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**SOCIALLY VULNERABLE GROUPS: SELECTED ISSUES:  
EMPOWERMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

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*Note by the secretariat*

**SUMMARY**

On 22 May 2002, the Commission adopted resolution 58/4 on promoting an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for people with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region in the twenty-first century, in which it proclaimed the extension of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, for another decade, 2003-2012. In October 2002, Governments adopted the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (BMF) as the regional policy guideline for the new Decade. As at 2003, 43 members and associate members of ESCAP have signed the Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region. The new Decade (2003-2012) must ensure a paradigm shift from a charity-based approach to a rights-based approach to protect the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of persons with disabilities.

This paper summarizes the current status of persons with disabilities in the ESCAP region at the inception of the new Decade, the seven priority areas for action under BMF and its targets, strategies, time frames and supporting/monitoring mechanisms as well as immediate ECCAP follow-up activities.

Despite recent achievements, persons with disabilities remain the single-largest sector of those least served and most discriminated against in almost all societies in the region. Persons with disabilities have been prevented from accessing entitlements available to other members of society, in the areas of health services, education, employment, community participation and other basic social and political rights and services. Failure to access these services, and to have their voices heard, has resulted in economic and social exclusion for persons with disabilities and their associates, prejudice, rejection and, ultimately, lives in poverty.

There are a number of key areas that require ongoing critical action if the region is to satisfactorily achieve the inclusion of people with disabilities in society and in all mainstream development programmes in order to reach the goal of full participation of people with disabilities.



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## INTRODUCTION

1. On 22 May 2002, the Commission adopted resolution 58/4 on promoting an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for people with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region in the twenty-first century, in which it proclaimed the extension of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, for another decade, 2003-2012.
2. In October 2002, the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, adopted the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (BMF) as the regional policy guideline for the new Decade.
3. The Biwako Millennium Framework outlines issues, action plans and strategies towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities.
4. To achieve the goals, the Framework identified seven priority areas for action, in each of which critical issues and targets with specific time frames and actions follow. In all, 21 targets and 17 strategies supporting the achievement of the targets were identified.
5. As at 2003, 43 members and associate members of ESCAP have signed the Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region.
6. The new Decade (2003-2012) must ensure a paradigm shift from a charity-based approach to a rights-based approach to protect the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of persons with disabilities. To pursue the targets and strategies, consultations with and involvement of civil society, including self-help organizations (SHOs) and concerned NGOs, are essential.
7. The following sections of this paper summarize the current status of persons with disabilities in the ESCAP region at the inception of the new Decade, the seven priority areas for action under BMF and its targets, strategies, time frames and supporting/monitoring mechanisms as well as immediate ESCAP follow-up activities. The first Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons was concluded in 2002. The theme and goal of the Decade was the promotion of the full participation and equality of people with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region.
8. The paper also summarizes the achievements of the last Decade, its shortcomings and challenges, and priority areas for further action during the new Decade. The focus of analysis is on progress at the national level, which may be used as a baseline for monitoring future progress.
9. Information has been derived mainly from a regional survey conducted by ESCAP for the above-mentioned High-level Intergovernmental Meeting in 2002 and other supplementary data provided by additional meeting reports and background documents on related activities that took place in 2002 and 2003. The former survey report is based on 37 returns of the ESCAP survey questionnaire, including from four non-signatories of the Proclamation.

## I. OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

10. It is recognized that many gains have been achieved in creating awareness about the situation of persons with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region and the need to address the issues affecting their full participation and equality in the development process. There has been progress at the national and subregional levels, where a variety of measures for equalization are being implemented. These include legislation, promotion of barrier-free environments, community-based rehabilitation services, education and training and employment. People with disabilities are increasingly active in contributing to the planning and implementation of programmes relating to such measures.

11. Despite these achievements, it may be argued that persons with disabilities remain the single-largest sector of those least served and most discriminated against in almost all societies in the region.

12. Persons with disabilities have been prevented from accessing entitlements available to other members of society, in the areas of health services, education, employment, community participation and other basic social and political rights and services. Failure to access these services and to have their voices heard has resulted in economic and social exclusion for persons with disabilities and their associates, prejudice, rejection and, ultimately, lives in poverty. The number of persons with disabilities continues to increase with population growth and such other factors as war and other forms of violence, traffic accidents, inadequate medical care and natural and other disasters.

13. There are a number of key areas that require ongoing critical action if the region is to satisfactorily achieve the inclusion of people with disabilities in society and in all mainstream development programmes in order to reach the goal of full participation of people with disabilities. Not surprisingly, many of the people with disabilities are poor; poverty and social exclusion are closely linked.

14. The overwhelming majority of people with disabilities in the ESCAP region live in remote rural areas where the services needed to help them are unavailable. Additionally, a major cause of poverty is the lack of productive employment.

15. People with disabilities remain disproportionately unemployed and underemployed. Efforts have been made in many parts of the ESCAP region to improve the labour force participation rate but a major obstacle to gaining - and retaining - employment is lack of access to education and training. People with disabilities are confronted with social exclusion from their earliest years because of existing social and physical barriers.

16. Generally, the educational systems fail to offer any education to the majority of children with disabilities. Among those who do have access to education, few receive inclusive education in the mainstream school environment. Additionally, an increasingly important issue in this area that still

has to be addressed is access by people with disabilities to new and emerging information technologies through computer literacy.

17. Since lack of education is one of the main factors leading to social exclusion and poverty, this phenomenon will be followed by new emerging problems related to ICT developments, globalization and poverty, including temporary poverty caused by structural adjustments.

18. It is hoped that the extension of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons for another 10 years will complete the achievement of the goal of full participation and equality of people with disabilities.

## **II. SPECIFIC TARGETS**

### **A. Self-help organizations of persons with disabilities and related family and parents' associations**

19. Governments in the ESCAP region are becoming increasingly supportive of SHOs and value the role which they play in advising Governments on disability concerns. Twenty-four countries out of 37 that responded to the ESCAP survey have formed national cross-disability organizations of people with disabilities, or SHOs. Four were in the process of forming such groups. The World Blind Union and the World Federation of the Deaf have extensive networks of national organizations.

20. Seventeen Governments have reported that input by SHOs was fully integrated into national policy development. Thirteen Governments provide funding assistance to strengthen and support the development of SHOs. The Philippines has a national forum of SHOs. In the Pacific island economies, the Oceania Subregional Office of Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) was formed in 2000 and provides support to many countries in the subregion. DPI Asia and Pacific region has a membership of 22 national assemblies of people with disabilities. These include six organizations from the Pacific island economies.

21. Some SHOs have developed without government support, as in Kiribati and Solomon Islands, but they helped to improve public attitudes towards persons with disabilities. Additionally, the lack of coordination of many disparate and often single-disability groups has weakened the capacity of SHOs to advocate their cause effectively. Coordination is clearly beneficial to people with disabilities and Governments alike. A situation of equal partnership and consultation between Governments and SHOs has not yet been achieved within the region and progress towards it has been slow.

22. Often, SHOs have not yet fully included marginalized persons with disabilities such as women and girls with disabilities, persons with intellectual disabilities and persons with psychiatric disabilities.

23. BMF affirms that persons with disabilities and their SHOs are best equipped and best informed to speak on their behalf and can contribute to solutions on issues that concern them. Under BMF, two targets are set to make a difference:

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(1) By 2004, Governments, international funding agencies and NGOs should establish policies to support and develop SHOs. Governments should take steps to ensure the formation of parents' associations at the local level by the year 2005 and federate them at the national level by year 2010;

(2) By 2005, Governments and civil society organizations should fully include SHOs in decision-making processes.

24. Actions for the targets include the participation of persons with disabilities in policy-making, political representations and capacity-building.

### **B. Women with disabilities**

25. Some countries have developed gender-inclusive disability policies while others facilitate gender-sensitive data and the formation of networks of women with disabilities. These initiatives need to continue and expand if women with disabilities are to acquire the skills and confidence to advocate for the inclusion of their particular issues within SHOs of persons with disabilities, mainstream advocacy groups and the wider community.

26. Gender-inclusive disability policies were reported by Japan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. Gender-sensitive data were reported by Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Fiji, Hong Kong, China, Indonesia; and the Philippines reported the formation of networks of women with disabilities. A regional network of women with disabilities was formed at Hanoi during Campaign 2001. In Fiji, the group of women with disabilities is a member of the Fiji National Council of Women. The Fiji Disabled Peoples' Association has a task force on women. In the Philippines, a leadership training manual for women with disabilities has been developed, and ongoing training is carried out.

27. Given that women with disabilities suffer doubly from being women and from being disabled, it is clear that the concerns and development of women with disabilities should form a central part of any future framework for action in the region.

28. In BMF, women with disabilities are recognized as multiply disadvantaged through their status as women and as persons with disabilities and their propensity to be living in poverty. Three targets are set to solve these problems:

(1) By 2005, Governments should ensure anti-discrimination measures, where appropriate, to protect women with disabilities;

(2) By 2005, SHOs should adopt policies to promote full representation of women with disabilities;

(3) By 2005, women with disabilities should be included in the membership of national mainstream women's associations.

### **C. Early detection, early intervention and education**

29. Twenty-five countries out of 37 survey respondents have prevention strategies within overall health programmes, while comprehensive disability prevention programmes were implemented in Bangladesh, China and India, among others. In China, nationwide prevention strategies target urban, rural and migrant communities. National surveys of children at risk have been undertaken and early identification and intervention services provide training and support to families in 23 countries and areas, within urban and community-based frameworks. Prevention programmes included safety in the workplace and the prevention of traffic accidents and, in some cases, injury due to landmines. In 2001 the Government of New Zealand released a strategy on the health of older people with a view to supporting positive ageing and prevention of disability.

30. Continued effort is needed to further reduce the number of infants born with disabilities as a result of maternal malnutrition, inadequate prenatal and post-natal care, childbirth complications and preventable childhood diseases.

31. Twenty-nine countries out of 37 provide for rehabilitation services and 22 have established community-based rehabilitation (CBR) approaches. In one notable model in Bangladesh, three government departments work together with more than 100 NGOs and some organizations of people with disabilities to provide rehabilitation to people with disabilities within their community. Deliberate policy decisions have resulted in extensive CBR service delivery in China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines and rapidly expanding services in Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam.

32. However, many rehabilitation services in the region are still urban and institution-based. They lack consultative and participatory mechanisms that would allow people with disabilities and their families a role as equal partners in problem-solving.

33. It is estimated that well under 10 per cent of children with disabilities in developing countries have access to education. Lack of data on the number and prevalence of children with disabilities makes it impossible to measure progress or gain a better understanding of these issues.

34. There is some evidence that the situation is improving. Legislation mandating education for all children has been passed or is being planned by 20 Governments. However, only a few Governments provided for the inclusion of children with disabilities in national Education for All plans. The predominant form of access to education has been through separate school provision, but inclusive educational provision was increasing. Twenty-seven Governments reported some access to regular schools for children and youth with disabilities.

35. It is roughly estimated that less than 10 per cent of children and youth with disabilities have access to any form of education, compared with an enrolment rate of over 70 per cent for non-

disabled children and youth in primary education in the region. This exclusion from education for children and youth with disabilities results in exclusion from opportunity for further personal, social and vocational development. Four targets are set for these problems:

(1) Children with disabilities will be an integral part of the population targeted by Millennium Development Goal target 3, which is to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling;

(2) By 2010, at least 75 per cent of children and youth with disabilities of school age will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling;

(3) By 2012, all infants and young children (0-4 years) will have access to and receive community-based early intervention services;

(4) Governments should ensure detection of childhood disabilities at a very early age.

36. Actions in this area include adequate legislation for inclusive education and national data collection on children with disabilities (0-16 years).

#### **D. Access to built environments and public transport**

37. Some progress has been made in this area, with 24 Governments having adopted, or being in the progress of developing, legislation and standards on accessible environments and transport.

38. Inaccessibility of the built environment, including public transport systems, is still the major barrier for persons with disabilities. This problem will get worse, as the number of older people with disabilities increases in the region. A new inclusive, integral approach, "universal design", benefits all people in our society including older persons, pregnant women and young children and its economic benefits have been proved; yet substantive initiatives at the policy level have not been taken. Three targets are set to improve the situation:

(1) Governments should adopt and enforce accessibility standards for the planning of public facilities, infrastructure and transport, including those in rural/agricultural contexts;

(2) Existing public transport systems and all new and renovated public transport systems should be made accessible as soon as practicable;

(3) All international and regional funding agencies for infrastructure development should include universal and inclusive design concepts in their loan/grant award criteria.

#### **E. Training and employment, including self-employment**

39. Of 28 Governments which provide vocational training services, 5 were in the early stages of establishing such services. Nine countries are moving towards integrated provision of vocational training. Many strategies had been adopted to promote increased rates of employment of people with

disabilities. Twelve countries have implemented a quota system with incentives and fines being used to ensure enforcement. Additional strategies include job search agencies, employment placement and support centres, wage subsidies, job coaching, trial employment and industrial profiling.

40. Strategies to promote self-employment and income generation through small grant funding, microcredit and loans have been reported in a number of countries. These countries and others reported a specific focus on employment of people with disabilities in rural areas. The Government of Japan has begun employment promotion for people with severe disabilities within the private sector.

41. Nevertheless, persons with disabilities remain disproportionately undereducated, untrained, unemployed, underemployed and poor. They have insufficient access to the mainstream labour market owing to social exclusion, lack of trained and competent staff and adequate training for independent workers.

42. By 2003, only 11 countries in the region had ratified ILO Convention concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons), 1983. Three targets follow:

(1) By 2012, at least 30 per cent of the signatories will ratify ILO Convention concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons);

(2) By 2012, at least 30 per cent of all vocational training programmes in signatory countries will include persons with disabilities;

(3) By 2010, reliable data on the employment and self-employment rates of persons with disabilities will exist in all countries.

#### **F. Access to information and communications, including information, communication and assistive technologies**

43. In terms of access to communication, there is wide use of Braille and sign language, with popular usage and access by hearing people in countries such as China and Thailand. National sign language dictionaries were developed, and in 1999 in Thailand sign language was declared the national language of deaf people.

44. Overall access to communications technology and computer literacy in the region is clearly limited and not available to the majority of people with disabilities, especially those living in rural areas or in urban poverty. In terms of accessible information and ICT-related services, much more needs to be done. Where related ICT legislation has been passed, it is often not enforced.

45. In the past 10 years, there has been much progress in ICT development in some countries of the region, and this opens up many opportunities for people with disabilities in networking, solidarity, employment and independent living.

46. Advances in ICT have also widened the gap between privileged disabled persons and non-privileged ones, as well as persons with disabilities and the non-disabled. The digital divide includes inaccessibility of infrastructure for ICT and the Internet, as well as English language skills. These problems are acute in rural areas. The multimedia environment and graphics-based electronic information are creating new forms of barriers for people with visual disabilities.

47. Based on information from a disability survey in the Republic of Korea (the most advanced ICT environment in the region) which revealed that persons with disabilities have 75 per cent less opportunity to access the Internet than non-disabled persons, legislation has been passed to implement measures to redress the imbalance in computer literacy between persons with and without disabilities. Japan has issued information accessibility guidelines for Japanese personal computer manufacturers, thus involving the private sector as a partner. Accessibility was reported as an emerging concern in Hong Kong, China; Thailand; and Turkey, where free access to computers was made available.

48. Indeed, access to communications technology and computer literacy has the capacity to transform the lives of persons with disabilities, greatly enhancing their capacity to pursue gainful livelihoods. Five targets are set to improve the situation:

(1) By 2005, persons with disabilities should have at least the same rate of access to the Internet and related services as other citizens in a country;

(2) By 2004, international organizations should incorporate accessibility standards for persons with disabilities into their international ICT standards;

(3) Governments should adopt, by 2005, ICT accessibility guidelines for persons with disabilities in their national ICT policies;

(4) Governments should develop and coordinate a standardized sign language and finger Braille in each country and disseminate and teach the results through all means, i.e., publications, CD-ROMs, etc.;

(5) Governments should establish a system in each country to train and dispatch sign language interpreters, Braille transcribers, finger Braille interpreters and human readers and to encourage their productive employment.

#### **G. Poverty alleviation through capacity-building, social security and sustainable livelihood programmes**

49. Increasingly the link between poverty and disability and the unmet needs of the majority of disabled persons living in rural areas is being recognized. The capacities of persons with disabilities must be developed so that they may contribute to community-based solutions to the particular problems that they face. Governments need to ensure that vulnerable persons with disabilities are

able to access health, education, training and employment services and are integrated into community development programmes. The low rates of access to appropriate education for children with disabilities and high rates of unemployment for youth and adults with disabilities in rural areas both need urgent attention.

50. Persons with disabilities are the poorest of the poor. It is estimated that 160 million persons with disabilities in the region, over 40 per cent of the total, are living in poverty, unable to benefit from their socio-economic rights. It is also estimated that 70 to 80 per cent of people with disabilities in some countries of the region live below the national poverty line.

51. Research has found that a higher proportion of households having members with disabilities were living below the poverty line and had lower total assets, smaller land holdings and greater debt than households without disabled members. The unemployment rate has been at least twice or even three times that of non-disabled people. When disabled people are employed, there is a greater tendency for them to be underemployed relative to their levels of training.

52. Malnutrition in its various forms is a cause of disability as well as a contributory factor in other ailments that increase susceptibility to disabling diseases. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, there are currently 515 million Asians chronically undernourished, accounting for about two thirds of the world's hungry people.

53. Poverty and disability worsen each other when persons with disabilities are socially excluded and adequate social services are not provided.

54. The extra costs directly related to disability can be considerable. In India, a survey found that the direct cost of treatment and equipment varied from three days' to two years' income, with a mean of two months.

55. Pursuant to the United Nations Millennium Development Goal target 1, Governments should halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of persons with disabilities whose income/consumption is less than one dollar a day. Governments should integrate disability dimensions into MDG baseline data collection and analysis and allocate a certain percentage of the total rural development/poverty alleviation funds to persons with disabilities.

## **H. Disability statistics and research**

56. The establishment of national databases is essential to provide accurate information on people with disabilities and their situations, without which it is difficult to plan appropriate services and monitor progress towards the achievement of full participation and equality.

57. Many Governments have taken action to collect data on disabilities. Ten Governments have developed a national disability database and five Governments are planning to develop one. Some countries have data collection to include information on children with disabilities vis-à-vis education, others a database focused on industrial profiles and job opportunities for people with disabilities. Five Governments have established databases to collect information on users of various services available to people with disabilities.

58. In the Pacific island economies, comprehensive and specific disability surveys were undertaken in some areas and further surveys are planned for others. The Republic of Korea has been conducting national surveys on disability every five years, the findings of which have supported policy changes to address disability issues.

59. There still remain many problems in this area: data collection is not transparent in some contexts; it does not reflect the full extent of disability and this renders comparison of data meaningless. These limitations are due in part to the conceptual framework adopted, the scope and coverage of the surveys undertaken and the definitions, classifications and methodology used.

60. A common system of definition and classification of disability is not uniformly applied in the region. Two strategies are set to solve the problem. Strategy 8 of BMF calls for Governments to develop, by 2005, their system for disability-related data collection and analysis. Strategy 9 calls for Governments to adopt, by 2005, definitions on disability based on the United Nations publication, *Guidelines and Principles for the Development of Disability Statistics*.

### **I. Rights-based legislation**

61. Thirteen Governments out of 37 survey respondents have adopted comprehensive disability legislation, 9 Governments reported that legislation was in preparation and 27 have enacted, or are in the process of revising, extensive additional specific legislation or regulations. Measures for the enforcement and enactment of anti-discrimination legislation have also been undertaken by a number of Governments.

62. Several good practices of national laws are found in the Law of China, the 1991 Act of Thailand, the Magna Carta in the Philippines and related national laws in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam. The new Constitution of Timor-Leste, which was adopted in August 2001, includes two articles that refer to the rights of people with disabilities.

63. A major challenge in this area is the establishment of stricter mechanisms for the enforcement of legislation and the application of penalties for non-compliance.

64. Strategy 2 of BMF calls for Governments to examine the adoption and implementation of non-discrimination policies. Strategy 3 draws attention to national human rights institutions as agencies to protect disabled people's rights. Strategy 4 calls for Governments to actively involve

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persons with disabilities in policy development. Strategy 5 calls for Governments to consider ratifying the core international human rights treaties. Strategy 6 calls for Governments to consider support for the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities. Strategy 7 calls on Governments to include persons with disabilities and their organizations, in their procedures at the national, regional and international levels, concerning the drafting and adoption of the proposed human rights convention on disability.

### **III. ESCAP ACTIVITIES DURING 2003**

65. Taking into consideration the above-mentioned conditions and targets, ESCAP has programmed well-focused activities to be undertaken during 2003, in the following areas:

- (a) An international convention to protect and promote the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities;
- (b) Access to information and ICT;
- (c) Women and disability;
- (d) Access to built environments;
- (e) Poverty and disability;
- (f) Regional networking;
- (g) Disability statistics.

#### **A. An international convention to protect and promote the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities**

66. In 2003, three consecutive activities have been planned on the elaboration of an international convention. First, an Expert Group Meeting and Seminar on an International Convention to Protect and Promote the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities was held at Bangkok from 2 to 4 June 2003.

67. In pursuance of previous United Nations resolutions, this Expert Group Meeting and Seminar was held to generate a regional input to the elaboration of an international convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. It increased awareness and interest among civil society organizations, particularly human rights NGOs, and Governments in the region with regard to the international convention. The training seminar component of this activity greatly helped to empower people with disabilities themselves by enhancing their knowledge of the human rights issues and negotiation skills, and to ensure their active participation in the national process of elaborating the convention.

68. As requested in General Assembly resolution 57/229 of 18 December 2002, the recommendations of this Expert Group Meeting and Seminar (Bangkok recommendations) were

made available by ESCAP to the Ad Hoc Committee at its second session, held in New York from 16 to 27 June 2003.

69. It will also serve as a main background document for two forthcoming meetings on the subject to be organized by ESCAP during the second half of this year, at Bangkok (October) and Beijing (November).

70. The participants in the first Bangkok Expert Group Meeting were convinced that a new international human rights treaty was necessary to ensure that persons with disabilities fully enjoy their human rights in the region.

71. Notwithstanding possible limitations and shortcomings, the move towards a new international convention for people with disabilities will have positive effects on Governments in the region and their development of anti-discriminatory national laws and policies to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities.

#### **B. Access to information and ICT**

72. From 2003 forward, all ESCAP regional meetings and workshops on disability will utilize the standard format of accessible electronic reporting, including e-proceedings and virtual on-line discussion with a fully accessible standard format of web site home pages and CDs to accommodate the special needs of blind end-users. In 2003, ESCAP and the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability (APCD) co-organized a regional workshop on accessible web page-based networking for people with disabilities.

#### **C. Women and disability**

73. Strengthening the capacity of women with disabilities and their organizations is a priority if persons with disabilities are to take responsibility for their own development, in partnership with Governments and NGOs.

74. ESCAP is implementing a project designed to provide a good package of advocacy skills by organizing two consecutive training workshops targeting mainly women with disabilities. The workshops' agenda will cover the BMF targets and enhance the understanding of the concept of gender mainstreaming among NGOs and SHOs of persons with disabilities so that they will be familiar with and accept BMF and be motivated to take the necessary actions to achieve the BMF goals, particularly those related to women and disability. Beneficiaries will include policy makers of national and international NGOs and SHOs in addition to some governmental organizations. The project will promote a rights-based approach through training sessions to generate unified ESCAP regional support for the ongoing process of elaborating an international convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.

75. This project is devised to provide advocacy skills for women with disabilities to participate actively in the national, regional and global efforts towards an international convention on protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, taking into consideration international and regional instruments and norms such as the 1993 Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

76. The recommendations from the planned workshops will be incorporated into the ESCAP regional meeting on the international convention to be held in October and provide a vital regional input to future global sessions of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities.

#### **D. Access to built environments**

77. ESCAP and APCD co-organized the Regional Training of Trainers Course on the Promotion of Non-handicapping Environments for Persons with Disabilities at Bangkok from 24 February to 11 March 2003.

78. ESCAP joined the Royal Thai Government and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) through APCD to organize this training workshop of trainers to strengthen capabilities in improving access in ESCAP developing countries. Beginning this year, APCD will be the main organizer of this training course. APCD is a joint initiative of the Government of Thailand and the Government of Japan through JICA. APCD was established as a legacy of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons concluded in 2002. Around 30 participants from nine countries, including policy makers, architects, urban planners and persons with disabilities attended this two-week training session.

#### **E. Poverty and disability**

79. ESCAP collaborated with the Colombo Plan Secretariat in organizing a training workshop on raising awareness on mainstreaming disability rights and concerns into national development across all sectors from 24 to 29 March 2003. The training was specifically designed for public sector officials in decision-making positions.

80. Some 20 participants from Colombo Plan member countries participated in the workshop. They experienced an extensive and intensive one-week training course that included a field visit to a slum area of Bangkok, exposure to an interactive panel discussion by leading local disability advocates and a disability experiential exercise, which sensitized them to issues of physical access in the built environment. The participants prepared action plans for implementation on return to their home countries.

81. The participants noted some recent improvements in mainstreaming disability issues into pro-poor development strategies and in formulating comprehensive development policies targeting persons with disabilities and their families at the national level. However, they felt that progress had been uneven and limited, and the majority of people with disabilities were prevented from receiving adequate food, balanced nutrition, productive employment and other very basic social services such as access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

82. The course curriculum covered such critical issues as (a) disability, poverty and development, (b) access to basic social services, (c) promotion of participation of persons with disabilities through social mobilization, (d) promotion of employment and income generation activities and (e) coordination mechanisms and multisectoral convergence. The policy makers particularly valued the experiential disability simulation exercise and the opportunity to visit the Klong Toey slum community in Bangkok, where they gained first-hand knowledge of the challenges faced by poor families with a disabled family member.

#### **F. Regional networking**

83. ESCAP has been organizing biannual sessions of the Thematic Working Group on Disability-related Concerns. The first session in 2003 was held at Bangkok on 5 and 6 June 2003. The Group's primary objective is to sustain the momentum towards the fulfilment of the BMF goals in the new Decade. The position of co-chairperson has been held by ESCAP, other United Nations agencies and NGOs. The membership has expanded to include 50 NGOs, some 15 government representatives and the Asian Development Bank. The Group had been active in setting targets for the final period of the first Decade and in reviewing the achievements in the implementation of the Agenda for Action.

84. The Group was instrumental in advocating the extension of the Decade, 2003-2012. Members were actively engaged in assisting ESCAP in drafting BMF. Several task forces have been formed to promote advocacy and action in fulfilment of the particular BMF targets in such areas as Education for All, including children with disabilities; employment and training; access to information and ICT; emerging issues in Timor-Leste and Afghanistan; an international convention; women and disability; and SHOs. These task forces have been very effective in raising awareness of the need to include children with disabilities in national education, promoting inclusion of concerns of persons with disabilities in regional ICT meetings and facilitating funding for a project to support national survey and disability awareness in Timor-Leste.

#### **G. Disability statistics**

85. Lack of data makes it difficult to assess improvements achieved during the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons. Clearly, further action is needed to achieve full participation and equality.

86. ESCAP is organizing a training workshop on disability measurement. ESCAP is attempting to offer selected member countries a forum where they can meet to discuss their problems related to measuring disability, including various issues such as definitions, classifications, standardization, data collection, sampling, reporting and identification of selected good policy indicators for monitoring purposes. The workshop could also contribute to ensuring that the Asian and Pacific perspective is taken into consideration in international disability initiatives such as the Washington Group on Disability Measurement. Currently, Australia is the only country in the region that has participated in the first two meetings of the Washington Group on Disability Measurement.

#### **IV. FUTURE CHALLENGES**

87. Achievement of the theme and goal of the new Decade is still at its very initial stages. Progress made during the first Decade was so uneven that most of the key goals of BMF will pose serious challenges in the years ahead.

88. The establishment of national statistical databases is essential to provide accurate information on people with disabilities and their situations, without which it is almost impossible to plan appropriate services and monitor progress towards the achievement of the goals. Excluded from education, people with disabilities are excluded from other opportunities and development, and condemned to live in poverty.

89. Strengthening of the capacities of women with disabilities and their organizations is a priority if persons with disabilities (both men and women) are to take responsibility for their own development, in a participatory manner and in a sustainable and mutually reinforcing partnership with Governments and NGOs.

90. Strong commitment by the Governments of the region with full regional cooperation is needed to ensure that the equal rights of all people with disabilities, including the right to participate in development and decision-making, are fully achieved in Asian and Pacific societies by 2012. By the year 2012 it is hoped that the goals of the Biwako Millennium Framework will largely have been achieved.

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