



Video

Global food crisis: A harbinger of what is to come, unless we act wisely

Deputy Secretary-General, Asha-Rose Migiro, urged action on the food crisis during a special session of the Economic and Social Council on 20 May. To avoid facing the same crisis next year or the year after, "We need to rethink the failed policies of the past. We need new strategies for development that work."

<http://webcast.un.org/ramgen/ondemand/specialevents/2008/se080520pm.rm> (9 minutes)

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World economy on the edge

Continuing credit crunch, declining U.S. dollar, rising prices for food and fuel all point to economic downturn

The year 2008 marks a major transition in global economic and social development with the waning of the era of cheap and plentiful fossil fuels, accelerating pressures on commodity prices, particularly those of food, and worsening impacts of climate change on livelihoods and well-being as well as a slow-down in the growth of the world economy from the 3.8 per cent registered in 2007 to an estimated 1.8 per cent in 2008.

These factors are increasing inequalities and risk compromising the achievement of the internationally

agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Bold and concerted policy action by both developed and developing countries can, however, serve to improve global economic and social performance in 2008 and 2009. Additionally, a reformed international reserve system and better financial regulation and safety nets would help improve financial conditions and confidence to prevent the recurrence of similar crises.

A severe economic downturn

According to the World Economic Situation and Prospects 2008 mid-year update, the global economy is teetering on the brink of a severe economic downturn. The deepening credit crisis in major developed market economies, as triggered by the continuing housing slump, the declining value of the United States dollar vis-à-vis other major currencies, persisting global imbalances, and the soaring oil and

non-oil commodity prices are slowing growth of the global economy.

Without aggressive and coordinated expansionary policies, a more pessimistic scenario could occur, which could trigger a disorderly unwinding of the massive global imbalances and have drastic implications for global trade and finance. In addition, the steep rise in food and energy costs is compounding the downside risks, particularly in view of the unfolding food crisis, which poses a threat to social and political stability. The dollar may still decline another 15 per cent in value under this scenario in 2008, although slackening demand may dampen further oil price rises so as to achieve an average price of \$95 per barrel for the year.



What is needed in response to this crisis is a multilaterally-coordinated stimulus package centred on the expansion of domestic demand in surplus countries, while staying within existing fiscal capacity; deep reforms in mechanisms of international financial regulation and supervision; and meeting emergency food needs, while setting longer term strategies for alleviating supply constraints and improving food security. According to Rob Vos, Director of the Development Policy and Analysis Division, “the United Nations system, including a more inclusive IMF, should take the lead in forging concerted policy action and address the food crisis.”

Concerted macroeconomic policy action needed

A concerted macroeconomic policy action plan would involve reducing global imbalances while avoiding an economic downturn, including a rebalancing of domestic demand between surplus and deficit countries and a smooth realignment of exchange rates. More importantly, the root causes of the imbalances need to be addressed to prevent their reappearance in the future, through measures such as

reforming the international reserve system and strengthening financial regulation and safety nets.

A multilaterally-coordinated stimulus package for the global economy would include the expansion of domestic demand in surplus countries as well as more proactive public policies. Several industrial economies such as Japan, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Norway and Canada, as well as the emerging market economies of East Asia and the main oil exporters can help through expansionary domestic fiscal and monetary policies.

Surplus countries can gain much from using their accumulated reserves to generate income, employment and improve wealth distribution at home. For its part, caught between addressing its twin trade and fiscal deficits and the grimmer prospect of a recession that may reduce GDP by 0.2 percent in 2008, the United States has opted for expansionary domestic monetary and fiscal policies. However, the recovery of the United States economy will also need the external stimulus of increased demand for its exports from its major surplus trading partners through an expansion of their economies.

A coordinated response to the food crisis

Against the backdrop of the global macroeconomic slowdown, the present food crisis presents an additional threat to human well-being. Addressing the food crisis requires internationally-concerted measures. In addition to the emergency assistance spelled out by the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator, major policy reforms are required in developed and developing countries to achieve a sustainable solution to the crisis. Abolishing agricultural subsidies in developed countries will probably benefit farmers in developing countries in the long run, despite causing short-term world food price increases.

The food crisis reflects both a long unheeded problem of low agricultural productivity in developing countries and the poor’s lack of access to affordable food. In the long run, increasing productivity through investments in water supply, infrastructure, improved seeds and fertilizers, education and agricultural research and development will be essential not only to deal with the present food crisis, but to allay persistent and widespread rural poverty. Improving access of producers to agricultural land, affordable inputs, and infrastructure would increase the productivity of food production and lead to significant reductions in rural poverty and

better nutrition. Agriculture must, therefore, become a policy priority at both the national and international levels.

A multilateral reserve system?

