



CHAPTER SEVEN

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (ESCAP)

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Afghanistan	Kazakhstan	Republic of Korea
Armenia	Kiribati	Russian Federation
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Bangladesh	Democratic	Solomon Islands
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Georgia	Netherlands	America
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Associate Members:

American Somoa	Macao, China (China)
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French Polynesia (France)	Northern Mariana Islands
Guam (United States)	(United States)
Hong Kong, China (China)	

This year, AMUN is expanding its simulations to include one of the Economic and Social Council's (ECOSOC's) regional commissions, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Participation in ESCAP includes one or two

Representatives from each of the Member States currently on the Commission, as well as one or two member-delegations to represent the Associate Members (see list above). ESCAP will meet for all four days of the conference, and will report to a combined ECOSOC Plenary session on Tuesday afternoon.

About ESCAP

Established in Shanghai, China in 1974, ESCAP is the largest of ECOSOC's regional organizations in both the number of people and span of territory under its scope. The 62 members of ESCAP include 58 in the region; this includes not only UN Member States but also the nine ESCAP Associate Members. The geographical range of the Commission stretches from Turkey in the west to the Pacific island nation of Kiribati in the east, and from the Russian Federation in the north to New Zealand in the south. ESCAP is the most comprehensive of the United Nations five regional commissions, and addresses regional development of the Asia-Pacific region for the United Nations.

Purview of the Committee

There are three main focuses of ESCAP's work in the region: poverty reduction; managing globalization; and tracking emerging social issues. Within these areas, the Commission focuses on development issues that are best addressed through regional cooperation such as those that would benefit from regional or multi-country involvement. This includes issues that face the entire region or several countries, cross border issues, and sensitive or emerging issues that require further negotiation or advocacy. ESCAP also provides technical assistance to its members and monitors progress of, and provides advice to, countries pursuing the UN Millennium Development Goals.

Poverty and Development: Housing for the Urban Poor

As the developing world continues to grow, most of the world's population is feeling the effects. Asia, specifically, is projected to gain over 1.3 billion urban residents in the next 30 years. Projections also show Asia's rural population decreasing by roughly 20 million over the same span of time. For Asia's urban centers, this means planning for a sharp increase to what are already largely overpopulated areas.

Rapid Growth in urban population generally stems from three basic factors in the developing world: migration from rural or other urban areas, natural population increases, and reclassification of previously rural areas as urban as these areas develop and change character. While this last factor may somewhat ease the burden caused by large growth, with the type of growth projected in Asia over the next decades it is doubtful that urban reclassification will happen on a scale that would do much to assuage the population crunch projected in many urban centers. Factors such as deteriorating quality and

quantity of agricultural lands, poor market infrastructures, and a lack of supporting institutions in rural areas may force the transition from rural to urban in a much shorter period of time than would otherwise happen. These factors require urgent UN and international attention at various levels.

Within the past year, several ongoing projects have been monitored at the UN level. In addition, several resolutions were passed in the General Assembly touching on the general topic of poverty in urban areas. Throughout the process and the discussions, access to housing remains a priority and something that must be continually acted upon. Various small projects were launched between August and October 2004 in Cambodia, East Timor, Nepal and Mongolia, several specifically tied to ESCAP and its efforts in the area of poverty reduction.

The main focus of these smaller efforts was assessing the potential viability of the Housing the Urban Poor project. Undertaken on both regional and national tracks, the Project, which ran from June 2004 through May of this year, expects to accomplish three main goals. First, it aims to establish an online regional resource focused

on urban low-income housing. Second, the Project hopes to increase the capacities of country-level institutions to undertake research and training in urban low-income housing, ideally by implementing distance-learning methods. Finally, the Project aims to create pilot projects, assisting at least three cities in focused urban low-income housing projects.

Implementation of the program remains its biggest difficulty, with the ambitious goals of attempting both country-wide and regional-wide tracks of capacity building. Inputs from the regional track of implementation inevitably affect the progression of the individual country track; it is hoped that the country track will then be able to output its pilot projects through those same regional tracks.

Funding is also a major hurdle, especially with the number of partners involved. Included in the program are ESCAP, managing partners such as the Regional Network of Local Authorities for the Management of Human Settlements (CITYNET), the Network of Local Government Training and Research Institutes in Asia and the Pacific (LOGOTRI) and the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR). Input will also be provided by UN-HABITAT and UNDESA. Obviously, managing such an extensive project is complicated, but with the management focused through ESCAP, along with regular meetings at all levels, it is hoped that sufficient management will provide a more than suitable project for the participating countries.

No plans for major projects immediately following the conclusion of the Housing the Urban Poor initiative have been created. However, it is likely that many cities will still need significant assistance in managing and supporting their ever growing urban populations. Several factors may affect the growth and relative poverty level of these populations, including supporting longer-term structural interventions, alleviating labor constraints on groups like women, ensuring that social capital remains intact, and developing policies that integrate human and social capital.

The availability of financial resources remains at the heart of this matter, including who is willing to contribute to alleviating this problem. Larger, more financially secure states may balk at the idea that they should contribute funds to a problem in a completely different part of the world, Asian states themselves may not be able to contribute the necessary funding for successful implementation of housing and other poverty-related projects. It may be up to the UN, and ESCAP in particular, to ensure the adoption of appropriate programs, with the appropriate funding guaranteed, in order to garner support for projects similar to the Housing the Urban Poor initiative.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include:

- Where are the most viable sources of funding likely to come from? If not from one particular organization, is there any way to ensure funding through certain state actors or NGOs?
- Are there ways outside of financial support in which the international community can better assist future efforts in the realm of housing the urban poor?
- Are there aspects unrelated directly to the immediate issue that may affect how this situation is dealt with under the UN or other auspices?

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Moser, Caroline O.N., "How do the Urban Poor Manage in an Economic Crisis?" *Finance and Development*, Dec 1996.

Mydans, Seth, "After String of Disasters, Indonesians Ask: Why Us?" *The New York Times*, 11 Feb 2007.

UN Documents:

A/RES/61/214

A/RES/61/213

A/RES/61/157

A/RES/60/209

ECOSOC 2003/61

ECOSOC/6154

ECOSOC/6133

ECOSOC/5904

WP/07/01: ESCAP Working Paper, "Workers' Remittances, Economic Growth and Poverty in Developing Asia and the Pacific Countries," Juthathip Jongwanich

Additional Web Resources:

practicalaction.org/?id=iuhd_working_papers – Practical Action, Housing and Urban Poor

topics.developmentgateway.org/special/slumhousing – Development Gateway Communities, Slum Housing

www.achr.net – Asian Coalition for Housing Rights

www.adb.org/Projects/project.asp?id=37697 – Asian Development Bank, Urban Development Sector Project

www.idrc.ca/en/ev-8556-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html - International Development Resource Center, Asia

www.iied.org/HS/themes/urbnpov.html – International Institute for Environment and Development, Urban Poverty Page

www.worldbank.org/urban/upgrading/partnerships.html – The World Bank, Urban Services to the Poor Thematic Group

www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/HousingUrbanPoor04-05/housing-ur-poor.asp - ESCAP Housing and Urban Poor Project

Environment and Sustainable Development: Water Conservation

At least 1.1 billion people in the world are currently without access to a safe water supply and approximately 2.5 billion more are without adequate sanitation systems. The majority of these people live in developing countries. By 2025, it is estimated that 3.5 billion people will live in water-stressed countries – 6.5 times as many people as there were in the year 2000. These numbers come in the wake of an increased imbalance between water availability and water demand as the world's use and abuse of water accelerates due to population growth and economic expansion. The UN Millennium Development Goals set 2015 as the target date for reducing by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.

Asia and the Pacific, home to 60% of the world's population and 70% of the world's poor, have seen a deterioration of water quality leading to water-borne diseases and the destruction of downstream natural resources. This has led to two crucial problems. First, more than half of the regions population now lacks access to adequate sanitation systems. Second, the deterioration of water quality has impacted food availability, human health, livelihoods, and economic development. In 2006, the UN Development Programme stated that the water and sanitation crisis causes nearly two million child deaths every year. The poor are the most vulnerable to the water crisis. It is vital for socio-economic development and poverty alleviation that this issue be addressed.

Noting the importance of water management in the promotion of sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, recent international and regional conferences have addressed freshwater issues. In 2000, the ESCAP Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (MCED) identified conservation and integrated management of freshwater resources as one of the eight priority areas for the region. The Ministerial Declaration which was issued at the International Conference on Freshwater, held at Bonn in December 2001, made a call to the Secretary-General to strengthen the coordination and coherence of activities within the UN system on water issues. In 2002 and 2003, subregional workshops for South, South-West, and South-East Asia were held to promote public awareness of water conservation. Each recognized that government efforts to increase public awareness of water scarcity is a top priority in combating the decline of water quality and will promote increased efficiency of water use.

Following the 2005 Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (MCED) and ESCAP Commission Session, a new section in the Environment and Sustainable Development Division (ESDD) was established with a focus on Sustainable Development and Water Resources (SDWRS). This division will assist policy makers in achieving environmentally sustainable economic growth, "Green Growth," while also providing advice and capacity building assistance in promoting integrated water resources management. The UN Development Programme's 2006 Annual Report stated that the current water crisis seriously affects the prospects for economic and social development, political stability, as well as ecosystem integrity. The report calls for an integrated approach to water resource management through effective water governance. The 2006 UNESCAP Commission Session in Jakarta underlined the important work of strengthening regional and subregional cooperation to develop infrastructure for water resource management and conservation. The Commission stressed the importance of promoting efficiency in water use and water services as well as improvements in water productivity and conservation through public-private partnerships.

Despite the increased awareness and recent work towards achieving sustainable development and water resources management there are still many problems that must be addressed. Countries should be in the process of developing water resource management plans that account for other international agreements on issues such as climate change, trade, and finance. Water financing remains a key issue with a focus on increasing all sources of funding, including international and regional financial assistance. Education and training towards increasing water use efficiency and water quality are only in the earliest stages of development and implementation. Water institutions must be made more effective through reorienting their structure and enhancing their capacity. Finally, regional cooperation between countries must be facilitated with a means towards sharing

knowledge, best practices, and innovative technologies. These issues must be addressed if the Millennium Development Goal of reducing by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water is to be met by 2015.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include:

- How can the needs of the increasing population of Asia and the Pacific be fully met without sacrificing the sustainability of the region's finite and vulnerable freshwater resources?
- What resources will be needed in order to move towards sustainable water conservation and what are the necessary steps to achieving equal access to these resources?
- What types of systems, institutions, or regulations should be created in order to ensure that the UN Millennium Development Goal's will be met by 2015?
- What specific issues or problems does sustainable water conservation pose to your country?

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A/RES/59/228
APFED1/02/Ref.3
E/2003/61
E/ESCAP/1390
ST/ESCAP/2379
UNDP 2006 Annual Report

Additional Web Resources:

- www.lakemerced.org/WorldWater/worldwater.html - Friends of Lake Merced's Water Conservancy World Wide
- www.unescap.org/esd/water/ - ESCAP Sustainable Development and Water
- www.undp.org/water/index.html - UN Development Programme, Energy and Environment, Water Governance
- www.watertreaty.org - Watertreaty.org Web site