



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
3 May 2011

Original: English

---

## Substantive session of 2011

Geneva, 4-29 July 2011

Item 10 of the provisional agenda\*

### Regional cooperation

## Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

Rapid economic growth observed in many regions of the world has resulted in an unprecedented number of people being lifted from poverty and significant progress towards internationally agreed development goals. However, in many regions the high rate of economic growth has not trickled down to all segments of the population and has led to widening inequalities. The national and regional averages on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals mask considerable disparities between countries and within countries. Therefore, making economic growth more inclusive and sustainable, and adopting social protection systems and policies that contribute to equity and reducing social and economic gaps represent an imperative for countries in all regions.

Youth in today's societies face a number of challenges that hinder their development, including obstacles in their access to education, employment, health care and resources. The International Year of Youth provides an important opportunity to increase the commitments and investments from Governments and the international community in addressing the challenges that hinder youth development. Regional efforts are critical in supporting the global youth agenda, as well as global efforts in support of the least developed countries and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

---

\* E/2011/100.



The present report is submitted to the Economic and Social Council in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1823 (XVII) and Council resolution 1817 (LV), and is structured in two parts. In the first part, the report examines the progress made by different regions in moving towards a new development paradigm of inclusive and sustainable development; regional contributions to the International Year of Youth and the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries; and regional contributions towards the Rio+20 Conference to be held in 2012.<sup>1</sup> The second part of the report covers developments in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation, including additional policy matters addressed during the regional commission ministerial sessions, further efforts to promote coherence at the regional level, including through the Regional Coordination Mechanisms convened by the regional commissions, as mandated by the Council, as well as ongoing interregional cooperation among the regional commissions through production of joint analytical products, hosting of joint events and implementation of joint projects.

## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Regional perspectives on the global agenda . . . . .	3
A. Towards sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth: promoting a new development paradigm . . . . .	3
B. Regional efforts to promote youth development. . . . .	10
C. Supporting the development efforts of least developed countries. . . . .	13
D. Preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). . . . .	16
II. Developments in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation . . . . .	18
A. Additional policy issues addressed by the regional commissions at their ministerial sessions and other high-level meetings . . . . .	18
B. Coherence at the regional level . . . . .	19
C. Enhanced interregional cooperation among the regional commissions . . . . .	23

<sup>1</sup> The data and analyses contained in this report are mainly obtained from sources provided by the regional commissions.

## **I. Regional perspectives on the global agenda**

### **A. Towards sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth: promoting a new development paradigm**

#### **1. Background**

1. The discussions at the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals held in September 2010 recognized the disparities and variations in the achievement of the Goals between regions, subregions, countries and within countries. The discussions highlighted the need for a new development perspective with equity at different levels at its core. This focus on equity reflects a new paradigm for development discourse, likely to continue beyond 2015. It partly responds to the critique that the framework for assessing progress on the Goals often masks significant inequities by focusing on national or regional aggregates. Following the High-level Plenary Meeting, the Assembly, in its resolution 65/10, called for more attention to this issue and requested the Economic and Social Council to hold a panel discussion on sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth for accelerating poverty eradication and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals during the substantive session of 2011. In the same resolution, the Assembly also called on the regional commissions to facilitate discussions of this issue in each region, including through their analytical work and support in the sharing of best practices and lessons learned, and the promotion of regional and subregional economic cooperation.

#### **2. Review of the situation prevailing in different regions**

##### *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean region*

2. Inequality is an issue of concern in all the regions, but some regions exhibit greater inequalities than others. Historically, the Latin American and Caribbean region has been characterized by one of the most unequal income distributions in the world. In the past few decades, the inequality has been exacerbated by uneven production patterns and opportunities, and segmentation in labour market and social protection; however, a number of Governments have begun to introduce policies to address this challenge.

3. In the 1980s the Latin American and Caribbean region was hit by the debt crisis, which coincided with an economic and social shift, reflecting a new globalization pattern and ideal of society based on the predominance of self-regulated market mechanisms and the action of private agents. As a legacy of this, some of the Governments in the region are faced with policy shortfalls in the areas of development promotion, economic regulation and provision of public goods. However, the Latin America and Caribbean region has the capacity to achieve greater and better quality of growth. For this to happen, not only should the economic performance be more robust, but steps are also required to close gaps in productivity, create decent jobs, ensure greater inclusion and social equality and reduce exposure to risks and volatility.

4. In terms of productivity, Latin American and Caribbean economies are hindered by a technology gap — a relative lag in technological capacities and their diffusion — and large gaps in productivity between sectors in the economy (also called structural heterogeneity), as illustrated in the table below. This structural

heterogeneity largely explains the social inequality in Latin America and large differences in wage levels leading to a skewed income distribution. These gaps in productivity reflect, and further exacerbate, capacity gaps and lack of bargaining power and access to social safety nets. Although much of the inequality in Latin America can be traced to the labour market, partly explained by wide variations in productivity between sectors, the other important cause is that labour and social institutions cover only part of the workforce. The rest belong to the large informal sector, which lacks access to social protection and is exposed to precarious working conditions. The region's high-productivity sectors such as mining, electricity and finance accounted for only about 8.1 per cent of formal employment in 2008 (rising slightly from 7.9 per cent in 1990), whereas the share of medium-productivity sectors such as industry and transport actually declined from 23.1 per cent in 1990 to 20 per cent in 2008. The rise in the proportion of workers in low productivity sectors has had an adverse impact on social equity and income distribution. The region needs to increase its social spending, and institute measures for income redistribution through non-contributory mechanisms.

### Latin America (selected countries): productivity indices

(Total GDP=100)

<i>Sector</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2008</i>
Agriculture	28.4	27.7	30.9	31.0
Mining	608.4	1 045.5	932.8	767.4
Industry	99.3	112.7	115.5	114.2
Electricity	225.9	353.6	434.6	483.2
Construction	91.3	94.4	84.7	77.5
Commerce	76.1	63.3	56.2	59.5
Transport	118.7	134.4	148.4	146.1
Financial establishments	279	282.5	279.7	252.1
Community, social and personal services	84.5	74.4	78.9	75.8
Total GDP	100	100	100	100
Period		1990-1998	1998-2003	2003-2008
Average productivity growth rate		1.9	-0.4	0.7