For a lasting solution to the current global economic crisis, both financial regulation and the international reserve system also need to be revised. Reforms of both national and international financial regulation and supervision are needed and policy makers need to pay more attention to preventing the harmful effects of financial exuberance.

Under present banking and finance rules, risk assessments tend to react to problems after they have occurred rather than foreseeing or forestalling them. By way of example, lenders are required to raise more capital only after liquidity problems occur rather than in anticipation of them. Current national regulations and international regulations such as the Basel II agreements, which have been crafted on risk assessment models developed by commercial banks themselves, are insufficiently geared to address contagion effects of crises across countries and markets or the herd behaviour of financial markets. Deeper regulatory reform, motivated primarily by the public interest, is urgently needed to avert future crises such as the recent sub-prime mortgage debacle and the resulting housing slump.

The international reserve system, too, is in acute need of reform. Under the current system based on the United States dollar as the reserve currency, the only way for the rest of the world to accumulate reserves is for the United States to run an external deficit. Over time, such a pattern inevitably erodes the value of the dollar, enhancing costs for countries to continue to hold vast amounts of reserves, and this may well cause a run on the dollar, probably with strong destabilizing consequences that will be felt worldwide.

The emergence of a new, supranational currency, based on scaling up Special Drawing Rights, the international unit of account based on a basket of currencies, is probably the ideal solution for redesigning the global reserve system in a stable way, but will require nimble negotiation and considerable building of political will over the long-term.

The more immediate and feasible reform would be to promote an officially-backed multi-currency reserve system. By diversifying their reserve holdings away from the dollar, many surplus countries have started to move in this direction. This concept should prove

as compelling as the pursuit of a multilateral trading system. Similar to multilateral trade rules, a well-designed multilateral financial system should create equal conditions for all parties and avoid unfair competition and an asymmetric burden-sharing of exchange-rate adjustments. It should also help to increase stability in the international financial system.

Lasting systemic reform

The way out of the present global economic crisis will involve coordinated domestic and international policy actions in the short term and deep reform of the financial and trading system in the long term. The present crisis cries out for the type of concerted and people-centred reform that only a truly multilateral system such as that of the United Nations can spearhead. The five-year review of the International Conference on Financing for Development in Doha from 29 November to 2 December provides a golden opportunity to chart out an authentically multilateral and just reform of the international financial system.

Likewise, a successful conclusion of the Doha Round of Trade Negotiations so as to favour economic and social development in all countries through a fairer trading system, will also contribute to more stable global economy. Ultimately, it is the active involvement of citizens in developed and developing countries, concerned about the negative welfare effects of financial and commodity crises such as the present ones, that can pressure their governments to effect such systemic reforms with human well-being in mind, rather than financial interests alone. Transparent and inclusive multilateral forums, particularly those of the United Nations system, with broad multi-stakeholder involvement, can show the way.

For more information: <http://www.un.org/esa/policy/>



Rob Vos, Director of the Development and Policy Analysis presents the mid-2008 update of DESA's World Economic Situation and Prospects, accompanied by Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development

<http://webcast.un.org/ramgen/ondemand/pressconference/2008/pc080515am.rm> (55 minutes)

Renewed thrust for sustainable development

Integrated approaches to economic growth, social progress, and environmental protection are in the spotlight as world events threaten well-being

The present economic slowdown, the rising price of oil, the growing food crisis, the worsening impacts of climate change and Africa's difficulties in meeting the Millennium Development Goals all reflect the glaring neglect of sustainable development in developed and developing countries. There is a pressing need around the world for the effective integration of economic growth, social progress and environmental protection. This year, the United Nations is actively seeking to address this need by spearheading a renewed thrust for sustainable development.

Special meetings of the Economic and Social Council, Security Council, and the Food and Agricultural Organization devoted to the global food crisis, as well as the sixteenth meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and the Secretary-General's Task Force on the Food Crisis, have served to put sustainable agriculture back in the centre of the development agenda, where it belongs.

Member states have recognized that we need to concentrate efforts on minimizing greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation and global warming, while finding ways to promote investments in agriculture and maximize the use of agro-science and technology. The aim is to reduce the costs of production and substantially increasing the productivity and output of every hectare of arable land. There is need for greater investment in agriculture, particularly in Africa, which will require the best science, tools and technologies to optimize efficiency and boost production as well as policies that support land and resource ownership. Increased oil prices have played a role in rising food prices. A sustainable solution to the food crisis must therefore be linked to oil price stability and our efforts to tackle climate change.

The unprecedented global attention and commitment to forestalling climate change provides a unique opportunity for pursuing the sustainable development agenda. As DESA Under-Secretary-General Sha Zukang has noted, "Climate change is a sustainable development challenge," rather than only a geophysical one. The increasingly development-oriented Bali-to-Copenhagen negotiation process of

the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which aims to establish a post-2012 governance framework for climate change, and the stronger collaboration between the secretariats of this convention and those on biodiversity and desertification all signal a clear political will to go beyond the intergovernmental and national policy silos which have held back the integration of economic, social and environmental goals so far.

Environment: rapidly deteriorating

In order to provide further guidance to coordinating the many intergovernmental efforts on sustainable development, the 2008 Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council is devoted to implementing the internationally-agreed development goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development. Global preparations for the review included a six-week electronic discussion which elicited 110 responses from experts, practitioners and policy makers from various regions and stakeholder groups and made specific recommendations for the Council's action.



The e-discussion identified three major economic and financial constraints that have stymied sustainable development: the competing claims for limited resources, particularly in the least developed countries, undelivered pledges made at international conferences to finance sustainable development, and externalities such as increased oil prices, recurring violent conflicts and natural disasters that affect the development model. Participants recommended new and different vehicles for growth, tailored to specific country situations, government incentives to make the private sector a problem solver rather than a polluter, incentives to increase the use of labour in agriculture and diversity production from monoculture, encouragement of a circular system of production and consumption, relying on clean

technologies without resource waste, instead of the classic linear system of production and consumption.

The Secretary-General's report to the Council further reveals that sustainable development as a concept has been generally adopted in principle in public and private circles around the world but often not in practice. Some approaches offer benefits in all three areas of sustainable development – the economic, social and environmental – but often there are costs and trade-offs involved. Generally, while there has been some progress on the economic and social aspects of sustainable development, greater efforts are required, particularly on the long-term sustainability issues of climate change, desertification, deforestation, biodiversity and marine resources, areas where the situation is rapidly deteriorating. There is, therefore, an urgent need to implement effectively the global consensus on Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and Millennium Development Goal number seven on environmental sustainability.

Solutions for today

The Secretary-General's report makes recommendations in a range of areas, including in strengthening governance, creating markets for sustainable development, strengthening global cooperation, increasing financial assistance and promoting the transfer of technology. Specifically, the report recommends that member states renew their commitment to sustainable development at the international and national levels, assess and replicate successful policies, all approve policy frameworks for integrating economic, social and environmental objectives, build international expert networks, establish an enabling environment for international carbon markets, expand the clean development mechanism, introduce environmental national accounts to internalise environmental costs in production and consumption decisions, promote an African green revolution, provide market incentives for protecting biodiversity and expand protected areas, and undertake a systematic review of financing for sustainable development. Technical and financial assistance should specifically target public sector capacities for integrating economic, social and environmental goals and activities.

The Council, as a neutral intergovernmental space devoted to economic, social and environmental matters, is ideally placed to channel and mainstream into the economic and social agenda the energies from the diverse intergovernmental bodies that focus specifically on sustainable development and

environmental matters, including its own functional commission, the Commission on Sustainable Development, the conferences of parties of the conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification, the UNEP Governing Council, the executive boards of the funds and programmes, and the governing bodies of the specialized agencies with specific mandates in environmental sustainability. There are clearly important additional synergies yet to be realized within the sustainable development architecture of the United Nations. The landmark Annual Ministerial Review meeting on this topic is the next important step in realizing them.

Following through on the outcomes of the meeting, as well as on all other intergovernmental decisions on sustainable development, has to involve coherent actions not only in governing bodies but also at the operational level and in the practices of producers and consumers around the world. "Solutions cannot wait," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned at this year's session of the Commission. "The world is looking for concrete action as well as new ideas on how to tackle the formidable challenges we face in the months and years ahead." The crisis resulting from the effects of climate change and insufficient sustainable development makes such follow-through at all levels a moral imperative for humankind.

For more information:

<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/>

Global dialogue on development

World economy, aid effectiveness, sustainable development take centre stage at ECOSOC 2008

The Economic and Social Council's substantive session unfolds in New York from 30 June to 25 July

A reformed Economic and Social Council gets into high gear this year with the first biennial Development Cooperation Forum taking place alongside the Annual Ministerial Review and other significant policy dialogues. The 2008 substantive session, of which the DCF and AMR are a part, takes place in New York from 30 June to 25 July.

The session opens with a high-level segment, from 30 June to 3 July, in four parts. Executive heads of the international financial and trade institutions will kick off day one with a policy-dialogue on the state of the world economy and its implications for the achievement of the United Nations development agenda. The dialogue, which will be moderated by DESA Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Sha Zukang, features Supachai Panitchpakti, Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Pascal Lamy, Director-General of the World Trade Organization, Justin Lin, Chief Economist at the World Bank and a representative from the International Monetary Fund.

The Development Cooperation Forum follows on 30 June and 1 July with discussions of aid allocation, South-South and triangular development cooperation, the impact of civil society organizations, national capacity to absorb aid, and the use of aid to support national development strategies. Some eighty ministers or directors-general responsible for development cooperation in developing and developed countries are expected to attend. Council President, Leo Mérorès, and Secretary-General Ban-Ki-moon will open the event. DESA Under-Secretary-General, Sha Zukang, will introduce the main report on trends and progress in international development cooperation.

At the Annual Ministerial Review, on 2 and 3 July, eight developing and developed countries will report on the progress they have made towards the goals and targets of the United Nations Development Agenda.

Ministerial roundtables will address the question of how to put the world onto a sustainable development path.

The high-level segment concludes on 3 July with a thematic debate on rural development, intended as a follow-up to the Council's ministerial declaration of 2003 on this topic. Taking into account the global food crisis, bio-energy and other emerging issues, the debate is expected to address questions of food security, energy needs, rural employment, water usage, land rights, technology, small business innovation, and market access.

Innovation Fair

To showcase best innovative experiences and mobilize a wide range of stakeholders in support of successful development activities, an innovation fair will be held in parallel to the high-level segment to allow for interaction between policy makers and authors of innovative experiences. The fair provides an opportunity for the private sector, foundations and other civil society organizations to share examples of innovative products, approaches or practices and to disseminate them more widely to Member States and other actors. Innovations in pollution management, energy use, corporate social and environmental responsibility, climate change, desertification, human settlements and slums, community development, biodiversity and a range of other areas will be featured.

Policy review of operational activities

The operational activities segment will provide a platform for the Council to consider the triennial comprehensive policy review of UN system operational activities for development. A series of high-level interactive dialogues and panel discussions will take place, focusing on the role of the UN system in a changing aid environment, strengthening UN development system's responsiveness to the different needs of programme countries and a dialogue with the heads of funds and programmes. The Council will have before it reports on the management process to implement the triennial review, on the functioning of the resident coordinator system, and a statistical analysis of the financing of operational activities for development.

Humanitarian consequences of natural disasters, climate change, food aid

The humanitarian affairs segment will take place from 15 to 17 July on the theme of building

capabilities and capacities at all levels for timely humanitarian assistance, including disaster risk reduction. The humanitarian consequences of natural disasters, including the impact of climate change, and humanitarian challenges related to global food aid will be the subject of two panel debates. Each panel will feature high-level participation from affected governments, relevant UN agencies, NGOs and experts.

On the morning of 15 July, in between the operational activities and humanitarian affairs segments, there will be a related informal event on coordination in the transition phase between emergency relief and sustainable recovery. The aim of this panel is to highlight the efforts that the United Nations and the World Bank are making to promote a common understanding of needs of countries in post-crisis transition and to address the essential of increasing national ownership of the recovery and development process as well as the strengthening of the partnership between the UN and Bretton Woods institutions.

In the margins of the humanitarian affairs segment there will be also several informal side events on issues such as the consolidated appeals process mid-year review, the independent central emergency response fund evaluation, the use of military assets in natural disaster relief, internal displaced persons in the context of natural disasters, gender-mainstreaming and the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action.

Global oversight and coordination

During the general segment, from 18 to 24 July, the Council will review the reports of its subsidiary bodies and other United Nations entities. The Council will assess the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of and follow-up to major UN conferences and summits and will review, in particular, progress made in the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries as well as the coordinated implementation of the Habitat agenda.

The question of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the UN system will also be discussed. Finally, the Council will review the work of some UN inter-agency mechanisms, such as the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Tobacco Control and the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics.

For more information: <http://www.un.org/ecosoc/>

Rome forum on aid effectiveness

Preparations for the upcoming Development Cooperation Forum will conclude with a stakeholder forum in Rome on 12 and 13 June

To ensure a comprehensive consultative process for the 2008 Development Cooperation Forum, the DESA Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination is supporting several country-led events. A stakeholder forum in Rome from 12 to 13 June, organized in cooperation with the Government of Italy, will conclude this process by engaging parliamentarians and high-level representatives from civil society and local governments in an open and interactive dialogue on their roles in contributing to effective development cooperation.

Through partnerships with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, United Cities and Local Governments, CIVICUS and Action Aid, the one-and-a-half day forum will focus on the critical role these actors play in guiding, managing and monitoring development cooperation. Each covering different aspects of the development process, these actors are all instrumental in ensuring that development cooperation benefits and reaches the people with the greatest need.

The meeting is organized around three segments and common plenary sessions, with presentations, country-based case studies and discussions addressing two main issues. First, aid quality and effectiveness will be considered with an emphasis on the role of civil society actors, parliamentarians and local governments. Second, cooperation at the local level will be reviewed with an eye on recent trends in decentralized development cooperation.

As a major preparatory event for the 2008 Forum, the Rome event is meant to ensure that the perspectives of representatives from civil society, local governments and parliaments on how to enhance effective and coherent development cooperation receive attention at the international level.

For more information:

<http://www.un.org/ecosoc/newfunct/dcfrome.shtml>

Sustainable development forum calls for more investment in research



The Commission on Sustainable Development wrapped up its annual session on 16 May by emphasizing the need for ramping up investment in research and development in innovative and sustainable agricultural technologies and infrastructure in poor countries.

The Commission, concluding two weeks of discussions in New York, examined the obstacles and barriers that have prevented sustainable development in the areas of agriculture, land use, rural development, drought, desertification and Africa. Countries will now follow-up on these issues with policy recommendations at next year's meeting.

The session also provided a foundation for international discussions on the global food crises that took place in the Economic and Social Council – of which the Commission is a subsidiary body – on 20 May in New York.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in an address earlier this week, said that “after a quarter century of relative neglect, agriculture is back on the international agenda, sadly with a vengeance. The onset of the current food crisis has highlighted the fragility of our success in feeding the world's growing population with the technologies of the first green revolution and subsequent agricultural improvements.”

The Secretary-General stressed that agriculture needs invigorating. “We need to work together to develop a new generation of technologies and farming methods which make possible a second green revolution, one which permits sustainable yield improvements with minimal environmental damage and contributes to sustainable development goals.”

Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Sha Zukang said: “We do need to address the runaway food prices as an emergency. We need to take quick, targeted action to deliver emergency food aid to the people in need.” But he added that crisis management was not enough. “We need to make sure it does not happen again.”

Many countries expressed concern that a number of factors had contributed to the present situation, including climate change, unfair trade policies, poor land management, biofuel production, and a lack of roads and access to markets in rural agricultural areas.

Almost 60 ministers attended the CSD, along with 680 representatives from 126 nongovernmental organizations. Representatives from civil society, including women, farmers, science, business, children and youth, local authorities, workers and trade unions, indigenous peoples and nongovernmental organizations participated far more extensively than in the past.

Participants also elected Gerda Verburg, the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality in the Netherlands, as the next chair of the Commission – the first time that the subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council will be led by a woman.

Based on UN press release of 16 May. For more information:

<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/review.htm>

Civil society and business asked to weigh in on financing for development

Doha preparations advance to next stage as Assembly concludes informal review of Monterrey Consensus

As part of the preparatory process of the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development, interactive hearings with representatives of civil society and the business sector will be held in New York on 18 June. These stakeholder consultations come on the heels of a series of six informal review sessions on the thematic areas of the Monterrey Consensus, convened by the General Assembly to ensure a successful outcome at the main event in Doha in November this year.

The thematic review sessions, held from 14 February to 20 May, each included an initial panel discussion comprising five experts nominated by governments and relevant stakeholders, followed by a policy debate.

Review session wrap-up

The first session, on mobilizing domestic financial resources for development, focused on the role of government, as well as on macroeconomic and social policies in domestic resource mobilization. Speakers highlighted that, since the adoption of the Monterrey Consensus in 2002, developing countries had made important progress in many areas of domestic resource mobilization. However, many challenges remained. Poverty was still on the increase in several countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, income inequalities persisted and rates of unemployment and underemployment were still very high in the developing world.

During the second review session, on mobilizing international resources for development, participants exchanged views on the quantity and quality of international private resource flows to developing countries and discussed policies to enhance the development impact of those flows. Many speakers stressed that private flows could serve to reduce poverty and stimulate economic growth. There was widespread concern, however, that foreign direct investment remains concentrated in a few countries. Moreover, speakers emphasized that while developing countries should create appropriate incentives to attract productive foreign capital, they must be cautious of short-term and potentially destabilizing capital flows.

Delegates at the third review session – on external debt – stressed that, overall, the debt indicators of developing countries had improved markedly since 2002. Most developing countries had debt management programmes in place and had built reserves, reducing vulnerability. The implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative and Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative had led to a significant reduction of the debt burden of many developing countries. It was also pointed out, however, that there was a considerable transfer of resources from the South to the North, partly because of debt servicing. A large number of countries still faced very high or unsustainable debt servicing burdens. Calls were made for a debt resolution mechanism aimed at guaranteeing fair burden sharing among debtors and creditors.

A fourth session focused on addressing systemic issues such as enhancing the coherence and consistency of the international monetary, financial and trading systems in support of development. Participants discussed new trends in international finance, including the increased role of emerging

economies, growing global current account imbalances, the emergence of a new generation of financial crises, excessive global liquidity and the continued marginalization of international financial institutions, especially the Bretton Woods institutions. Several discussants noted that international financial institutions had governance, financial and credibility problems. There was a wide convergence of views that the voice and representation of developing countries must be further strengthened in international economic decision-making and norm-setting.

Increasing international financial and technical cooperation for development was the subject of a fifth meeting at which it was noted that ODA trends since Monterrey showed an increase between 2002 and 2005, followed by two consecutive years of decline in 2006 and 2007. Participants expressed the view that the Doha Conference should seek to give greater predictability for meeting the agreed ODA commitments. South-South cooperation, including triangular cooperation, was seen as an important aspect of development cooperation. Emerging donors could contribute to lessons learned from their own development experience. Many speakers highlighted that aid quality and effectiveness depended significantly on national ownership, domestic policies and regulatory frameworks, as well as the alignment of ODA with national policy objectives.

Finally, at a sixth session on international trade as an engine for development, participants called for a universal, rule-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system. The Doha Development Round should be concluded by the end of 2008, so that trade could play its full part in promoting economic growth, employment and development for all. Participants highlighted the potential for trade liberalization to increase export earnings and promote economic growth. Numerous speakers emphasized the growing importance of South-South trade. Many participants insisted that trade liberalization had to be synchronized with conditions in developing countries. Aid for trade could help build capacity to ensure higher productivity in developing countries and enable them to better compete in the global market place.

For more information: <http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/>

Trends and analysis

Environmental accounting gains ground

Statistical experts gather in New York starting 25 June on water, energy, pollution, climate change and other pressing data needs

Environmental and economic accounting is a branch of the System of National Accounts that helps policy analysts measure the contribution of the environment to economic activity and, conversely, of the impact of economic activity on the environment. An explicit connection between the two can help decision-makers to plan more sustainable modes of development.

The international environmental and economic accounting standard, commonly known as SEEA 2003, comprises four modules: flow accounts for pollution, energy and materials; environmental protection and resource management; natural resources assets; and valuation of non-market flow and environmentally adjusted macroeconomic aggregates. According to a 2007 assessment of SEEA take-up, seventy percent of countries currently compile such accounts at the national level or are planning to do so in the near future, with water statistics being the most significant area of concern for developed and developing regions alike.

At its third meeting, scheduled for 26 and 27 June in New York, the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting will consider a proposed revision to its terms of reference to cover standards for environmental statistics in addition to the SEEA. The day before, on 25 June, a special session will be devoted to emerging work on measurement of climate change.

The Committee is a technical advisory body of ECOSOC's Statistical Commission whose members are high-level experts from national governments and international organizations with a broad range of experience in statistics and in the uses of environmental-economic accounts. The Committee

For more information:
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/>

Converging on population estimates

UN system team, led by DESA, is reviewing methodological differences that can blur analysis

Reliable population estimates are vital to development research and are widely used by analysts in the UN system and around the world. Yet, varying sources of information and definitions have led to discrepancies among agencies producing population figures, thereby clouding understanding of policy options at the national and international levels. The problem is most pronounced in developing regions where many countries do not yet have the capacity to produce continuous and consistent time series of population estimates between official censuses.

To rectify the situation, DESA's Population Division has been asked to engage in more extensive consultations with countries. The Population Division is leading a team of UN system experts: (a) to review and recommend ways to improve consultations with countries that are in the process of producing national estimates; (b) to indicate to agencies how to factor in changes in the population figures from one revision to the next; and (c) to discuss ways to address the concern that there are no internationally agreed standards for annual population statistics.

The task team, which operates under the aegis of the inter-agency Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, met in New York on May 19 and 20. Aside from identifying problems and shortcoming of available population estimates, participants in the May session emphasized the importance of expanding collaboration between DESA and the UN regional commissions, the desire for national statistical offices to release basic census results quickly, and the need for the Population Division to keep partners informed of major changes in estimates and methodology.

For more information:
http://unstats.un.org/unsd/workpartner_ccsa.htm

Information society and the role of legislators

Global Centre for ICT in Parliament brings legislators together to explore information access, security, standards, and rights

A parliamentary forum on the information was organized the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament – a joint initiative of DESA and the Inter-Parliamentary Union – in Geneva on 14 and 15 May. The forum brought together about ninety members of parliament responsible for information society issues from some forty countries. During the two-day event, participants shared country experiences in advancing the information society and engaged in debates about the role of parliaments in ensuring equitable access, data protection, open standards, and fundamental internet rights.

The event ended with broad consensus on the need to enhance information-sharing and on the importance of contributing a parliamentary dimension to implementation of the goals of the World Summit on the Information Society. The forum was organized as part of the cluster of WSIS-related events taking place in Geneva from 13 to 30 May.

For more information:

<http://www.ictparliament.org/parliamentaryforum/>

Technical cooperation

Knowledge networking for African legislatures

Parliamentary officials gather in Cairo from 4 to 5 June for Pan-African networking event

Government representatives from across Africa will gather in Cairo on 4 and 5 June to work out modalities for establishing a regional knowledge network among elected officials and staff of the continent's parliamentary organs. With a focus on legislative processes, research, and information technology, the proposed network is intended to promote collaboration, knowledge-sharing and mutual support on an ongoing basis. Conference participants will be invited to finalize a charter for the regional initiative, and iron out an action plan for its operation.

A number of technical sessions will be held in parallel to provide training for interested individuals in the network's three priority areas. About 150 people are expected to attend the Cairo event, including speakers and presidents of parliament, legislative officials and staff, representatives from the United Nations system, parliaments outside the African region and other development partners.

Entitled "Building open and learning Parliaments in Africa," the conference has been organized by the People's Assembly of Egypt together with DESA's Division for Public Administration and Development Management and the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, and is being held under the auspices of the Pan African Parliament – the legislative arm of the African Union based in South Africa.

For more information:

<http://apkn.parliaments.info/conference/objectives>

Stronger local government in Africa, as in Italy

Italian study tour for African officials, from 11-21 June, stresses decentralization for enhanced accountability

Four representatives of African authorities will take part in a study tour from 11 to 21 June in Florence and Rome to see first hand how local governments in

Italy handle decentralization and promote networking. Elected women leaders from Mali, Senegal, South Africa and Tanzania will participate. The exchange is ultimately intended to strengthen the capacity of selected local governments in Africa to engage in decentralization efforts. It is being organized by the Rome Office of DESA's Division for Public and Development Management, along with the Regional Assembly of Tuscany, and the Conference of European Legislative Regional Assemblies.

Among other activities, participants will be invited to attend the Stakeholder Forum on Development Cooperation on 12 and 13 June, meet with representatives of local government networks and authorities, visit public service delivery facilities, and take part in ad hoc roundtables organized by national-level counterparts. A highlight of the ten-day programme is a seminar on the role of local cooperation in the process of decentralization in Africa, scheduled for 19 June. The seminar has the specific aim of stimulating discussion on concrete aspects of African realities and enriching debate between different national and international actors.

According to a recent report prepared for the Committee of Experts on Public Administration, decentralization can have a strong impact on how effectively government resources are collected and used. Research and practice have shown that politically decentralized regimes tend to tax less overall and administrative decentralization tends to encourage social policy-making. Administrative decentralization may allow competition, information and innovation to lead to efficient and effective public policies, and redistributive public action, the report asserts. In addition, well-planned and prepared decentralization, coupled with strong monitoring, can improve human resource management by fostering more effective staffing, the utilization of more locally grown skills and experience where needed, and more appropriate inputs to organizational performance — important for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

For more information:

http://www.euroafricanpartnership.org/news.htm?conference_id=4885

Parliamentary cooperation in South East Europe

DESA workshop on regional approaches to e-Parliament will be held in Sofia on 9 and 10 June

The Global Centre for ICT in Parliament is co-organizing a workshop on regional approaches to e-Parliament, from 9 to 10 June, in cooperation with the Regional Secretariat for South East European Parliamentary Cooperation. The workshop will be hosted by the National Assembly of Bulgaria in Sofia.

The session is intended to provide a platform for the exchange of information among parliamentary officials. Participants will be invited to identify opportunities for collaboration within and outside the region, and discuss the formulation of a regional programme on e-parliament in support of democratization in South East Europe. The Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, based in Rome, is itself a joint activity of DESA's Division for Public Administration and Development Management and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

For more information:

<http://www.parliament.bg/ipait/?lng=en>

Census experts head to Tanzania

Innovations in statistical data collection will be highlighted at Dar es Salaam workshop starting 9 June

The DESA Statistics Division will hold a regional workshop on census data processing in cooperation with the National Bureau of Statistics of Tanzania, from 9 to 13 June in Dar es Salaam. Those attending will hear about international standards for conducting population and housing censuses and explore the significant capabilities of contemporary technology for data capture and editing. Optical character recognition, internet data collection, and the use of handheld devices will be featured.

Population and housing censuses are one of the main sources of data for effective development planning and objective decision-making. Recognizing the value of reliable demographic data, the Economic and Social Council is encouraging every country to conduct a census at least once between 2005 and 2014.

The Statistics Division is supporting the Council's initiative, formally known as the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme, by developing census methodological guidelines, facilitating exchange of experience, and assisting countries in improving their statistical capacity in census-taking. Two related training sessions were held earlier this year, the first in Noumea in February and the second in Doha in May.

For more information:

http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/wsh_ops/Tanzania_9June08/

Distributive trade statistics

African statisticians will gather in Bamako from 17 to 20 June to discuss the latest standards

To enhance the knowledge and use of good practices in the collection and compilation of basic economic statistics, the Statistics Division of DESA will host a workshop for Francophone African countries in Bamako from 17 to 20 June in collaboration with the Economic and Statistical Observatory of Sub-Saharan Africa. Participants will have a chance to reflect in particular on the needs of policy-makers and the business community for distributive trade statistics, and on implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts.

Specifically, the workshop will cover the 2008 International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics, the state of distributive trade statistics compilation in African countries, and the challenges and good practices in data collection, compilation and dissemination. The workshop follows a similar event held in Addis Ababa for Anglophone Africans in May.

For more information:

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/>

Publications and websites

Technical report



World Economic Situation and Prospects as of Mid-2008

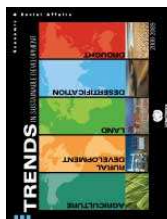
In the wake of global financial turmoil, the mid-year update of the World Economic Situation and Prospects forecasts a deeper downturn in the global economy in

2008 and warns that in the absence of aggressive and coordinated expansionary policies a more severe contraction will occur, which could trigger a disorderly unwinding of the massive global imbalances and have drastic implications for global trade and finance. The report also discusses the steep rise in food and energy costs and warns against the social and political risks associated with the unfolding food crisis.

To address the economic malaise, the report recommends a multilaterally coordinated stimulus package centered on the expansion of domestic demand in surplus countries, while staying within existing fiscal capacity; deep reforms in mechanisms of international financial regulation and supervision; and meeting emergency food needs, while setting longer term strategies for alleviating supply constraints and improving food security.

For more information and to download:
<http://www.un.org/esa/policy/wess/wesp.html>

Outreach material



Trends in Sustainable Development 2008-2009

Efforts to reduce poverty and improve food security in developing countries are hampered by declining support for strong agricultural growth, long

considered a hallmark of successful poverty reduction strategies. Strong agricultural growth is four times more effective than growth in other sectors in benefiting the poorest half of the population, the

report finds. However, while many developing countries have posted gains in agricultural production, distribution and exports, people living in areas of high inequality and in isolation from the broader economy typically benefit little from them.

This title highlights recent trends in agriculture, rural development, land, desertification and drought – five of the six themes being considered by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its 16th and 17th sessions, in 2008 and 2009.

To download:
<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/publications/trends2008/>



Trends in Sustainable Development: Africa Report 2008-2009

Since 2000, Africa has enjoyed faster economic growth than for several decades thanks in part to improved economic management and strong global demand for key export commodities. This publication notes that, despite such success, achieving the Millennium Development Goals remains a challenge for sub-Saharan Africa due to widespread poverty.

The report was launched at the 16th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which tackled issues such as agriculture, drought, and desertification that impact many rural African economies.

To download:
http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/publications/trends_of_rica2008



Innovation for Sustainable Development: Local Case Studies from Africa

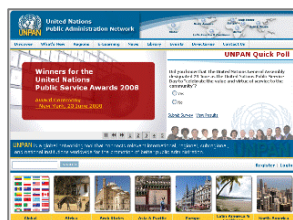
Africa faces daunting sustainable development challenges in coming decades, but also significant opportunities. The period since the beginning of this new millennium has been one of the strongest economic performance on the continent. This volume aims to highlight many exciting innovations for sustainable development in Africa at the local level. It also begins to assess the scope of scaling up these innovations to make an impact on a larger scale. This title is based on a

fruitful dialogue between the UN Secretariat and development practitioners in Africa.

For more information:

http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/publications/africa_casestudies/

Websites



UNPAN Upgrade

The UN Online Network in Public Administration and Finance has undergone a visual transformation making it easier to navigate and more engaging. New features include document ranking, enhanced subject trees, a focus on e-learning, simplified user registration and networking.

To browse and join: <http://www.unpan.org/>



Global Economic Outlook

UN global economic outlook data, produced by DESA's Development Policy and Analysis Division, are now available online for free. The data series span the time period 2000-2008, based on official national sources and on forecasts generated within Project LINK. Series at the regional level include trade in goods in values and volumes, as well as GDP growth and CPI-inflation. At the country level, GDP growth and CPI-inflation are available.

Supplementary tables provide the complete set of historical and forecast data as given in the annex of the most recent edition of the World Economic Situation and Prospects. Data series at the regional and country level include GDP growth, CPI-inflation, unemployment, selected financial indicators, as well as trade and financial flows, among others.

For more information:

<http://www.un.org/esa/policy/dataretrieval.html>



Monthly Bulletin of Statistics Online

MBS provides current economic and social statistics for more than 200 countries and territories of the world. It contains over 50 tables of monthly and/or annual and quarterly data on a variety of subjects illustrating important economic trends and developments, including population, prices, employment and earnings, energy, manufacturing, transport, construction, international merchandise trade and finance.

MBS Online presents the full content of the most recent issue of the printed version and is available at the beginning of each month. The online service includes data from volume LXII, no. 3 of March 2008 (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.Q/423), and no. 4 of April 2008 (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.Q/424). Print editions forthcoming.

For more information:

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mbs/>

Comings and goings

Comings

The following staff members were promoted in May:

Mr. Mounirou Djobo, Statistics Assistant, