also encountered great difficulties in making sufficient progress in meeting the MDG targets by 2015. Given the narrow production base of countries with special needs, their exports continue to be mainly low-value-added manufactures with a limited range of destination markets. Insufficient domestic and external financial resources have prevented such countries from investing in improving their productive capacity and developing their human and institutional capacities. Furthermore, they are subject to unprecedented environmental stresses, such as sea-level rise due to global warming and air and water pollution. The region has also been hit by a number of natural disasters in recent years. The toll from such disasters was most severe in the least developed countries and the small island developing States—in some cases all development gains were lost. Prohibitively high transport costs, lack of coordination with transit countries and limited market access continue to pose major obstacles to many countries with special needs in the region.

11. The mobilization and effective use of financial resources for development is essential for the attainment of MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals and the strengthening of the new global partnership for sustainable and inclusive development for countries with special needs in Asia and the Pacific. While the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals is the primary responsibility of each country, the interdependence between the domestic economies of countries with special needs and the global economic system has increased their vulnerability to external shocks. In coping with such external shocks, such countries will need appropriately designed support measures, including in the area of regional and South-South cooperation, to create an enabling international and regional economic environment in which they can make effective use of trade and investment opportunities and participate more equitably in the global and regional financial systems. Similarly, ODA flows to such countries need to be increased significantly with a view to promoting sustainable and inclusive development; enhancing social, institutional and physical infrastructure; promoting foreign direct investment; adapting trade and technological innovations; improving health and education; fostering gender equality; ensuring food security; and reducing poverty. In that context, commitments made by donors in the areas of trade, aid and financial flows need to be met, and ODA for “new” purposes, such as aid for trade and financing for climate adaptation and mitigation, should not be diverted from resources for other internationally agreed development goals. Countries with special needs should pursue sound and stable macroeconomic policies to promote pro-poor growth, reduce poverty, ensure food security and achieve environmental sustainability. Increased investment is also needed so that they can expand their productive capacity, diversify their export base, build their infrastructure and improve their human and institutional capacities. The subprogramme will assist in developing an Asia-Pacific regional

perspective for the 2010 MDG Summit. It will also provide a forum for the Asia-Pacific least developed countries for the conduct of a regional review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action² during 2001-2010 as a part of the global review at the fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, to be held in 2011.

E. Poverty alleviation through sustainable agriculture

12. The agriculture sector is the backbone of the economies of many developing countries, in particular countries with special needs. The problem of poverty in such countries cannot be tackled without closer attention being paid to problems in the agriculture sector. CAPSA is well placed to assist member countries in coordinating research on topical issues relating to food security, hunger, malnutrition and sustainable agriculture in an environment of climate change. Redirecting some of the Centre's efforts on research to analyse the effects of climate change on secondary crops in particular and farming systems and agribusiness development in general would enable CAPSA to respond more effectively to the challenges of the twenty-first century. The Centre could also undertake research and development on secondary crops in drought-affected and saline areas.

13. Further action in strengthening CAPSA will include exploring synergies with the United Nations Asian and Pacific Centre for Agricultural Engineering and Machinery (UNAPCAEM) and the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (APCTT); broadening the CAPSA portfolio of potential research topics to include the role of secondary crops in biofuel production; increasing the Centre's visibility through a more inclusive approach to project identification; and networking with other regional research centres to promote and coordinate research, highlight and disseminate research findings and convert the results of primary research into relevant policy options for member States in the region.³

F. Issues for consideration by the Commission

14. The first session of the Committee on Macroeconomic Policy, Poverty Reduction and Inclusive Development, held from 24 to 26 November 2009,⁴ reviewed issues arising from the activities carried out under the subprogramme in 2008-2009 and the proposed activities for 2010-2011, as summarized above. Member countries may wish to share their experiences and views on the issues and challenges raised under this subprogramme and provide further guidance on the secretariat's programme of work.

II. TRADE AND INVESTMENT

A. Introduction

15. While there are solid signs of recovery across the world, the global economic crisis hit the developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region hard. Exports dropped sharply in the ensuing months and unemployment rose, exposing the vulnerability of the region to external shocks. There have been calls to abandon the export-led growth strategy that the region has largely relied on and to focus more on stimulating domestic demand. While there is a clear need for rebalancing the sources of growth, bolstering domestic demand may take time and considerable effort. In many cases,

² A/CONF.191/13, chap. II.

³ Issues relating to the strengthening of CAPSA are also covered in the summary of progress in the implementation of resolution 65/4 (see E/ESCAP/66/3).

⁴ See E/ESCAP/66/5.

domestic markets are too small to compensate for exports. Similarly, while trade remains an important element of economic growth, the lesson learned from the crisis is that trade policy should be clearly aligned with broader goals of inclusive and sustainable development so that trade can work for all. Support for policies, most significantly in the areas of trade facilitation and business development, is crucial for the promotion of trade and investment.

16. Beyond the national agenda, the current crisis makes a strong case for increasing intraregional trade and investment. The effective realization of that objective will depend on efforts made to strengthen, broaden and consolidate existing regional trade agreements. At the global level, it is critical that countries in the region reaffirm the primacy of the multilateral system in governing trade and protect the gains made so far. Pushing for the successful completion of the Doha development round should be a priority. In the present section, the secretariat examines the key areas of policy actions that countries in the Asia-Pacific region need to pursue in order to stage a trade-led recovery and ensure that trade and investment work for all.

B. Promoting a more coherent, consistent and coordinated approach to trade policy

17. Trade policy has strong economic, social and environmental impacts. To ensure that trade policy is an effective tool for achieving inclusive and sustainable development, it must be mainstreamed into development policies and objectives. This means that the diverse linkages of trade policy with other development priorities need to be closely examined.

18. ESCAP analysis in the *Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2009*⁵ illustrates that under a pro-poor trade policy, the overriding principle is that trade is promoted in goods and services in which the poor have a relatively large stake. This may require Government interventions that distort trade as little as possible and that are acceptable under existing international commitments. Supply-side capacity-building is of the utmost importance in this regard.

19. Trade policy must also promote (or at least not discourage) the production of and trade in goods and services in a sustainable manner. This may mean calling for interventions to ensure that natural resources used in the production process are managed efficiently and sustainably; that least-polluting and energy-efficient processes and technologies are encouraged; and that trade in environmentally friendly products is promoted.

20. Agriculture and services should be given special attention in promoting inclusive and sustainable trade. The majority of the region's poor live in rural areas and the agriculture sector faces formidable supply-side constraints, in addition to market access limitations. The service sector tends to be less polluting, is labour-intensive and can improve supply-side capacity (such as information and communications technology and energy-related services).

21. The success of a more coherent, consistent and coordinated approach to trade policy depends to a large degree on effective institutional coordination in the design and implementation of trade policy. Effective coordination among various levels of government, as well as with major stakeholders, business in particular, is crucial in this respect. More often than not, lack of communication between central and local governments obstructs the implementation of coherent and consistent trade and development policies.

⁵ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.II.F.19.

22. The ESCAP Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Week, in November 2009, which brought together policymakers, researchers and businesses, spearheaded the region's dialogue on how to use trade and investment policies to navigate out of the present crisis and achieve inclusive and sustainable development in the long term.

C. Deepening trade facilitation reforms

23. The global economic crisis has put enormous pressure on exporters in the Asia-Pacific region to cut costs in order to remain competitive and secure their share of a shrinking global market. Given the lagging global demand and the high trade dependence of the majority of countries in the Asia-Pacific region, Government measures to reduce the hidden costs of trade—in some cases as much as 15 per cent of the value of goods traded—would be necessary to keep exports competitive. Since many countries in Asia and the Pacific have focused on facilitating trade with developed countries, it is easier and cheaper to trade with Europe and the United States of America than within the region. Renewed interest in the region to increase intraregional trade will very much depend on how effectively trade facilitation concerns are addressed.

24. Trade facilitation, which eliminates unnecessarily cumbersome procedures and requirements, should be a priority in the current environment. Focusing on concrete improvements that can yield quick efficiency gains, such as providing clear, complete and easily accessible information on existing rules and procedures for import and export, could be given priority in the short term. In the medium term, the simplification, harmonization and standardization of rules and procedures could be actively pursued, using the existing trade facilitation instruments. Making use of the single-window type of facility (a one-stop facility for exchanging information between traders and government) would assist countries in significantly reducing the time and costs involved in international trade.

25. A comprehensive approach addressing the entire set of procedures relating to importing and exporting must be promoted if real progress is to be made on trade facilitation. Since trade facilitation responsibilities lie across many government agencies, the success may depend on the coordination of and collaboration between government agencies, and between those agencies and private sector stakeholders (traders and service providers).

26. ESCAP has been assisting member States in tackling inefficiencies and bottlenecks in international trade by: (a) building-capacity among trade facilitation practitioners; (b) developing trade facilitation implementation methodologies and tools; (c) undertaking analytical and advocacy work; and (d) fostering a regional community of knowledge and best practices for trade facilitation through the United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (UN NExT). Using the UN NExT platform, ESCAP organizes the annual Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum in order to promote public-private dialogues and share lessons on implementing trade facilitation measures. ESCAP places special emphasis on assisting least developed and landlocked developing countries. In 2008-2009, ESCAP provided for capacity-building in trade facilitation for 17 least developed and landlocked developing countries. ESCAP has been representing the region in global talks on aid for trade and on trade capacity-building.

D. Ensuring business survival and development

27. The global economic crisis has brought new challenges to enterprises, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, in Asia and the Pacific. Such

enterprises, which typically account for over 95 per cent of domestic companies and provide over 60 per cent of national employment in the region, are the backbone of the region's economies. They are often more flexible and innovative in making changes than large firms, which is essential in the current environment. Ensuring their survival during the economic downturn and making room for them to grow should be a priority.

28. Governments need to play a key role in creating enabling business environments, facilitating better market and resource access and providing pro-business regulatory frameworks and business support services. In addition, by promoting corporate social responsibility, Governments could support enterprises that are working to improve their contribution to inclusive and sustainable development.

29. With the emergence of global and regional value chains and their quick spread into strategic sectors, such as the automotive, electronics, food and apparel/garment sectors, the survival and growth of enterprises, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, depends on their ability to connect to such chains. Global value chains have changed the traditional mode of competition based on low costs and low prices. Today, competition is among regional or global value chains, based on the efficiency of their entire production and distribution networks. Governments have a role to play. With a view to helping Asian and Pacific small and medium-sized enterprises to enter global value chains, it is important to raise the awareness of such enterprises of global and regional value chains and increase their knowledge about product standards and certification, product technology and distribution channels. Governments should also foster those enterprises that have established their own value chains in the region.

30. Another area that needs attention is corporate social responsibility, which is emerging as a competitiveness promotion strategy. Product features such as "environmentally friendly" and "fair trade" play an increasingly important role in global competition. If corporate social responsibility is to make a more significant contribution, Governments need to integrate it into their national strategies to promote competitiveness, with the overall purpose of inclusive and sustainable development. Putting corporate social responsibility on the public policy agenda may also increase the attractiveness of countries and the region to foreign direct investment and the benefits derived from it.

31. ESCAP has been working closely with countries in the greater Mekong subregion in implementing a series of technical assistance activities for private sector development. Between 1994 and 2007, over 5,000 people from both the public and private sectors were trained under the programme. Building on this experience, ESCAP is piloting a similar project in South Asia to facilitate access by small and medium-sized enterprises to global value chains. Through its "Investors for Development (I4D)" project, ESCAP is helping businesses to implement corporate social responsibility in 15 countries in the region. The project is aimed at helping companies to gain sustainable competitiveness by applying the principles of the United Nations Global Compact. Since 2004, ESCAP has been organizing the annual Asia-Pacific Business Forum in order to promote public-private dialogues on issues of mutual interest, such as the role of business in climate change adaptation and energy security.

E. Promoting deeper regional integration

32. In the context of the current global economic crisis, a strong case can be made for increasing intraregional trade, in particular trade among the region's developing countries. ESCAP research indicates that such trade can: (a) have a

positive impact on development; (b) expand productive capacity; (c) upgrade industry; and (d) help fully utilize resources. Opportunities to enhance intraregional trade and investment are significant.

33. Trade and investment liberalization is necessary in the pursuit of deeper integration, but it is not sufficient. Other actions are equally important. The proliferation of regional trade agreements—by mid-2009, 104 such agreements involving an ESCAP member State were in force—has led to a confusing network of overlapping and sometimes conflicting commitments among countries, which are often signatories to multiple agreements with overlapping membership. In order to ensure that such agreements become well-ordered building blocks of regional integration and of the multilateral trading system, it is important for them to be: (a) strengthened in terms of coverage and commitments; (b) expanded in terms of membership in order to limit potential trade diversion; and (c) harmonized and consolidated. Extending regional cooperation to other areas such as macroeconomic coordination, infrastructure and other supply-side capacity-building should be another area of consideration.

34. The Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA) has emerged as a potential driver of regional integration, since its membership cuts across subregions of ESCAP and includes some of the largest and most dynamic economies: China, India and the Republic of Korea. APTA has relatively simple and flexible rules of origin, which could be used as a template for common rules of origin for the region. For APTA to truly serve as the driver of regional integration, its scope and depth of commitments need to be expanded and its membership broadened. Ongoing efforts to that end are being made by both the participating countries and ESCAP.

35. ESCAP is the only United Nations regional body in Asia and the Pacific that plays an important role in promoting intraregional trade and investment. Three modalities stand out: (a) the role of ESCAP as the secretariat of APTA; (b) the Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade (ARTNeT), which has dedicated one third of its research programme to various issues related to regionalism; and (c) the development of the Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Agreements Database.

F. Reinforcing the primacy of the multilateral trading system

36. The global economic crisis has prompted many countries to resort to using protectionist measures, despite the rhetoric and pledges at various international forums to the contrary. Some countries, both developed and developing, have opted for “buy local” programmes as part of their recovery policies, using “murky” protectionism (that is, abuses of legitimate discretion under WTO rules that are used to discriminate against foreign goods, companies, workers and investors, which also include so-called “green” policies and abuses of health and safety regulations).

37. While countries have considerable leeway under WTO rules to protect their economies and some form of protectionism may be necessary in certain cases, it should be used as a last resort. Often, measures that are less trade-distorting can be implemented to help industries and companies. In reality, protectionism has proved to be devastating, as it triggers tit-for-tat action, which leads to a vicious circle of trade collapse. In this environment, the role of WTO becomes indispensable in monitoring protectionist trends and championing the role of trade in economic growth and recovery. In fact, the multilateral trading system overseen by WTO is the only system that comprises a universal body of non-discriminatory enforceable rules governing international trade.

38. The issues covered by the multilateral trading system and the current Doha round of multilateral trade negotiations are many and complex, taxing the capacity of the less developed and the least developed countries. The system needs to be strengthened and a more balanced approach taken to development including the involvement of developing countries in WTO decision-making. With all its weaknesses, this system of rules has enhanced the stability, transparency and predictability of international trade, and it warrants support from its members. The successful conclusion of the Doha round would send a strong signal to traders and investors that the world economy remains open and committed to trade. There are signs that WTO members are speeding up the process, and a final deal is expected in 2010/2011. Making this happen is the responsibility of all WTO members.

39. ESCAP has been helping countries to participate effectively in the multilateral trading system, in particular by helping countries to accede to WTO, effectively implement their WTO commitments and participate effectively in the Doha Development Agenda negotiations. Special attention is accorded to the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries. To that end, ESCAP organizes trade policy courses and specific training courses on WTO agreements and Doha Development Agenda issues, as well as regional policy dialogues among Governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, parliamentarians and other stakeholders. The principal modalities for this assistance are the WTO/ESCAP technical assistance programme and the Macao Regional Knowledge Hub in Support of Sustainable Trade and Development. The capacity of trade policy researchers in the region has been enhanced through ARTNeT.

G. Issues for consideration by the Commission

40. The Commission may wish to comment on the issues and challenges identified in making trade and investment work for inclusive and sustainable development; priority actions and policy measures identified by the secretariat for further consideration at the national, regional and global levels; and the appropriateness of the work of the secretariat in addressing these challenges.

III. TRANSPORT

A. Introduction

41. Transport plays an essential role in economic and social development, reducing poverty, improving general welfare and enhancing the inclusion of people in the overall economic and social development process. Connecting countries by road, rail and waterway transport infrastructure and services is a pivotal element of regional integration. Such connectivity across borders brings many benefits, including improved competitiveness of production networks, better trade flows and reductions in development gaps between rich and poor countries, all of which contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. At the same time, transport development can have negative impacts on the economy, environment and society. Consequently, there is a need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to addressing economic, environmental, social and poverty issues arising in the sector.

B. Connecting the region's land transport infrastructure

42. Significant progress has been made in developing regional transport networks, including the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks. Building on this progress, the two important issues to be addressed in moving towards the realization of a vision of an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system are the upgrading of infrastructure, completing “missing links” and the development of intermodal interfaces such as dry ports and inland container depots. Dry ports allow goods, in particular those in standard containers, to be transferred efficiently between transport modes, thereby ensuring optimal usage of the networks as a whole. In particular, developing dry ports may create economic stimuli similar to those that exist around sea ports and that have brought coastal prosperity to the region, by attracting manufacturing, agricultural processing and associated services. In addition they provide the opportunity for modal shifts from road to rail, which in turn contribute to increased energy efficiency and reduced emissions.

43. The development of dry ports has now received high-level commitment on the part of the countries in the region, as shown in the Bangkok Declaration on Transport Development in Asia, adopted at the first session of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport, held in Bangkok in December 2009,⁶ in which the secretariat was requested to assist regional members and associate members in their efforts to, inter alia, provide connectivity and integration of the Asian Highway network, the Trans-Asian Railway network and other transport modes by working towards the development of an intergovernmental agreement on dry ports. The intermodal integration and the development of clusters of economic activity will provide new impetus for regional cooperation and further facilitate regional economic integration.

C. Breaking down the barriers to smooth transport and logistics flows

44. With the entry into force of the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway Network Agreements, most members and associate members are placing greater emphasis on the removal of non-physical barriers that impede the efficient and smooth movement of goods and people across borders.

45. Cross-border and transit transport movements over land are still difficult in the region. Common non-physical barriers along transport routes include inconsistent and difficult border-crossing formalities and procedures; restrictions and limitations on the entry of vehicles; forced trans-shipment operations at borders; different standards for vehicles and drivers; restrictive visa requirements; incompatible working hours at borders; and a lack of coordination among various stakeholders. Renewed efforts are required to address those issues.

46. In the past two decades some ESCAP members and associate members have experienced rapid progress in their logistics industries. This is mainly reflected in an increase in logistics centres and service providers.

47. Logistics service providers are constrained by lengthy and complicated formalities and procedures for their operations. As a result, logistics costs in most countries of the region are quite high, representing the equivalent of 10 to 20 per cent of the total gross domestic product (GDP) according to a number of studies, and severely affecting economic and trade performance. Further action is required to increase efficiency and reduce the costs of logistics operations. One issue that needs to be addressed is the fact that many logistics service providers cannot attain the degree of professionalism required to provide efficient and effective services.

⁶ See E/ESCAP/66/11.

D. Connecting rural and urban areas to economic and social opportunities

48. Lack of access is one of the principal contributing factors to poverty: improved transport and logistics infrastructure and services increase physical access to economic and social opportunities by providing proximity (reduced travel times between origin and destination) and mobility. Consequently, transport has a significant role to play in poverty reduction.

49. While initiatives are being implemented in the countries of the region, physical access, especially in rural areas, remains an issue. In some countries, 30 to 40 per cent of villages are without all-weather road access and a minority have no road access at all. In other countries, many road connections between the capital city and provincial capitals are unpaved, while a great many provincial roads remain unpaved and may be impassable during the rainy season.

50. Improved transport and logistics infrastructure and services can increase food security. The infrastructure is also of primary importance when disasters occur and relief aid needs to be transported to the victims of floods, droughts, tsunamis and earthquakes. The ability to respond to disasters requires not only the adoption of risk-mitigation strategies, including the development of contingency transport and logistics plans, but also the adaptation of the design and alignment of infrastructure so that it is resilient to such disasters. Experience shows that more attention needs to be paid to such mitigation and adaptation strategies in the transport and logistics sectors.

51. Rural logistics and supply chains also need considerable attention. Such chains are affected by a number of complex and interrelated factors, including land tenure, farm size, market structure (including the market power of various actors in the chain), information flows, the availability and cost of finance and banking facilities, available logistics infrastructure and services, Government policies (legislative, regulatory and fiscal environment) and levels of public and private participation. Consequently, a multisectoral approach is required to address the issues.

E. Reducing transport energy consumption and emissions

52. The transport sector is one of the largest consumers of energy in the ESCAP region and is the largest consumer of petroleum products. It is a primary source of air pollution and the second largest contributor to CO₂ emissions. Furthermore, energy consumption and emissions by the transport sector will continue to grow if current mitigation measures are not enhanced. Consequently, there is a need for the transport sector in the region to further strengthen efforts to reduce energy consumption and emissions.

53. Particular attention needs to be paid to the road transport subsector, as it consumes 79 per cent of the oil products used in the transport sector in the region and is the largest producer of air pollution and greenhouse gases in the sector.

54. There is considerable potential for countries in the ESCAP region to take further measures to reduce energy consumption and emissions in the transport sector. In the freight transport sector, for example, there is scope for considering modal shifts away from road towards rail, as well as for significant improvements in freight transport logistics.

F. Reducing the burden of road traffic accidents

55. One of the negative side effects of the rapid growth of road transport infrastructure and motorization in the region is the increase in the number of road traffic fatalities and injuries. Some 1.3 million people are killed in road accidents every year worldwide and as many as 50 million are injured. In the ESCAP region, more than half a million people are killed by road accident (42 per cent of world road fatalities), and only one third of road vehicles are registered. Road accidents inhibit economic and social development in Asia and disproportionately impact lower income groups, thus contributing to the persistence of poverty.

56. In response to the problem, a number of General Assembly resolutions on improving global road safety, as well as the declaration of the ESCAP Ministerial Conference on Transport on improving road safety in Asia, have been adopted. Further action is required to address this issue. The secretariat, in consultation with member States, has developed a set of regional road safety goals and targets to be achieved by 2015, as well as indicators to monitor progress towards their achievement. The secretariat is now assisting member countries in setting their national road safety goals, targets and indicators. More recently, as proposed by the First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety: Time for Action,⁷ held in Moscow in November 2009, the General Assembly, in its resolution 64/255, proclaimed the period 2011–2020 as the Decade of Action for Road Safety, with the goal of stabilizing and then reducing the forecast level of road traffic fatalities around the world by increasing activities conducted at the national, regional and global levels.

G. Issues for consideration by the Commission

57. Member countries may wish to share their experiences and views on the issues and challenges raised above, taking into account the specific action contained in the report of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport.

IV. ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

A. Changing development context

58. The Asia-Pacific region as a whole has achieved phenomenal economic growth, lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty within the increasing constraints of a limited natural endowment and ever-growing demand for energy and water resources. While recovering from the triple crisis and striving to sustain inclusive and equitable economic growth, the region remains vulnerable to similar future shocks and to climate change.

59. Despite the region's rapid development, it is home to more than half of the world's poor, with over 900 million people without access to electricity and over 600 million people without access to improved water sources. In addition, almost 1.8 billion (46 per cent of the total ESCAP population) lacked access to improved sanitation and over 500 million urban residents live in slums and squatter settlements. Few countries in the region are on track to meet all of the MDGs. In fact, many Asian and Pacific countries with special needs, including the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, have recently shown a regressive trend and will most likely not meet key poverty- and environment-related MDGs, particularly those related to water and sanitation.

⁷ A/64/540, annex.

60. Rapid economic growth has resulted in an increasing demand for energy, water and other natural resources, but in Asia and the Pacific supply on a per capita basis is already below the world average. The demand for water, energy and other natural resources is expected to continue growing, given rapid urbanization and increasing economic development on the one hand, and the considerable unmet demand for energy services in many developing countries on the other.

61. Historically, the lack of technology and the growth in industrial production has led to a natural-resource-intensive development path. As a result of energy-intensive development in particular, the region's share of global greenhouse gas emissions has increased, contributing significantly to climate change. Unfortunately, it is also the region that will be most severely affected by climate change.

62. A key risk associated with climate change is water stress, which could become a particular concern for Asia and the Pacific since the region already suffers from a shortage of clean water. In addition, given that agriculture is one of the primary sources of income for millions, the possibility of reduced agricultural productivity due to rising temperatures, water shortages, floods and unpredictable weather and seasonal cycles may pose a serious problem for food security. In any situation where people are affected by sudden shocks or negative environmental impacts, it is the poor, in particular women, children, the elderly and other socially excluded groups, who are the hardest hit. Unless addressed effectively, climate change threatens to wipe out years of progress in development and poverty reduction.

B. An opportunity for greening growth

63. The triple crisis has shown the vulnerability of not only the region's economies and people, but also the global economy, to shocks because of ingrained unsustainable use of resources in consumption and production. This vulnerability highlights the need to seek synergies between environmental protection and inclusive socio-economic and physical development. The 2008 financial crisis led many Governments to take the unprecedented step of incorporating environmental considerations into socio-economic development efforts. Government responses have focused on increasing resource efficiency and eco-efficiency, in particular in terms of infrastructure and the greening of the economy. Many of these policies actively seek to create jobs and reduce poverty.

64. A number of policies exist that could support economic growth and poverty reduction while minimizing environmental impacts. Some of these, such as energy efficiency policies, are already economically feasible and are being implemented in many countries. Others require a shift in attitude to recognize that a country's natural resources are the foundation of its economy. They provide the food, minerals and fuel on which the population depends to survive. However, natural systems also provide an essential service to both the country and the planet, including water treatment and air purification. Greater investment in the sustainable management of natural resources, such as water, forests, land and the associated ecosystems, also known as natural capital, is increasingly recognized in many developing countries in the region as an opportunity for new job creation, as well as a way to secure the flow of ecosystem services required to meet the demands for food production, water and energy and greater socio-economic resilience to environmental change, in particular for the most vulnerable groups.

65. In addition to the recognition of the role of ecosystem services, sustainable infrastructure development is particularly important for some of the least developed countries. As infrastructure is underdeveloped and policies are still fluid, a shift from traditional development policies to those promoting greener growth would place the

economy on a healthy development path that would enable social development and economic growth, while preventing countries from locking themselves into infrastructure that will cost more over the long term.

66. Over the past five years, ESCAP has been advocating a green growth approach based on the principles of enhancing the quality of economic growth through the pursuit of resource- and eco-efficiency and improved environmental sustainability. Green growth is an effective win-win strategy that promotes continuing economic growth while ensuring environmental sustainability. It is also an integrated approach advocating an economically and socially beneficial shift from resource-intensive to labour-intensive economic activities because of the limited natural endowment and the wealth of human resources in the Asian and Pacific region. It will make economies more responsive and adaptive to such challenges as climate change, and will permit development in a socially and environmentally harmonious way. At the core of the green growth approach is the recognition that there is no trade-off between the environment and development: they are not two separate lines of effort competing for limited resources, but provide a path for effective development efforts in an integrated manner.

C. Green growth for inclusive social and economic development

67. Access to basic services should be the principle underlying development policies. There are several pro-poor policy tools and strategies available that would enable countries to green their economic recovery in the short term and, in the medium to long term, to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels and move towards a low-carbon society.

68. The possible reorientation of many national economies and the global economy in response to the financial crisis and the volatile fuel prices that have affected so many over the last few years provides an opportunity to fully integrate poverty reduction policies into long-term sustainable development priorities. Policies and planning need to be clearly linked to overall development strategies, including low-carbon strategies, poverty reduction, sustainable transport and green industries.

69. In this connection, urban development requires special attention. While 40 per cent of the region's population live in urban areas at present, the majority will live in cities by 2030. Formulating and implementing city-wide development strategies that integrate various urban systems with environmental sustainability and resilience would be crucial for inclusive and sustainable development of the region as a whole. In order to make a city-wide strategy that focuses on sustainability and resilience work, it is important to ensure that legislative and governance structures are enabling and inclusive.

70. A critical requirement for successful reforms is the creation of a participatory multi-stakeholder process for planning and implementing policies. The task at the local, national and international levels is to secure support for the scale of the change that is needed. Governments should seek the participation of business through public-private partnerships and of poor communities through community-based approaches, as a city's various residents often know their local challenges best and therefore often have fresh solutions to offer.

D. Regional forum for green growth advocacy and regional initiatives

71. ESCAP is well placed to provide a forum for promoting policy coherence and coordination in developing an integrated, green growth approach. The momentum already generated since the onset of the triple crisis cannot be undermined; rather, it

can only strengthen the demand from all levels of society for truly sustainable development. The global financial crisis has created an opportunity to introduce innovative policies in support of eco-efficient development, including infrastructures for safe water and sanitation, renewable energy, sustainable urban development and sustainable agricultural practices. Progress in these areas will, in turn, contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, but political leadership and integrated development policies will be a key factor in seizing the potential opportunities to achieve long-term sustainable development.

72. ESCAP provides support to Governments taking steps to address the above-mentioned challenges in various ways through ongoing regional initiatives. Formal capacity-building activities include nationally focused training events upon request by member countries and annual leadership training events organized through the Seoul Initiative Network on Green Growth (SINGG).⁸ Extensive training materials have been developed and will be available online within the year. ESCAP has also initiated a number of capacity-building programmes across the region in river rehabilitation, stormwater management, water supply and sanitation and adaptation to climate change. In addition, guidelines are being developed to build the capacity of institutions in the region to promote energy efficiency.

73. Regional policy dialogues facilitate the exchange of experiences on development and the application of green growth policy tools and approaches, including those that stimulate low carbon green growth. Field projects and activities are being implemented to support the development of high-level strategies and activities at the country level, including the development of eco-efficiency indicators, eco-efficient water infrastructure, payments for ecosystem services policy and pilots, sustainable infrastructure development and sustainable waste management. In addition, a project entitled “Pro-poor and sustainable solid waste management in secondary cities and small towns” will strengthen and replicate successful decentralized solid waste management using carbon financing.

74. Some field activities and policy dialogues are implemented and organized under subregional cooperation programmes, including the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation, SINGG and the Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment.⁹ The Trans-Asia Energy System, the North-East Asia Energy Cooperation Programme and the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia all support regional cooperation.

75. With its international partners in UN-Water and other organizations, ESCAP will be considering how to achieve a “wastewater revolution” that will tie in initiatives from Alpha (clean drinking water) to Omega (wastewater disposal). This latest initiative also supports the United Nations Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation in the implementation of the second Hashimoto Action Plan. With respect to energy, ESCAP will be working with countries of Central Asia to support subregional cooperation on energy efficiency. In addition, key countries throughout the region will be engaged in policy dialogues to develop an institutional framework on pro-poor public-private partnerships at the regional level for the purpose of addressing the lack of access to electricity for a large portion of the region’s population.

⁸ See Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *The Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2005* (ST/ESCAP/2379) (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.II.F.31), annex III.

⁹ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific 2000, Kitakyushu, Japan, 31 August-5 September 2000: Ministerial Declaration, Regional Action Programme (2001-2005) and Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment* (ST/ESCAP/2096) (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.01.II.F.12), Part Three.

76. ESCAP is also expected to continue its key role in the promotion of green-growth-related policies and approaches through research and analysis. Many of the above-mentioned activities have resulted in a significant body of research in such areas as publicly financed environmentally sound technologies, eco-efficiency indicators, institutional capacity for promoting energy efficiency, payments for ecosystem services and the development of national green growth road maps and strategies. Major publications currently being prepared include a report on sustainable development to be published in partnership with the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme for the sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development; the theme study for the sixty-sixth session of the Commission; the report *State of the World's Cities: Trends in Asia and the Pacific*, in partnership with UN-Habitat for the World Urban Forum 2010; and the *Asian Water Development Outlook 2010* report, to be released by the Asian Development Bank.

E. Issues for consideration by the Commission

77. Member countries may wish to share their experiences and views on the issues and challenges raised, identify priorities and provide further guidance on approaches they wish the secretariat to follow in its future work, taking into account the report of the Committee of Environment and Development on its first session (E/ESCAP/66/12).

V. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

A. Introduction

78. Asia and the Pacific as a whole is endowed with the financial, technological and human resources to meet socio-economic challenges and reduce disaster risks while pursuing inclusive and sustainable development. Information and communications technology, including space applications in particular, have been instrumental in bringing about socio-economic changes in ESCAP member States. However, opportunities and benefits are not enjoyed equitably among countries; in particular, in the least developed countries, the landlocked developing countries and the small island developing States access to technology, knowledge and capacity have been limited. ESCAP aims to promote digital opportunities, connect the unconnected, build ICT capacity and protect development gains from disasters, so as to address the region's priorities and promote equitable distribution of benefits through regional cooperation.

B. Promoting digital opportunities

79. ICT is an indispensable foundation for the promotion of inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development and reducing disaster risks with a view to the attainment of internationally agreed development goals. It is also instrumental in addressing emerging challenges, such as sustaining economic growth by expanding business opportunities, facilitating intraregional trade and extending the reach of public services to remote and rural areas. A significant development in ICT connectivity in the region is the rapid expansion of mobile technology. The compound annual growth rates in the number of mobile subscribers between 2003 and 2008 exceeded 100 per cent in some landlocked developing countries and least developed countries. Despite the growth, there still are significant disparities and differential growth rates between the more advanced countries and developing countries.

80. The disparity in ICT development in the region is a major problem, especially when an increasing number of ICT applications and content are developed for poverty reduction and MDGs. The disparity in the availability of broadband networks and services is even more striking. The slow growth in Internet and broadband networks among the least developed countries and the small island developing States will pose a serious limitation in the coming years, as more advanced countries are shifting their national strategic focus to the development of a broadband network. At the same time, ESCAP member countries are encouraged to reorient ICT policies and strategies to take advantage of the exponential growth in mobile networks and capabilities, which are now reaching an increasing number of the poor.

81. ICT is also indispensable for promoting paperless trade and facilitating transport, while presenting great potential for reducing energy and material consumption. The widespread use of ICT would accelerate the flow of goods and services across the region, which would then diversify sources of exports and imports among countries and reduce exposure to potential risks experienced in recent years. However, not many countries have embraced the single window approach or fully integrated ICT into transport facilitation. There is much more room for improvement in promoting collaboration among ICT, trade and other sectors within national Governments to make single window a reality and take advantage of emerging technologies, such as mobile broadband. At the same time, the secretariat will continue to assist members in analysing the current status of ICT connectivity. Building on its past initiatives and activities, ESCAP will place increased emphasis on accelerating the introduction of ICT in trade and transport facilitation and economic connectivity.

C. Connecting Asia and the Pacific through ICT and space applications

82. Recent ESCAP analysis reveals differential growth rates and patterns of ICT across the region. The Pacific island developing economies have shown much slower growth than the landlocked developing countries in almost all means of communications, which will further limit their economic opportunities compared with other Asian countries. Space-based information and communications applications and services have specific advantage in providing ICT connectivity to under-served areas, like those in the Pacific. ESCAP will promote the use of an experimental communications satellite, Wideband InterNetworking engineering test and Demonstration Satellite (WINDS), designed by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, to demonstrate satellite broadband connectivity and relevant services to the Pacific countries, explore cost-effective technical solutions for their remote islands and promote the sharing of information on the use of satellite-based connectivity and their development-oriented applications in education and health development. ESCAP will also undertake research and analysis towards enhancing ICT connectivity in the Pacific, taking into account new and emerging technological trends, and assist subregional organizations in coordinating initiatives and approaches. In these endeavours, public-private partnerships will be pursued, recognizing that the private sector is a major driver of ICT adoption and diffusion.

D. Building ICT capacity through APCICT

83. The Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT) recently conducted a comprehensive training needs assessment, according to which many Governments realize that bringing technologies to the people goes beyond the provision of infrastructure, hardware and software and incorporates ICT human capacity-building as an integral part of their policies and programmes. Yet in most countries, the focus has been limited to developing ICT skills for the ICT sector rather than for the nation as a

whole to fully leverage the opportunities presented by ICT and achieve development goals. APCICT also found that there were some stand-alone training courses available to policymakers, but that they focused primarily on e-business and e-government and lacked comprehensiveness, with no good understanding of the level of the trainees, mostly at the central Government level, and no follow-up mechanism after the training.

84. APCICT will strengthen its efforts to improve the human and institutional capacity of member States to apply ICT for socio-economic development in fulfilment of the 2010-2011 strategic framework. In accordance with ESCAP priorities, it will focus on a multisectoral and cross-divisional approach, accord importance to countries with special needs, further regional cooperation, support policy advocacy and address gender concerns through its initiatives. An inclusive and participatory approach to programme development, together with emphasis on long-term strategic partnerships with national and subregional organizations, international development agencies, civil society and the private sector, as well as alliances with other United Nations entities, will continue to be important underlying principles of the Centre's work.

85. APCICT seeks support from the Commission in (a) advocating for ICTD and APCICT programmes in individual member countries; (b) allocating budgets for ICTD capacity-building and promoting ICT training for national and local governments; (c) identifying potential partners for the roll-out of the APCICT core programme, the Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders and the collection and documentation of case studies of good practices; and (d) encouraging regional cooperation in the sharing of resources, experts and trainers, with particular focus on the participation of women.

E. Regional cooperation in sharing space information and communication capacities for disaster risk management

86. The Asia-Pacific region is covered by many Government and privately operated satellites, which may provide valuable technical support for communication and disaster risk reduction. While most remote-sensing-satellite-operating countries have taken initiatives to share their technical capacities with each other, many private satellite operators have also expressed their interest in cooperating with the United Nations to develop disaster communication capacities in the Asia-Pacific region. ESCAP, with its Regional Space Applications Programme (RESAP), is in a position to help the countries of the region, in particular the least developed countries, to benefit from those opportunities to build operational capacities through promoting relevant regional cooperative mechanisms.

87. The regional cooperation mechanisms are aimed at enhancing the national capacities of developing countries in the region at the technical, institutional and policy levels by, inter alia, developing and providing appropriate products and services to support their existing capacities, developing national service networks and establishing disaster management communication capacities. ESCAP, through RESAP, working in cooperation with relevant initiatives and international and regional organizations, has been promoting regional cooperative mechanisms for sharing such information resources and technical capacities.

88. ESCAP is also developing a regional cooperation mechanism to share relevant products and services for drought disaster monitoring and early warning. Given the current frequency of climate-related hazards and the expected future increase in extreme weather events, weather- and drought-related disaster risk reduction needs to be specifically addressed in the national development policy and

planning process by emphasizing the importance of integrating climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

F. Protecting development gains from disasters

89. The Asia-Pacific region has been disproportionately affected by disasters owing to the high number of hazards associated with its geographical locations, as well as increasing social and economic vulnerabilities. A series of severe floods, tropical cyclones, a tsunami and several major earthquakes, which occurred in the region over a few weeks in September and October 2009, caused enormous damage. Major disasters can wipe out accumulated development gains in an instant and significantly slow down the pace of development in countries, in particular vulnerable countries, for a long time. The only way to minimize the impacts of disasters is through the integration of disaster risk reduction into national development plans.

90. ESCAP is committed to facilitating the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015¹⁰ at the regional level. In order to facilitate information exchange on disaster risk reduction, ESCAP is developing a web-based platform, the “Asia-Pacific Gateway for Disaster Risk Reduction and Development”. The aim is to promote information-sharing and partnership-building in an efficient manner by means of innovative policies and programmes that deliver economic and social benefits, enhance regional access to data, information and resources and provide services for disaster risk reduction and management to all member States in Asia and the Pacific. It will include a mechanism for the development of policy options in the area of disaster risk reduction on the basis of sound science and technology provided by experts and expert groups in the region.

91. ESCAP should further build regional, subregional and national capacities for economic and social analyses of the impact of disasters to provide member States with a sound basis for policymaking in the area of disaster risk reduction and development. ESCAP is promoting a regional cooperation platform for the sharing of experience, knowledge and information in disaster risk reduction, disaster management and recovery. Following the recommendation of the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction, the secretariat, jointly with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, is preparing the Asia-Pacific Disaster Report to evaluate regional trends, provide economic and social analysis of disasters and identify good practices, lessons learned and future priorities in the area of disaster risk reduction and management in Asia and the Pacific.

G. Climate change adaptation as an emerging issue

92. A climate change signal is indicating more frequent and significant disasters in the region, with new physical threats, including glacial lake outburst flood and sea level rise. As the region has not yet been able to reduce disaster risk, coping with this additional problem will be an immense challenge. Disaster risk reduction is recognized as one of the most important components of climate change adaptation. In 2009, the Copenhagen Accord recognized the adverse impacts of climate change on vulnerable countries and stressed the need to establish a comprehensive adaptation programme, including international support for the implementation of adaptation action. Given the frequency of climate-related hazards and the likely increase in the number of extreme weather events in future, hydrometeorological disaster risk

¹⁰ Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters (A/CONF.206/6 and Corr.1, chap. I, resolution 2).

reduction should be specifically addressed in national development policy and planning processes.

93. ESCAP should enhance regional cooperation mechanisms to include disaster risk reduction and involve development planning and climate change adaptation policymakers so as to ensure that disaster risk reduction is an integral part of both the development and climate change agendas. Regional cooperation, including the regional coordination mechanism, the South-South cooperation programme, the ESCAP/WMO Typhoon Committee and the WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones, can help member States, in particular the least developed countries and the small island developing States, to build their internal capacities for preparedness and to develop policies for disaster risk reduction associated with climate change adaptation as part of their socio-economic development planning, such as natural resources management. Under the regional coordination mechanism, ESCAP needs to work closely with other United Nations and intergovernmental organizations, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

H. Issues for consideration by the Commission

94. Member countries may wish to share their experiences and views on the issues and challenges raised, identify priorities and provide guidance on approaches they wish the secretariat to take in their future work.

VI. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

A. Key issues related to population and development in Asia and the Pacific

95. The Asia-Pacific region is home to 4.1 billion people, representing more than 60 per cent of the world's population. Since 1990, the population of the region has been growing more slowly than that of the rest of the world, owing to sustained fertility declines in many countries: the region's overall fertility rate now stands at 2.2 births per woman, down from approximately 6 in 1950. Between 1990 and 1995, the population grew 1.5 per cent annually, but the growth rate has steadily declined since. In 2008, the annual growth rate fell to 1.0 per cent, the lowest among the world's developing regions. Those notable declines in fertility and population growth were mostly the result of ESCAP member States according importance and recognition to issues relating to population and development, in particular during the four decades following the First Asian Population Conference, held in New Delhi in 1963, when ESCAP was still known as the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East and when only five countries in the region had official population policies.¹¹ The programmes relating to population, reproductive health and family welfare that were widely implemented by Governments, in collaboration with development partners and non-governmental organizations, greatly contributed to the decline in fertility in the region.

96. For many decades, the Asia-Pacific region has been at the forefront of regional and global population debates. ESCAP, in particular, has been playing a pivotal role in providing a forum for member States to exchange information and experiences on successful practices and approaches in addressing population issues, in creating an enabling environment for the development and implementation of population policies and in promoting awareness of the importance and implications of

¹¹ Concepcion, M.B., "Evolution of population concerns: Reflections from the Asian and Pacific Population Conferences", *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, vol. 18, No.2, June 2003 (United Nations publication, ST/ESCAP/2260).

population factors in development. Established as a statutory organ of the Commission pursuant to resolution 74 (XXIII) of April 1967, the ministerial-level Asian and Pacific Population Conferences have been convened every 10 years, starting in 1963, helping member States to shape their policies and programmes and reach a consensus on the best way to tackle population-related issues.

97. The fifth and most recent decennial regional population conference was held in Bangkok in December 2002. In line with the overarching theme of the Millennium Declaration, adopted by heads of State or Government in 2000, the Fifth Asian and Pacific Population Conference adopted a Plan of Action on Population and Poverty¹² containing strategic recommendations intended to address the twin challenges of population concerns and poverty alleviation.

1. Key population concerns

98. Over the past 40 years, the Asia-Pacific region has been forging ahead in addressing issues relating to population and development. The region as a whole has had remarkable success in reducing extreme poverty and is likely to meet the 2015 Millennium Development Goal related target of halving the proportion of people living below the one-dollar-a-day threshold. In 1990, almost half of the region's population lived in extreme poverty, but by 2005 the proportion had decreased to one quarter. The decrease was largely due to the remarkable economic progress made in most of Asia, in particular in China. Given the size of the population, the impressive achievement of the region in drastically reducing poverty has been a key factor in the lowering of overall poverty rates at both the regional and global levels. The countries that have been most successful in reducing poverty are also those that have done the most to reduce levels of population growth and balance population and development dynamics.

(a) Reproductive health

99. The provision of reproductive health services is crucial for the well-being of individuals and families. Since the landmark International Conference on Population and Development, held in 1994, individuals and human rights, including with regard to sexual and reproductive health, have been placed at the centre of population and development concerns, and respect for human rights is recognized as vital for the fostering of genuine progress towards poverty alleviation. Many important issues relating to reproductive health have yet to be addressed, including the unmet need for reproductive health services. Although the level of contraceptive use in Asia over the past decade has risen considerably—owing to the broadening of individuals' and couples' contraceptive choices, an increase in women's education and the desire for smaller family size—a large number of individuals and couples still lack access to high quality reproductive health information and services.

100. The Asia-Pacific High-level Forum Declaration on Population and Development: Fifteen Years after Cairo¹³ recommended that, inter alia, urgent measures be taken to strengthen health systems, mobilize community support and realign services to make them more equitable, culturally sensitive and socially acceptable and to ensure universal access to comprehensive, integrated and quality sexual and reproductive health services.

¹² E/ESCAP/1271 and Corr.1, annex I.

¹³ See E/ESCAP/ICPD/2009/1, available at http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/meetings/pop_forum_2009.

(b) Mortality

101. Despite the significant progress achieved over the past few years with regard to most of the Millennium Development Goals, progress is lacking or remains slow in parts of Asia and the Pacific with regard to infant and child mortality, as well as maternal mortality—especially since many such deaths are preventable.

102. In 2005, 237,000 mothers died from pregnancy-related causes in Asia and the Pacific, representing 44 per cent of the world's maternal deaths. A critical intervention for reducing maternal mortality is the presence of a skilled birth attendant when the mother gives birth and access to emergency obstetric care. Access to antenatal care is another important determinant of maternal and reproductive health, as is the age of the mother, which in South and South-West Asia is often very low, which can put the health of both mother and child at risk.

103. Inequities associated with maternal mortality and morbidity are among the greatest health inequities. Mortality and morbidity rates are indicators of economic and social development and reflect the status of women in a society.

(c) Gender equality and women's empowerment

104. The high priority accorded to gender equality, equity and women's empowerment in population policies and programmes represents a reaffirmation that women's rights are at the core of development. In the Asia-Pacific region, all but four countries are parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.¹⁴ Because of the Convention, laws and policies are being adopted to strengthen women's economic security and rights in such vital areas as decent employment and access to credit and markets. Several countries in the region now have national action plans to combat violence against women. Yet notwithstanding these formal commitments and the benefits of gender equality for societies and economies, gender discrimination remains pervasive in the region. As highlighted in the Bangkok Declaration on Beijing +15,¹⁵ violations of women's and girls' rights and impunity, especially with regard to violence, persist in countries of the region. The Declaration urged that the enactment and implementation of domestic laws to address discrimination and violence against women remain a priority.

105. While the region has been an early achiever in terms of reducing gender disparities in primary and tertiary education, more attention needs to be given to ensuring the completion and high quality of education. Although the region has also taken positive steps towards gender equality in the workplace, having the second highest ratio (49 per cent) of employed women of working age in the world, women are predominantly employed in labour-intensive, low-valued manufacturing and service sector jobs, which are vulnerable to domestic and global shifts in demand. Women's political representation in the region is low, although it is growing slowly. New Zealand and Nepal lead the way, having the highest proportion of seats in parliament at 33.6 per cent and 33.2 per cent, respectively. Many countries have parliaments in which women occupy 10-25 per cent of seats.

¹⁴ All countries in the Asian and Pacific region have ratified the Convention except the Islamic Republic of Iran, Nauru, Palau and Tonga.

¹⁵ Adopted at the Asia-Pacific High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes, held in Bangkok from 16 to 18 November 2009 (see E/ESCAP/66/14).

(d) Population ageing

106. One of the inevitable consequences of declining fertility and improved life expectancy is population ageing. The number of persons aged 60 years and over is growing rapidly in the region and is expected to increase from 410 million in 2007 to 700 million in 2025, a 71 per cent increase in just 18 years. The feminization of the elderly population, with women constituting the majority of the older population and an even greater majority of the oldest old population (80 years and over), is also notable and is particularly pronounced in certain countries of the region, including Japan, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation.

107. Population ageing has emerged as a serious developmental challenge that will become increasingly salient in the coming years. The challenges are immense yet predictable. In the context of increasing old-age dependency ratios, as the proportion of the elderly increases with a smaller base of the economically active population to support them, Governments will need to explore financially viable models to finance old-age social security, among other measures to be taken in order to prepare for ageing societies. The low formal social security coverage in the region, especially in lower-income countries, poses a severe challenge. Providing social protection schemes, strengthening national capacity and establishing an institutional framework for meeting the health needs and care of the elderly will remain some of the greatest challenges facing policymakers in the region.

(e) Youth

108. While the proportion of older persons is growing rapidly in Asia and the Pacific, the concentration of young people, aged 10 to 24 years, is also the highest in the world, with 756 million young people (nearly 62 per cent of the world's 1.2 billion youth population) living in the region.¹⁶ The sheer size of this population means that young people represent critical mass and should be an essential part of the development process of the region. Young people are potentially a tremendous resource for countries' development and hold the key to the region's future.

109. Unless their specific needs are met in areas such as education, health (including sexual and reproductive health) and employment opportunities, and they are meaningfully involved in decision-making processes, young people will not be able to contribute to or benefit from the region's development. Greater investment in the region's sizeable youth population is therefore required.

(f) HIV/AIDS

110. HIV/AIDS, which affects people in various age groups, including young people, is another challenge faced by many countries in the region. It is estimated that in 2007, 4.9 million people were living with HIV in Asia and approximately 300,000 died from AIDS-related illnesses. If the epidemic is not contained, HIV/AIDS, more than any other disease, will cause a total loss of 180 million years of healthy and productive life in Asia between 2002 and 2020.¹⁷ Although HIV epidemics vary considerably from country to country, men who buy sex are the most powerful driving force in transmitting the infection in the region. It is therefore crucial that HIV responses focus on population groups that are most at risk of becoming infected and most likely to transmit the virus to others. The unique context of the HIV

¹⁶ United Nations (2005), *World Youth Report 2005: Young People Today, and in 2015* (United Nations publication, ST/ESA/301).

¹⁷ Commission on AIDS in Asia (2008), *Redefining AIDS in Asia: Crafting an Effective Response* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

epidemics in Asia, including the currently low prevalence in most countries, established institutions and relative economic prosperity in the region, provide an opportunity to considerably reduce the number of new HIV infections. Furthermore, increased efforts to link HIV/AIDS and reproductive health interventions in the region by strengthening the capacity of health-care providers has the potential to significantly curtail the epidemic and contribute to achieving universal access to reproductive health.

(g) Urbanization and internal migration

111. The Asia-Pacific region is urbanizing rapidly, with an urban population growth rate of 2.3 per cent per annum, compared with 2.0 per cent growth rate in the world. By 2008, almost 43 per cent of the region's population were living in urban areas. Levels of urbanization are closely linked to rates of economic growth, with higher levels of urbanization in the more developed countries, where better economic opportunities and access to services in the cities attract migrants from rural areas.

112. The urban population of Asia and the Pacific is growing more than twice as fast as the total population of the region, at 2.3 per cent per year, as compared with 1 per cent. Most of the growth in the urban population is the result of rural-urban migration and of the reclassification of rural areas into urban areas, with a smaller proportion of the increase the consequence of natural population growth. Urbanization in many Asian countries is characterized by high rates of population growth in medium-sized and small cities or towns, where a large proportion of the urban population live. Urbanization in the region has also resulted in the growth of "megacities", which have more than 10 million people. The Asian and Pacific region is home to 11 of the world's 19 megacities, including 6 of the 10 largest. The size of these cities is posing challenges of urban management and governance, including for the provision of basic social services.

(h) International migration

113. Given the steady and continuing increase in international migration flows within Asia and the Pacific, the challenges of addressing migration issues in a way that maximizes its benefits while mitigating its adverse impacts remain, and will intensify in the years to come. By 2010, the region will host about 53 million migrants, representing about one quarter of the world's migrants.

114. One persistent challenge is that of managing the increasingly large number of irregular migrants, in particular in unregulated informal sectors, where the proportion of women is high. Such women are not only statistically invisible, but tend to suffer the most as a result of exploitation, abuse, violence and harsh working conditions. They often have very limited access to basic health facilities and other social services and to legal protection.

115. Human trafficking in the region has been a fast-growing transnational crime and a major issue of concern for many Governments. The number of persons being trafficked for forced labour has been increasing, and trafficking routes have become more diverse. Combating the practice of trafficking in persons, especially women, girls and boys, and providing support to trafficking victims, will continue to represent a serious challenge.

2. New challenge: population, environment and climate change

116. Environmental sustainability has become an increasingly critical issue in the Asia-Pacific region, where half of the world's population lives on less than one third

of its arable land. The challenge is to meet human needs, especially those of the poorest and most vulnerable population, while still preserving a healthy and resource-rich environment.¹⁸

117. The interrelationship between population and environment is complex, but the basic elements include population pressure, per capita consumption and technology. The Bali Declaration on Population and Sustainable Development, adopted by the Fourth Asian and Pacific Population Conference, called on Governments to formulate policies and strategies and implement programmes regarding appropriate technologies, keeping in view the interaction between population and environment, as well as their long-term sustainability.

118. As a consequence of population growth in the region, as well as of economic growth and affluence, the consumption of energy and food is continuing to increase. In addition to environmental degradation, the adverse impacts of climate change exacerbate vulnerabilities and population displacement problems and impede development efforts in the region. Moreover, in the disaster-prone Asia-Pacific region, natural disasters will continue to pose a major challenge, especially given the impact they have on poor populations, who are the least protected and often the worst affected. The natural disasters that have hit the region, including floods, cyclones, earthquakes, storm surges and tsunamis, have been devastating and have led to the loss of countless human lives.

119. A better understanding of demographic trends, including fertility, population growth, urbanization, migration from environmentally-depleted areas and growing population density in some areas, to mitigate the adverse impacts of current and projected climate change, is crucial for the sustainable development of the region.

3. Towards a new vision for population and development

120. Much progress has been accomplished by countries in the region, but much more remains to be done. Regional partnerships are vital to address critical population challenges and concerns. Over the years, there has been increased cooperation and partnerships among Governments, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, the private sector and civil society to address pressing population concerns within a framework of shared responsibility. Partnerships with parliamentarians have been forged to create an enabling environment for the speedy implementation of population policies and programmes. South-South collaboration has been used to strengthen national population programmes.

121. The Asian and Pacific Population Conferences have played an invaluable role in setting the agenda for population and development policies in the region. Taking into account new and emerging challenges and changing population dynamics in the region, a new paradigm is required for population and development in the Asia-Pacific region. In this regard, a sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference could be organized by ESCAP in 2012, in collaboration with relevant United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The conference could lead into the end of the 20-year implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)¹⁹ and the MDGs

¹⁸ Richter, Benjamin and Punpuing (2009), "Population and environment in Asia and the Pacific: Trends, implications and prospects for sustainable development", *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, vol. 24, No. 1, April 2009 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.II.F.99).

¹⁹ *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

in 2015. This would provide an invaluable high-level regional intergovernmental forum to assess the achievements made and to consolidate lessons learned over the past 20 years and consider the way forward. The meeting would also be an appropriate occasion for the formulation of a regional vision and a road map to sustain the achievements and address continuing and imminent challenges in the post-ICPD and post-MDG era.

B . Issues for consideration by the Commission

122. The Commission is invited to consider and decide whether it wishes to convene a sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference in 2012 in line with the mandate provided by resolution 74 (XXIII).

123. The Commission is also invited to provide the secretariat with guidance on the urgent regional actions required to address the range of population and development issues outlined in the present document with a view to ensuring that progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and other agreed development goals, such as those of the ICPD Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action, are sustained and accelerated in the Asian and Pacific region.

VII. STATISTICS

124. Improvements in official statistics are needed in a number of areas in order to make national policies more inclusive. Governments should give a higher priority to strengthening the capacity of official statistical systems as a foundation for informed policymaking.

A. Statistics in support of inclusive development

1. Counting the informally employed, describing their conditions of employment and measuring their contribution to the economy

125. Improving data on the informal sector and informal employment for the promotion of evidence-based policies in member States is particularly significant for developing countries where the informal sector and informally employed workers form a large part of the labour force and issues related to income, poverty and social protection are serious development concerns. Yet the practical implementation of internationally adopted statistical definitions of the informal sector and informal employment has been very slow in the Asia-Pacific region. Lack of comparability of available data continues to be a challenge, as does the regular compilation of data as part of official economic and social statistics, owing to methodological difficulties in capturing such a dynamic and diverse sector.

126. A recent effort to assess these issues and develop practical solutions was the Development Account project, “Interregional Cooperation on the Measurement of Informal Sector and Informal Employment (2006-2009)”, implemented by ESCAP in collaboration with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. With the participation of statistics development partners and participating national statistical offices representing the three regions, a cost-effective data collection strategy for implementation by the national statistical systems of developing countries has been developed and tested.

127. This adaptation of the “1-2” survey approach to data collection on the informal sector and informal employment resulted in improved and tested questionnaires, field designs, weighting and estimation procedures and tabulation

plans for a two-phase survey based on, respectively, a labour force survey and a household unincorporated enterprise survey. The household unincorporated enterprise with at least some market production as a starting point for data collection comes close to operationalizing a harmonized definition of the informal sector.

128. The results showed that there were no major impediments to enhancing existing labour force survey questionnaires with informal sector content. This means that the first phase of the “1-2” survey could be conducted without difficulty by countries on a regular basis. The challenge for member States lies in committing resources for the second phase, to widen the existing enterprise surveys to cover household unincorporated enterprises.

2. Monitoring progress towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities

129. The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action identified lack of adequate and comparable data on disability and disabled persons as leading to the neglect of disability issues in national development plans and policies. ESCAP has since implemented two technical cooperation projects to improve disability measurement, in partnership with the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, which is mandated to develop global standards for measuring disability in population and housing censuses and national surveys.

130. Through ongoing work with national statistical offices in Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Maldives, Mongolia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, ESCAP has made some inroads in advocating for and developing census and survey tools for the integration of data collection on disability as endorsed by WHO on the basis of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health. This approach focuses on measuring the functional limitations of disabled persons and their living conditions, rather than on impairment, and thus provides much better information for the development of national plans and disability policies.

131. Although the results of the efforts to develop a standard set of questions for measuring disability in population surveys are encouraging, the methodological challenges remain large. Globally, as in the region, the number of countries in a position to apply and adapt the methods developed needs to be dramatically increased if the lack of adequate and comparable data on disability and disabled persons is to be addressed.

3. Measuring violence against women

132. The General Assembly has made the eradication of violence against women a top global priority. The Bangkok Declaration on Beijing +15¹⁵ committed to intensifying efforts to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls and to elaborating and ensuring that capacities and resources are available to implement multi-sectoral national strategies to eliminate violence against women.

133. The monitoring of progress towards that goal is challenging and is being addressed concertedly by the global statistical community, spearheaded by the Friends of the Chair Group on Violence against Women, established by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session, in February 2008. The Group has proposed a list of nine core indicators and is currently exploring the possibility of introducing a worldwide homogeneous data-collection exercise on violence against women.

134. Collaborative work among the five regional commissions through a development account project, "Enhancing Capacities to Eradicate Violence Against Women", addresses issues relating to lack of ownership and political will by many member States on the subject. Actions being taken include sensitizing national stakeholders to the social, political, economic and development issues related to violence against women and enhancing the technical and analytical capacity of national statistical offices to collect and analyse data on those issues. The methodological work currently focuses on the testing of a short survey module that will be the basis for a global push to make more data available, more often, in member States.

135. The secretariat's current work programme mainstreams gender aspects in all statistical activities. However, a new dedicated regional programme could pick up on the work being carried out in the area of time-use statistics and time-use survey methodologies applicable to developing countries, which started in the late 1990s in response to the Beijing Platform for Action. Such a programme could prove to be important for measuring more fully the achievement of the gender equality MDG, increased unpaid care work by women and employment in the formal and informal sectors, as well as for analysing gender disparities in time poverty, all of which could improve understanding of various forms of gender inequality and thereby directly influence policies and public services that address the needs of women.

B. Regular production of core social and economic statistics

136. Official statistics are a public good and their production and dissemination is a core function of all Governments, which should support and develop their statistical systems with a view to promoting trust and accountability. Recognizing that an effective, efficient and independent statistical system is an essential element of good governance, the international high-level data user and producer community gathered at the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) Consortium Meeting in November 2009 adopted the Dakar Declaration on the Development of Statistics. The Declaration, inter alia, called for support to all countries to define their own priorities, integrate user needs and set out their own development pathways for statistics, from collection to dissemination, respecting internationally recognized quality standards. It emphasized the need to strengthen and sustain the institutions and agencies that make up national statistical systems and to put national strategies for the development of statistics into effect. It also called for Governments and development partners to place all essential global statistical programmes on a sustainable financial and technical footing by 2014.

137. In deliberating on the regional implementation of the revised standards on economic statistics, the Committee on Statistics, meeting at its first session, in February 2009, recognized that many developing countries were not able to produce core economic statistics on a regular basis. It concluded that the foundation of business registers, economic censuses and surveys and administrative data systems had to be strengthened. The Committee also requested the secretariat to plan capacity-building in the area of improving vital statistics, which in ideal circumstances would be based on a comprehensive vital registration system. The improvement of vital registration systems is not only important for vital statistics but is also essential for ensuring the equal treatment of people, since many rights and access to key services throughout human life depend on the registration records.

138. Since the Commission last met, the secretariat and its partners have undertaken a substantial amount of preparatory work towards planning regional programmes in both economic and vital statistics. The second session of the Committee on Statistics will deliberate on the respective plans in December 2010.

139. The economic statistics programme will be implemented in close cooperation with key subregional, regional and international partners. The goals and capacity-building strategies of the programme will be guided by a comprehensive assessment of the current state of economic statistics in the region, the recommendations and conclusions of an expert group meeting and a regional workshop held in 2009 and a core set of economic statistics identified as necessary for effective monitoring and decision-making that all countries in Asia and the Pacific should have the capacity to produce by 2020. The core set is also being discussed with the global Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts in the context of the ESCAP position on the regional implementation strategy for the 2008 System of National Accounts and serves as the regional perspective on a global set of early warning and business cycle indicators to monitor economic trends.

140. With the aim of developing a programme to improve vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific, planning meetings have been organized with the University of Queensland, the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and national experts. A regional forum planned for June 2010 will promote a common understanding among statisticians, registrars-general and health experts on the main challenges to generating reliable vital statistics with a view to arriving at a consensus on key priorities for a regional programme to improve vital statistics.

C. Issues for consideration by the Commission

141. Member countries may wish to share their experiences and views on the issues and challenges raised, identify priorities and provide further guidance on approaches they wish the secretariat to take in their future work.

VIII. SUBREGIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

142. Mandated to strengthen the United Nations Development Pillar, ESCAP has initiated a new subprogramme 8 on subregional activities for development. Under this subprogramme, subregional activities of ESCAP are carried out from the existing subregional office for the Pacific and three new offices covering East and North-East Asia, North and Central Asia, and South and South-West Asia, while ESCAP headquarters will handle the work for the South-East Asian subregion. The office for the Pacific has been active since 1984, while the three new offices will be operational this year, pending completion of administrative formalities.

143. This network of offices will assist in enhancing regional cooperation as well as bridging development gaps, including in the area of poverty reduction, and would promote methodologies for accelerated and sustainable growth within and among subregions and the region as a whole.

144. Increased attention is being focused on achievement of the Millennium Development Goals throughout the Asia-Pacific region. However, given its wide-ranging cultural and economic diversity and population variations—it includes three of the world's most populous countries and Pacific island countries with only a few thousand people—it is difficult to compare socio-economic development levels.

145. Given that ESCAP is mandated to undertake analytical and normative work that supports the achievement of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, the rationale behind these offices is that, in order to understand and respond to the issues and challenges that member States in Asia and the Pacific are confronting, a subregional perspective, built on the premise that neighbouring countries or countries

which show economic and geopolitical similarities and complementarities, would provide for a more accurate study. The ESCAP MDG-related Asia-Pacific regional reports and the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific* would benefit from support from the subregional offices.

146. More specifically, the subregional offices would serve as the secretariat's operational arms at the subregional level by, inter alia:

- (a) Adding more focus and greater depth to the normative and analytical work of ESCAP;
- (b) Developing, mobilizing resources for and implementing subregional programmes and projects;
- (c) Contributing subregional perspectives to regional programmes and projects to achieve greater synergy and to leverage funds accordingly;
- (d) Aiding in the pursuit of overarching priority areas, such as mainstreaming gender equality and achieving the Millennium Development Goals;
- (e) Forging partnerships with government agencies, institutions, the private sector and civil society;
- (f) Developing and disseminating virtual products;
- (g) Sharing good practices and replicating successful programmes and projects;
- (h) Providing advisory services at the request of member States.

147. The activities and priorities of the subregional offices are set out in document E/ESCAP/66/16.

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