*Source:* Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

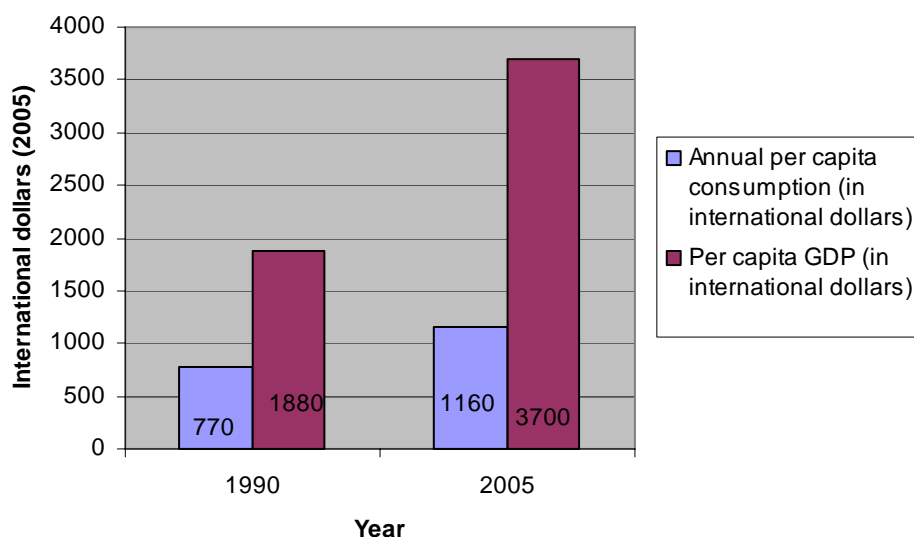
5. Despite these drawbacks, in the period 2003-2008, the region enjoyed a historical period of prosperity driven by, among other factors, sound fiscal policies, better debt profiles, more flexible exchange rates and high foreign exchange reserves. Per capita GDP grew by 3 per cent per year for more than five years, unemployment fell from 11 to 7.3 per cent with increased job quality, and poverty fell by 11 percentage points from 44 to 33 per cent. For the first time in the history of the region, there were improvements in the inequality indicators, with the Gini coefficient improving in 10 out of 20 countries, and income of poor households growing by 20 per cent. Though the global economic crisis did halt the progress, it did not undo the substantial gains made in the first decade of this century. In its landmark report entitled "Time for equality: closing gaps, opening trails", published in 2010, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

argues that the crisis provides a unique opportunity to chart a new course to change the dominant model of development hitherto being followed. The report emphasizes that social equality and economic growth are not mutually exclusive.

*Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific region*

6. The Asia-Pacific region has registered remarkable progress in reducing the average rate of poverty. Between 1990 and 2008, the number of poor people in the region declined from 1.5 billion to 947 million; however, the absolute number of poor people in the region is still very large. High rates of economic growth have not been translated into reduction of poverty in all cases. This is because the high rates of GDP growth in the Asia-Pacific region have not been matched by increased rates of household consumption. Between 1990 and the mid-2000s, per capita GDP grew faster than household consumption in 13 out of 15 countries that account for the majority of the region's population, as illustrated in the figure below.

**Per capita household consumption and GDP per capita in 15 Asia-Pacific countries**



Source: *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2010*.

This suggests that the region has the potential for reducing poverty faster than it did. The key lies in the implementation of policies that push up the rate of average per capita household consumption closer to the rate of growth of per capita GDP. However, just reducing the gap between the two growth rates will not be effective in reducing poverty if most of the increase in consumption accrues to non-poor households and if growth does not benefit poorer households in a greater manner. Economic growth did not “trickle down” to all segments in the Asia-Pacific region. Instead, it has typically been accompanied by a rise in inequality, suggesting that growth has not benefited poor households as much as wealthier ones. Thus, to speed up the impact of economic growth on poverty alleviation, it would be necessary to implement policies aimed at income redistribution, improved taxation schemes, and

boosting specifically the consumption of poor households. The latter could contribute not only to reducing poverty and inequalities, but also to boosting aggregate demand and supporting growth.

7. Increasing social spending should be at the core of such policies. The average public spending on education in the Asia-Pacific region was 3.4 per cent of GDP, against a global average of 4.7 per cent. A large share of health expenditures in the region is funded out of pocket, limiting the access of poor individuals to basic services. Another related concern is the low coverage rates of social protection programmes, particularly in health-care assistance, labour market programmes, and assistance to persons living with disabilities and access to microcredit by the poor. The average proportion of the population covered by social protection in Asia is less than 40 per cent, whereas the average expenditure on social protection is less than 5 per cent of GDP. But on a positive note, existing levels of poverty and other deprivations provide substantial headroom for increasing aggregate demand in the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore, poverty reduction must occupy a central place in the economic development strategy designed to sustain Asian dynamism in the coming years.

8. The economic crisis and subsequent recovery have highlighted the importance of regional options to combat global macroeconomic volatility. If Governments had access to a well-endowed regional crisis response and prevention facility they would feel less need to build up large foreign exchange reserves to protect their economies against speculative attacks and liquidity crises, and could thus free up reserves for more productive investments. The region needs to develop further its financial architecture for development financing, which would include systems of intermediation between its large savings and its unmet investment needs. Although the region's land transport networks have increased since the 1990s, the cost of moving goods to the hinterlands of some countries and across countries remains high, especially in the case of landlocked developing countries and small island developing States of the Pacific. In information and communications technology connectivity, the most remarkable development has been the rapid diffusion in mobile networks and services across the region. But in spite of these positive developments, inequalities remain and are growing in other areas of information and communications technology connectivity, most notably in access to broadband Internet services. It is critical to boost regional integration by enhancing the region's connectivity. Enhancing connectivity provides a unique means to reduce the region's development gaps, by spreading employment and business opportunities from the region's fastest-growing economies to slower-growing and poorer neighbours.

#### *Economic Commission for Africa region*

9. Africa has sustained and strengthened the economic recovery that started in the aftermath of the recent global crisis, with an average GDP growth rate of 4.7 per cent in 2010 compared with 2.3 per cent in 2009. Real GDP per capita also expanded in 2010 by 2.4 per cent for the continent as a whole. Oil-exporting countries expanded more strongly than oil-importing countries. Notwithstanding downside risks, growth prospects are optimistic for Africa, with an expected average growth rate of 5 per cent in 2011. However, sustained economic growth in many African countries has not translated into significant gains in social development. Growth rates continue to fall below the levels required for Africa to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The continent's growth remains heavily dependent on the primary

commodity sector, which has low employment elasticity. Governments must place social development high on their agenda in order to harness economic growth successfully for social progress. Adequate resource allocation to the social sector is necessary. This is demonstrated by the progress made in education due to Government commitment to increasing primary school enrolment. Countries that allocate at least 50 per cent of their education budget to primary education have reported the fastest rate of progress.

10. Africa is a highly unequal continent on many indicators. In addition to historically high inequality between rural and urban areas, the continent is characterized by high horizontal inequalities, reflected in the exclusion of many social groups from actively participating in the social, economic and political processes in many countries. High inequality and the fact that growth is concentrated in enclave sectors, reduce the impact of economic growth on social outcomes. A critical challenge is reducing inequity in access to social services and thus in development outcomes, including health and education. There is a serious risk of the poor being left behind, since most of the targets are national averages. These inequities explain a great deal of the region's slow progress in attaining the health goals, as there is strong evidence to suggest that more egalitarian societies tend to be healthier.

11. Poverty remains a critical social development factor on the continent. Thus, tackling poverty is essential for achieving social development objectives. One of the exit strategies from poverty is employment. The low employment elasticity of growth implies that Africa's recent growth has been largely jobless. Thus, the continent needs to promote broad-based and shared growth to reduce unemployment and poverty and enhance progress towards achieving other social development objectives.

#### *Economic Commission for Europe region*

12. The economies of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region are generally acknowledged as having achieved some of the highest levels of social welfare in the world. This is due not only to their high levels of per capita income but also to access to education, leisure and health care, and high life expectancy in most of the advanced ECE economies, especially in the Scandinavian economies. Although per capita incomes are lower in the transition economies, most of them are also ranked as having high social welfare levels, commensurate with their income levels, due to a historical emphasis on equality, education, gender rights, and publicly financed health care.

13. The model of inclusive economic development has been based upon three pillars. Firstly, there is a high level of fiscal redistribution due to relatively high and progressive income taxes, well-developed social safety nets and generous pension systems. Secondly, workers have extensive legal rights to safeguard their interests; this includes union bargaining rights, progressive gender and ethnic anti-discrimination legislation and legal rights in the workplace. Thirdly, there exists an economic structure that results in market-based incomes that are relatively equitable; this includes an educational system that allows workers to acquire the skills necessary to obtain high wages, macroeconomic and microeconomic policies that maintain high levels of employment, a diversified economic structure of

manufacturing and service sectors that require highly skilled workers, and limits on non-productive rent-seeking activities.

14. Although compared with other regions the ECE region overall is still characterized by inclusive growth, the general trend over the last two decades has been one of increasing income inequality. Within the ECE economies, income inequality has increased between countries and within countries. The increases in income inequality have been particularly high in transition economies. This trend towards greater income and wealth inequality that has characterized the region over the last two or three decades has been due to a weakening in all three of the pillars underlying its equitable growth model. In some cases, this has been due to exogenous economic developments such as technological change, globalization and demographics, but in many instances this weakening has been the result of explicit policy changes that have been generally justified as reforms required for increasing economic efficiency or addressing fiscal imbalances. Income taxes have become less progressive (in some cases replaced by flat taxes), corporate taxes have been reduced, restrictions have been increased on usage of social safety nets, union rights have been scaled back, firm-level employment protections reduced, and macroeconomic policy has shifted from promoting full employment to maintaining price stability. Despite the fact that inequality has been increasing, poverty has not; this is due largely to the moderate to strong economic growth that the region has experienced and a commitment of most countries towards maintaining social safety nets for the most vulnerable.

*Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia region*

15. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) region is at a crossroads, with social movements calling for change sweeping across most Arab countries. While some countries in the region have not fully seized previous opportunities for enacting extensive political and socio-economic reforms, the present situation provides another window to make a difference. Current political uprisings, and previously the series of economic crises, have raised questions about the development models applied in the region, and on ways to reshape policies to create the space to address the needs of everyone in society, and reach the most deprived.

16. Many countries in this region embraced a neo-liberal economic model centred on fiscal and monetary stabilization and varying degrees of economic liberalization. This has resulted in acceptable levels of economic growth and adequate economic and financial stability. However, the impact of such economic policy choices has not always led to the desired outcomes in terms of human development, human rights and political reforms, considering the large endowments and potentials of this region. Unemployment rates in the Middle East are estimated at around 10 per cent in the last two years, with youth affected at four times the rate of adults.<sup>2</sup> High and chronic unemployment, vulnerable employment, informality, working poverty and static levels of income inequality are manifestations of a more complex problem of inequalities in opportunities that characterize the application of this economic model in many countries in the region. On the other hand, some countries blessed with oil-driven wealth have managed to perform well on social indicators, including

---

<sup>2</sup> International Labour Office, *Global Employment Trends 2011: The Challenge of a Jobs Recovery*.



poverty, education and health, yet they struggle with the structural transformation of their economies to shift away from oil dependency.

17. In light of the above, countries in the ESCWA region have the opportunity to adopt a new development model, a model that expands the policymaking space to reconnect the economic with the social and the political. The new model would consider macroeconomic policies that would achieve developmental priorities. Fiscal and monetary policies have to be reshaped to achieve not only stabilization, adjustment and economic growth, but also trigger the transformations required to generate a growth that is sustainable, inclusive and broad-based. Policy tools such as taxation, financial inclusion, labour market reform and sectoral diversification would be central in this context. This would mean having social policy as a pillar of the development model, in order to provide social security and ensure that basic services to populations are secured. Some countries have already taken measures to boost their social spending in response to the unrest. The measures include upgrading housing and infrastructure for the low-income segments, increasing minimum wages and unemployment benefits, and increased spending on health. While these measures are important in the short term, the structural root causes will have to be dealt with. This new development model would not reach its goals if political and institutional reforms remained shallow.

### **3. The role of regional cooperation**

18. The promotion of equity is at the core of the work of all the regional commissions. Regional cooperation is promoted among the countries of the region to discuss the opportunities and challenges to ensuring growth with equity. South-South cooperation, through the sharing of experiences between countries on good practices and lessons learned in implementing policies for ensuring equity, has proved to be a very effective tool for common learning and capacity-building. Regional commissions have also provided a forum for interregional learning through the participation of experts from different regions in addressing issues of common interest.

19. ECLAC is working with its member States and using regional cooperation to promote a development agenda based on seven pillars to promote growth with equality. These pillars include: (a) promoting a macroeconomic policy for inclusive development to mitigate volatility, stimulate productivity and favour inclusion; (b) overcoming structural heterogeneity and productivity gaps through more innovation, dissemination of knowledge and support for small and medium enterprises; (c) improving international integration, diversifying exports and raising competitiveness; (d) overcoming territorial disparities affecting productive, institutional and social development capacities and hindering national production linkages; (e) creating more and better employment to improve equality of opportunities and social inclusion; (f) closing social gaps through a steady increase in social spending and stronger social institutions; and (g) building consensus around social and fiscal covenants and a new role of the State.

20. In the Asian and Pacific region, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is working with its member States to promote a six point agenda to rebalance the economies in the region. The agenda includes: (a) making economic growth more inclusive and sustainable; (b) strengthening social protection; (c) reducing persistent gender gaps; (d) ensuring financial inclusion;

(e) boosting international development assistance and financing for closing Millennium Development Goal gaps; and (f) exploiting the potential of regional cooperation. The Asia-Pacific region is also gradually moving towards developing some elements of a regional financial architecture with the Chiang Mai Initiative and regional bond market development. ESCAP is working towards boosting Asia-Pacific connectivity by promoting strong regional institutions to support all Asia-Pacific countries in the planning, management and funding of major cross-country connectivity initiatives, both in physical infrastructure, trade and transport facilitation, and the harmonization of rules and regulations.

21. To promote sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has advocated for a new development framework in Africa based on a more effective role for the State in governing development and promoting economic transformation. The new development framework affirms that while macroeconomic stability and growth are essential, it is important to ensure that the composition and distribution of growth benefits are conducive to achieving the continent's social development targets. In this regard, Africa's development framework must effectively address structural constraints to social development that include institutional weaknesses, weak human development and inadequate mechanisms to manage vulnerability and risk, including special employment and protection measures for vulnerable groups, namely women, youth, the elderly and the rural poor.

22. ECE is working mainly with transition economies in the region to promote policies for achieving growth with equity by ensuring synergies between growth, employment and social objectives. These include policies that promote: (a) economic competitiveness and environmental sustainability; (b) trade and transport links; (c) public-private partnerships for provision of social services and infrastructure development; (d) gender equality policies; and (e) better data on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

23. ESCWA is supporting its member States in increasing national capacities to devise and apply comprehensive and equitable economic and social policies and programmes, and to deal with transboundary issues, including through promotion of South-South cooperation, and enhanced sharing and utilization of the knowledge capital in the region. It is also supporting its member States in harnessing the power of popular movements in the region into effective and positive political and social transformation. In doing so, ESCWA is improving the regional coordination of efforts and resources of United Nations organizations with a view to providing joint responses in dealing with the complex challenges faced by the countries of the region.

## **B. Regional efforts to promote youth development**

### **1. Background**

24. Since 1995, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond has provided an integrated strategy of work to guide countries in their efforts to formulate a national agenda to address more effectively the problems of young people and to increase opportunities for their participation in society. In addition, and in line with relevant resolutions of the Commission for Social Development, the regional commissions have been involved in global and regional

inter-agency collaboration and coordination networks of relevant United Nations entities working on youth. The General Assembly proclaimed the year commencing on 12 August 2010 as the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding, which will culminate in a high-level meeting of the General Assembly on youth on 25 and 26 July 2011 in New York. The Year provides an important opportunity to increase the commitments and investments from Governments and the international community in addressing the challenges that hinder youth development, including obstacles in their access to education, employment, health care and resources.

## **2. Regional overview**

25. One out of every five persons in the Arab region is in the age bracket 15-24 years and more than half of the population is below the age of 25. The large youth population has opened up a demographic “window of opportunity” for increasing per capita income and savings, and improving the quality of life. Arab youth have proved that they can be a positive vector of change in their societies; however, this should not mask the fact that in societies, youth remain confronted by social exclusion, unemployment and deprivation, potentially leading to their involvement in violence and social upheaval. The approach of ESCWA to youth issues and policies revolves around: (a) encouraging national Governments to formulate national youth policies and related plans of action; (b) strengthening the individual and institutional capacities of its member States; (c) assessing progress of countries towards achieving goals and targets on youth development; and (d) conducting research analysis on the situation of youth in the domains of education, employment, health and participation in public life. This integrated approach has helped ESCWA member States to identify problems and challenges they are facing and formulate appropriate youth policies that target youth as a distinct socio-demographic group.

26. During the reporting period, ESCWA held several meetings and training workshops in relation to youth, including an Expert Group Meeting on “The positions of ESCWA member countries towards the development of a national policy for youth”, held in Beirut in March 2011. The 14th meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Arab States held in November 2010 focused on promoting greater coherence among all the United Nations agencies with regard to their youth-related work and a working arrangement between youth and the Regional Coordination Mechanism. A publication entitled “Youth development in the ESCWA region: statistical profiles, national strategies and success stories” highlights the mechanisms and institutional environment required for developing youth policies and laying out the general framework and steps needed for initiating, adopting, implementing and evaluating these policies. ESCWA is also providing technical assistance to member States to overcome obstacles and challenges in the formulation and implementation of national youth strategies under a regional project entitled “National capacity-building in formulating youth policies and action plans: response to the World Programme of Action for Youth”.

27. Young people comprise 60 per cent of Africa’s total population and are projected to reach over 75 per cent in 2015. Currently, they account for about 36.9 per cent of the working population. Demands for full accountability of the implementation of youth-related commitments continue to be made by young people in Africa because of the high unemployment rates and low enrolment percentages of

education at higher levels of learning, notwithstanding the limited progress made on health indicators. ECA has continued prioritizing youth issues following the African Development Forum on Youth, hosted by the Commission in 2006, to deepen youth development strategies at the regional and national levels in line with the objectives of the African Youth Charter, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals and the World Programme of Action for Youth. Other outcomes and decisions from the African Development Forum on Youth implemented by ECA include a biannual publication of the *African Youth Report*, which serves as an advocacy and analytical study report on youth issues in the region.

28. ECA, through the Regional Coordination Mechanism in support of NEPAD, has enhanced inter-agency synergies and strengthened capacity-building activities on youth. For example, the Decade on Youth Development in Africa 2009-2018 and its Plan of Action, implemented by member States, are being supported by the various United Nations organizations, programmes and agencies. ECA launched the International Year of Youth in partnership with other United Nations organizations and the African Union Commission on 1 November 2010. The continental event, which was a dialogue between representatives of Government and African youth to discuss issues related to bridging the intergenerational gap, leadership transition and African youth in the global context, was also celebrated at the national level in many countries as well as in refugee camps. Other activities during the International Year of Youth included a side event on youth and climate change during the African Development Forum on Climate Change, which was held in October 2010 and in which capacity-building, skills development and financing for youth-led programmes were highlighted as priority areas for young people in order for them to actively participate in climate change mitigation.

29. Over 45 per cent of the world's youth, amounting to about 700 million young people, live in the Asian and Pacific region. This group accounts for almost half of the region's jobless population. Indeed, with an unemployment rate in 2010 of 13.1 per cent, young people are at least three times more likely to be unemployed than adults in the region as a whole and up to five times in South-East Asia and the Pacific. In response to these challenges, ESCAP and its partners in Asia and the Pacific undertake analytical work and policy advocacy that seek to engender more youth-friendly programmes. ESCAP leads the Asia-Pacific Interagency Group on Youth, which includes more than 10 agencies and promotes sharing of information, enhanced regional cooperation and coordination, as well as dissemination of innovative good practices and lessons related to youth policy.

30. The Group observed the launch of the current International Year of Youth, by organizing several national events and a regional launch event, on 18 August 2010 at the United Nations headquarters in Bangkok. In addition, the Group is planning to convene a regional meeting with organizations of young people to establish a regional network of youth organizations and allow dialogue and identification of key issues. ESCAP is also engaged in the mapping of national youth policies and related information in the Asia-Pacific region. ESCAP is planning, together with other United Nations partners, to establish and develop a network of emerging leaders in Asia and the Pacific and provide an enabling environment for young people to be dynamic agents of social change and play active roles using the appropriate tools to overcome many of the problems that affect them.

31. Despite significant reductions in youth poverty in the ECLAC region over the past two decades, over 35 per cent of young people of 15-29 years of age were living in poverty (2006). Despite higher education levels, young people face higher levels of unemployment and receive lower wages. More young people die as a result of external causes, and youth homicide rates are very high in several countries in the region. Skill development, access to opportunities and exposure to risks among young people are highly segmented by income levels, and also by geographic location, race and gender. ECLAC, in collaboration with several entities of the United Nations system, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund, has helped develop a multidisciplinary research agenda on youth. Other stakeholders include the European Commission, the German technical cooperation agency GTZ and the Ibero-American Youth Organization. ECLAC has also conducted data collection and research on various youth-related topics, including adolescent pregnancy and motherhood and indigenous youth. A system of disaggregated indicators has been created to monitor the social and economic situation of youth in all countries of the region; these indicators are published online and accessible to all stakeholders.

32. In most countries of the ECE region, the unemployment rates are two to three times higher for youth than for adults. Youth unemployment rates vary inversely with the level of education and particularly school leavers without work experience have low chances of finding jobs. The low level of educational attainment explains to some extent why unemployment of young job seekers from disadvantaged backgrounds is particularly high. Moreover, the fragile labour market position of youth reflects growing mismatches between their skills and those sought by employers. The recent crisis has further aggravated the situation of youth employment since employers have sharply cut recruitment of school leavers. The unemployment rates for disadvantaged ethnic minorities and indigenous groups are especially high. High and persistent youth unemployment presents a threat to social cohesion in a number of ECE economies. Governments in the ECE region have responded to the economic crisis with various measures aiming to reduce unemployment, while some countries have also targeted the employment of young people with the aid of subsidized apprenticeship and internship programmes as well as wage subsidies or social tax reductions for new entrants.

## **C. Supporting the development efforts of least developed countries**

### **1. Background**

33. Since 1971, the United Nations has recognized the significant structural impediments to development faced by least developed countries and, by classifying them as such, has signalled to the global community that special attention and preferential treatment should be accorded to these countries to help them emerge from poverty and address their development challenges. Despite the increased international attention accorded to this group of countries, since the establishment of the category only three countries have graduated from this status. Of the 48 countries included in the list of least developed countries today, 33 are located in Africa, 14 in Asia, and 1 in Latin America. In all regions, least developed countries are lagging behind in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and are the ones most likely to be impacted by climate change. At the same time, the recent

global financial and economic crisis aggravated the situation by causing job losses and income insecurity for the poor and vulnerable sections of society in these countries. The food and fuel crises just prior to the economic crisis had devastating effects on the poor, and the spectre of these crises again looms with food inflation running at double digits in many least developed countries. The external environment has been equally challenging, with many of the commitments made by the development partners in support of least developed countries remaining unfulfilled. Although the majority of least developed countries are members of the World Trade Organization, or are presently negotiating their accession, least developed countries have largely been marginalized in the global economy.

## **2. Regional assessments of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action**

34. In line with the mandate given by the General Assembly to organize regional-level preparatory meetings to contribute to the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in May 2011,<sup>3</sup> ECA and ESCAP successfully held regional reviews of the Brussels Programme of Action in January 2010 and March 2010, respectively, in close cooperation with the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

35. The Africa and Haiti regional preparatory review was held in Addis Ababa and brought together representatives from 25 African least developed countries, regional organizations, development partners, the United Nations system and civil society. The review emphasized that African least developed countries had made progress towards the Brussels Programme of Action, but this progress was uneven and slow within and across countries and across commitments. Economic growth in African least developed countries reached the target of 7 per cent for a number of years; however, intra-Africa least developed country trade remains low. Progress was notable, however, as the merchandise exports of African least developed countries grew from a negative 1.3 per cent in 2001 to 19.8 per cent in 2007. This trend continued in 2007 and 2008, notwithstanding the economic and financial crisis, demonstrating a weak integration in the international financial system and the lag effect on the real economy of African least developed countries in 2009 and beyond. Agriculture, mining products and fuel still constitute over 70 per cent of exports. The outcome document of the regional review was discussed and endorsed during the Joint Annual Meetings of the African Union Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and the Economic Commission for Africa Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development in April 2010 in Malawi. Guided by the outcome, ECA is committed to supporting the development efforts of African least developed countries through addressing the challenges of reorienting growth strategies for the continent to promote high and sustained long-term growth rates to reduce unemployment, with special attention being given to vulnerable groups.

36. The High-level Asia-Pacific Policy Dialogue on the Brussels Programme of Action was held in Dhaka and involved 13 least developed countries of the Asia-Pacific region and Yemen, as well as a number of other stakeholders, including relevant regional organizations, development partners and civil society. The meeting highlighted that despite impressive progress and dynamism of the Asia-Pacific

---

<sup>3</sup> See General Assembly resolution 63/227.

region, poverty continues to be a major problem for many least developed countries. It also stressed the need to scale up, diversify and build the productive capacity of least developed countries in agriculture, manufacturing and services, and invest in human capital, especially education and health. At its 66th session held in Incheon, Republic of Korea, in May 2010, ESCAP adopted its resolution 66/3 on the implementation of the Dhaka Outcome Document on the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries and requested ESCAP to continue to assist Asia-Pacific least developed countries, in cooperation with other international entities, taking into account their respective mandates, in building their capacity to make appropriate policy responses that mitigate the impact of the economic crisis, restore growth and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

### **3. Regional integration and South-South cooperation for promoting development in least developed countries**

37. The regional commissions play an important role in promoting the development efforts of least developed countries through multilateral dialogue and knowledge-sharing at the regional level, and by working together to promote interregional cooperation, both among themselves and through collaboration with other regional organizations. In this regard, the outcome document of the least developed country-IV will call on the regional commissions to continue to ensure that the needs of least developed countries are addressed as part of their ongoing work, and to undertake periodic reviews of the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action in collaboration with relevant subregional and regional organizations.

38. Least developed countries can benefit from the diverse development experiences of other developing countries in their region through regional cooperation and South-South cooperation, and regional commissions are actively engaged in supporting these efforts. For example, ECA is undertaking a study on the enhancement of employment and growth in Africa through South-South cooperation. ESCAP is working to enhance the capacity of policymakers and senior Government officials for formulating appropriate economic and social development strategies, policies and programmes, and engaging more robustly in global and regional forums. ESCWA recently established the ESCWA Technology Centre in Jordan, to provide a forum for the exchange of technical expertise in the region. Subregional offices of both ESCAP and ECA provide targeted and in-depth technical assistance to address the priorities of least developed countries in the respective subregions.

39. The regional commissions will actively participate in the least developed country-IV in Istanbul in May 2011. The Conference will bring together high-level representatives of least developed countries, development partners, the United Nations system, the business sector and civil society. Apart from contributing to the high-level panels and round tables, the regional commissions will organize side events to highlight the regional perspectives. For example, ECA will exhibit visualization tools that spatially assess and track progress towards the Programme of Action for least developed countries at the national and subnational levels and provide policymakers with geospatial information for targeted interventions. ESCAP will focus on approaches to building productive capacities, whereas ESCWA will highlight the particular needs of least developed countries in conflict situations.

## **D. Preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)**

### **1. Background**

40. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) will be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 4 to 6 June 2012. The objective of the Conference is to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assess the progress to date and remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of major summits on sustainable development, and address new and emerging challenges. The regional commissions have been mandated by the General Assembly to facilitate regional preparations for the Conference, including conducting analysis and facilitating discussion among Member States and other stakeholders on the two Conference themes: a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and the institutional framework for sustainable development.<sup>4</sup>

### **2. Regional preparations and contributions to the preparatory process for Rio+20**

41. The regional commissions are making contributions in a number of ways to the preparatory process of Rio+20. Regional commissions have provided inputs for a range of reports being prepared by the Secretariat, including the synthesis report for the first intersessional meeting, the reports of the Secretary-General for the preparatory meetings and the United Nations system-wide paper on the green economy being produced by the Environment Management Group. In providing these inputs, regional commissions are drawing on the analysis undertaken at the regional level on the issues addressed by the Conference. Many of the regional commissions have proposed models for development that integrate sustainability as a core element, and these are being used to inform the global debate. In addition, as chairs of the Regional Coordination Mechanisms, regional commissions are also drawing on analytical and normative inputs from the entire United Nations system through the Regional Coordination Mechanisms. The regional commissions are also preparing a number of publications for Rio+20 that will highlight regional experiences and good practices at the regional level on promoting sustainable development.<sup>5</sup>

42. As the regional arms of the United Nations, regional commissions will be organizing the regional preparatory meetings for the Rio+20 Conference in the latter part of 2011, in partnership with and with the support and involvement of regional and subregional organizations and sister United Nations bodies. In addition to these meetings, a number of other intergovernmental meetings serve as a regional platform for preparation for the Rio+20 process. In the ESCAP region, the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development was held in Astana from 27 September to 2 October 2010 and resulted in the adoption of a ministerial declaration and regional implementation plan for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific for 2011-2015. It also adopted the Astana “Green bridge” initiative,<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> General Assembly resolution 64/236 and 65/152.

<sup>5</sup> A list of publications and papers produced or proposed to be produced by the regional commissions is available from [www.un.org/regionalcommissions/](http://www.un.org/regionalcommissions/).

<sup>6</sup> The ministerial declaration, regional implementation plan and “Green bridge” initiative can be downloaded from: [www.unescap.org/esd/mced6/documents/final\\_documents.asp](http://www.unescap.org/esd/mced6/documents/final_documents.asp).



which will bring an interregional perspective to the Seventh Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (convened by ECE), scheduled to be held in Astana from 21 to 23 September 2011.<sup>7</sup> The Ministerial Conference will discuss effective ways to green the economy and contribute to the Rio+20 Conference. A number of other events in the ECE region, including those under ECE environmental conventions and protocols and those on education for sustainable development, will also provide valuable inputs for the Rio+20 preparatory process. The ESCAP Subregional Office for the Pacific and other United Nations bodies in the Pacific are collaborating with the Governments of small island developing States of the Pacific and regional organizations to convene a subregional meeting to prepare inputs for the Rio+20 regional and global preparatory processes.

43. In the African region, ECA, jointly with the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme and the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, held a workshop on trade, environment and sustainable development for policymakers of ECOWAS member States from 24 to 26 January 2011. ECA also jointly organized with the African Union, African Development Bank, regional economic communities and United Nations agencies two workshops on institutional and strategic frameworks for sustainable development and a sustainable development indicator framework for Africa from 7 to 11 March 2011. These workshops were intended to contribute to strengthening the capacity of African countries to articulate their concerns and priorities for Rio+20, and to build capacity to implement the outcomes of Rio+20.

44. In the ECLAC region, a meeting of Government-designated experts was held on 15 and 16 December 2010 to discuss the concept of the green economy in the context of poverty eradication and its implications for the region. In addition, intergovernmental and expert group meetings on urban planning and infrastructure are also being used to provide contributions. In the ESCWA region, the outcomes of the Regional Workshop on Trade and Environment: Developing the Environmental Goods and Services Sector in the Arab Region for Transformation into a Green Economy, which was held in Beirut on 15 and 16 December 2010, and the 3rd Roundtable Meeting of Experts on Sustainable Consumption and Production in the Arab Region, held in Cairo on 26 and 27 January 2011, will also feed into the Rio+20 process. The outcome of the regional preparatory meeting will lead to the formulation of an Arab ministerial green economy initiative expected to be adopted by the twenty-third session of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment in December 2011, and provide a unified framework for action and support the position of the Arab countries in Rio+20.

45. In addition to providing regional inputs into the global process, the regional preparatory meetings and other regional intergovernmental processes provide a platform for working towards a common understanding among policymakers on issues that are most critical and important for their respective regions. They also help to build solidarity and a common regional position on key issues, which would allow for stronger and more coherent representation of regional perspectives at the global level. Given their multidisciplinary strengths, regional commissions are ideally placed to follow up on the outcome of the Rio+20 Conference. The outcome

---

<sup>7</sup> Documents and information related to the Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” are available from: [www.unece.org/env/efe/Astana/welcome.html](http://www.unece.org/env/efe/Astana/welcome.html).

would need to be adapted and structured to fit regional specificities, as sustainable development and green economy require mainstreaming of the environment into other sectors, such as macroeconomy, trade, the social sector, transport and agriculture, and the adoption of a transformative approach that cuts across all sectors.

## **II. Developments in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation**

### **A. Additional policy issues addressed by the regional commissions at their ministerial sessions and other high-level meetings**

46. The regional commissions have actively considered most of the issues highlighted in the first part of the present report during high-level ministerial sessions held since the 2010 substantive session of the Council. During the period under consideration, three of the regional commissions (ECA, ECE and ESCAP) held their annual or biennial ministerial sessions.

47. The forty-fourth session of the Economic Commission for Africa was held in Addis Ababa from 24 to 29 March 2011. The Fourth Joint Annual Meetings of the African Union Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development was held on 28 and 29 March 2011. The main theme of the Meeting was “Governing development in Africa”. The discussions covered a wide range of topics related to governance and development in Africa, green economy and global sustainability, health financing in Africa and leveraging opportunities for accelerated growth in the region over the next decade.

48. The Meeting resulted in a ministerial policy statement that reaffirmed the central role of the State in promoting development and economic transformation in Africa. The statement also addressed a number of important issues on the agenda of the ministerial session, such as sustainable development in Africa, health financing and making use of opportunities for faster growth. The Meeting also considered and adopted 11 resolutions on various issues of importance for the work of ECA, including resolutions on the proposed programme of work and priorities of ECA for 2012-2013; enhanced United Nations support for the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning; and enhanced United Nations support for the African Union and NEPAD in the context of the 10-year capacity-building programme.<sup>8</sup>

49. The sixty-fourth session of the Economic Commission for Europe was held from 29 to 31 March 2011 in Geneva. The theme of the high-level segment was economic integration in the ECE region which was divided into the following sub-themes: (a) general developments and new challenges in light of the economic crisis; (b) transport and trade infrastructure; and (c) energy cooperation. The session discussed the impact that the recent financial crisis has on the region, and the longer-term efforts to improve the region’s integration and competitiveness in the global economy. An underlying theme of the session was the importance of fostering innovation as a way to overcome the crisis as well as address longer-run challenges faced by the region, such as making development more environmentally sustainable.

---

<sup>8</sup> See E/2011/15/Add.1.

Discussions also focused on the inclusion of environmental and energy considerations into development and competitiveness policy, with a focus on the Rio+20 process, the importance of trade and transport for economic integration, the increasing role of natural gas in the energy future of Europe, the need to address the energy-water nexus in Central Asia, the financing requirements and needs for large infrastructure investment in pipeline and electricity networks, and the challenges in diversifying energy sources in Europe.

50. The sixty-seventh session of ESCAP will be held at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok from 19 to 25 May 2011. The theme of the session will be “Beyond the crises: long-term perspectives on social protection and development in Asia and the Pacific”. The Commission will review national experiences and consider policy choices to be followed to promote more effective and inclusive social protection systems in the Asia-Pacific region. A high-level panel on the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2011: Sustaining Dynamism and Inclusive Development — Connectivity in the Region and Productive Capacity in the Least Developed Countries* will also be organized. The panel will discuss some of the key findings and challenges presented in the survey, including the role of regional connectivity in helping to foster domestic and regional sources of aggregate demand and enhancing the productive capacity of least developed countries through regional integration.

51. The Third Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean was held from 21 to 23 November 2010 in Lima. Ministers and senior Government representatives from Latin America agreed to implement a regional plan to make access to the information and knowledge society a universal right, to promote integration among countries and to coordinate global targets with the needs and priorities of the region. The plan, known as “eLAC2015”, was approved by delegates by means of the Lima Declaration, at the end of the Conference. Participants reaffirmed their conviction that public policymaking must incorporate the mainstreaming of information and communications technologies for countries’ development and resolved to continue strengthening regional research networks, technological development and innovation and growth to facilitate access to the benefits of information and communications technology use for the region’s less developed countries (particularly Haiti and other small island States).

## **B. Coherence at the regional level**

### **1. Regional Coordination Mechanism**

52. During the reporting period, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46 (annex III), which mandated the regional commissions to hold regular inter-agency meetings in each region with a view to improving coordination among programmes of work of the organizations of the United Nations system, the regional commissions convened several Regional Coordination Mechanism meetings in their respective regions. In accordance with usual practice, the Deputy Secretary-General chaired the main Regional Coordination Mechanism meetings in each region.

53. The eleventh session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism of the United Nations agencies and organizations working in Africa in support of NEPAD was held on 14 and 15 November 2010 in Addis Ababa. The meeting was attended by

senior officials and experts from the United Nations, the African Union Commission, the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency and the regional economic communities. Participants identified and sought more productive ways by which all United Nations agencies and organizations working in Africa could coordinate their efforts in order to strengthen their support for the African Union and NEPAD in fostering development in Africa. They examined the progress, achievements and challenges faced by the nine clusters throughout the year,<sup>9</sup> reports on the review of the 10-year capacity-building programme for the African Union, as well as activities on climate change, combating desertification and biodiversity conservation.

54. The Meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for the Latin America and Caribbean region was held on 8 and 9 February 2011 in Santiago. The meeting was attended by the regional representatives of a large number of funds and programmes as well as specialized agencies. The participating agencies and organizations agreed to work together towards the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and jointly produce an inter-agency document to assess progress and challenges in terms of sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The representatives also committed to contribute to the recently created UN-Women. During the reporting period, the regional Millennium Development Goal report entitled “Achieving the Millennium Development Goals with equality in Latin America and the Caribbean: progress and challenges” was prepared within the framework of the Regional Coordination Mechanism by 18 United Nations agencies, funds and specialized bodies in the region under the coordination of ECLAC.

55. ECE convened two Regional Coordination Mechanism meetings during the reporting period. The first and most important meeting was organized in October 2010. It was agreed that the next inter-agency Millennium Development Goal report in Europe and Central Asia should focus on the post-2015 agenda. At the second session, held in March 2011, participating agencies agreed to produce a regional inter-agency report for the Rio+20 Conference, which would be forward-looking and policy-oriented and would showcase good practices in the relevant policy areas. It was also agreed to establish a thematic working group on tackling inequities in progress towards the health-related Millennium Development Goals and to work closely with UN-Women on gender issues, including through possible establishment of a thematic working group on women.

56. The Regional Coordination Mechanism produced an inter-agency report on the Millennium Development Goals in Europe and Central Asia that was initially presented at the regional Millennium Development Goals review conference held in Istanbul and later in New York at a ministerial side event during the MDG+10 Summit in September 2010. The report reviewed progress towards the Millennium Development Goals in the ECE region, undertook analysis of development trends, highlighted good practices and provided specific policy recommendations on human development challenges faced by countries in the region.

---

<sup>9</sup> The clusters, which are aligned with the priority areas of NEPAD, include: infrastructure development, governance, social and human development, environment, population and urbanization, agriculture food security and rural development, science and technology, advocacy and communications, peace and security, and industry, trade and market access.

57. The Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism meeting held on 3 March 2011 discussed the growing importance of the regional dimensions of development. Participants also addressed the issue of balancing the three pillars of sustainable development based on the work of the Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group on Environment and Disaster Risk Management and the Thematic Working Group on Hunger and Poverty. Key joint outputs delivered through the Regional Coordination Mechanism during the reporting period included the following:

(a) Contributions to the regional Asia-Pacific Millennium Development Goal reports in 2010, entitled *Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in an Era of Global Uncertainty: Asia-Pacific Report 2009/10* (February 2010) and *Paths to 2015: MDG Priorities in Asia and the Pacific*, which was launched at the MDG+10 Summit in New York (September 2010);

(b) Joint publication of the report *Striving Together: ASEAN and the UN*, which was presented by the Secretary-General at the Third ASEAN-UN Summit held on 29 October 2010 in Hanoi;

(c) Preparation of the Joint Declaration on ASEAN-UN Collaboration in Disaster Management, which was adopted at the Third ASEAN-UN Summit;

(d) Joint launching of the UNiTE to End Violence Against Women campaign on 25 November 2010 and organization of a commemoration of the tenth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

58. In addition, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism, through its Thematic Working Group on Migration and Human Trafficking, contributed to the organization of the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Global Forum on International Migration and Development, which was attended by representatives of 31 Governments in the Asia-Pacific region as well as representatives of the United Nations system and affiliated organizations. The Asia-Pacific Thematic Working Group on Gender and Empowerment of Women organized joint commemorative events on International Women's Day (8 March) and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November). It also established a Regional Advisory Group on Women, Peace and Security in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in October 2010.

59. ESCWA held two Regional Coordination Mechanism meetings during the reporting period. The 14th Regional Coordination Mechanism meeting for the Arab region was held at United Nations House in Beirut on 11 and 12 November 2010. The meeting brought together regional United Nations agencies and offices and the League of Arab States. The key outcomes of the meeting included: (a) synergizing interlinkages between the thematic working groups,<sup>10</sup> and enhancing their effectiveness by convening an annual joint meeting of the three thematic working groups between Regional Coordination Mechanism meetings; (b) strengthening statistical coordination and capacity-building in the region by establishing a task force comprising directors of statistics working in national statistical offices, the United Nations and other international organizations; (c) ensuring that the outcomes

<sup>10</sup> The thematic working groups focus on the Millennium Development Goals, food security and climate change.

of the Regional Coordination Mechanism would feed into the deliberations of the High-level Committee on Programmes and Chief Executives Board as well as the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on 19 January 2011; (d) Developing a working arrangement between youth and the Regional Coordination Mechanism process, with the participation of the League of Arab States; and (e) inviting the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to participate in working groups and the work of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, in addition to the Islamic Development Bank, which agreed to enhance its participation with current actors in the region through the Regional Coordination Mechanism process. Other actors, including the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, which have expressed interest in the work of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, will be encouraged to participate. The 15th meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for the Arab region held on 1 June 2011 focused on “Transition to democracy” and the issue of harnessing the power of popular movements in the region towards effective political and social transformation, as well as developing a strategy for the Regional Coordination Mechanism on effectively engaging and supporting member countries in this process.

## **2. Regional Coordination Mechanism and United Nations Development Group regional teams**

60. In clear recognition of the complementary roles played by the regional United Nations Development Group teams and the Regional Coordination Mechanisms, the United Nations Development Group strategic priorities and the workplan for 2010-2011 include clear outputs for enhanced coordination between the Regional Coordination Mechanisms and regional United Nations Development Group teams with a view to ensuring effective support for the United Nations country teams. The United Nations Development Group workplan and strategic priorities for 2010-2011 have clearly identifiable outputs and performance indicators at the country, regional and global levels. The specific outputs include increased coordination of United Nations Development Assistance Framework technical assistance and advice provided to the United Nations country teams by the regional United Nations Development Group teams together with the Regional Coordination Mechanisms; and increased coordination between the regional United Nations Development Group teams and Regional Coordination Mechanisms to facilitate the access of the United Nations country teams to regional/global expertise and resources (including South-South and triangular) to support quality and coherence in programming, operations and management and accountability system implementation.

61. During the reporting period, there has been significant progress made in enhancing the coordination between the Regional Coordination Mechanisms and regional United Nations Development Group teams, and increased involvement of the regional commissions in United Nations Development Assistance Framework processes. There has been enhanced interaction between the Regional Coordination Mechanisms and regional United Nations Development Group teams through back-to-back meetings and active participation in each other’s meetings. During the reporting period, Regional Coordination Mechanism and regional United Nations Development Group team meetings were held back-to-back in four regions (Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and Central Asia, and Arab regions). There has been increased participation of the regional commissions in

common country assessment and United Nations Development Assistance Framework processes in areas such as disaster risk reduction, food security, sustainable development, statistics and in other areas that have subregional and regional implications.

### **C. Enhanced interregional cooperation among the regional commissions**

62. Since the last reporting period, the Executive Secretaries held four regular meetings to further strengthen coordination and collaboration among the commissions: in July 2010, at the margins of the Economic and Social Council; in November 2010, in New York at the margins of their dialogue with the Second Committee of the General Assembly; in January 2011, hosted by the Executive Secretary of ECLAC in Santiago; and in February 2011, in New York. Many of the issues discussed as part of their agenda are addressed in this report, including the support extended by regional commissions towards United Nations system-wide coherence at the regional and global levels; regional perspectives and contributions towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals; promotion of policies that lead to greater inclusion and equity; regional contributions to the Rio+20 process; and regional cooperation as an important tool for development. These issues were addressed as part of the dialogue of the Executive Secretaries with the Council and the Second Committee of the Assembly in July and November 2010, respectively.

63. In addition, a joint side event was organized in New York at the margins of the High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals in September 2010, during which the Executive Secretaries highlighted the regional perspectives on the achievement of Millennium Development Goals, and the role of regional cooperation in addressing key challenges in this regard. A joint side event was also organized on the margins of the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Cancun, Mexico, in December 2010.

64. The regional dimension of development is now being recognized as being critical for an effective and coordinated response for addressing an ever-growing number of transboundary issues. Regional organizations and groupings have evolved as important players in determining the development agenda at all levels. Regional commissions have come together to undertake a study to identify ways in which the United Nations system, and regional commissions in particular, could engage more deeply and more effectively with the policy frameworks and initiatives developed by regional and subregional organizations.

65. Regional commissions are jointly implementing a number of interregional projects in the areas of access to energy, energy efficiency, renewable energy, social protection and statistics, in partnership with a wide range of United Nations and non-United Nations organizations. Regional commissions are also working towards implementing a coordinated policy on knowledge management, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme.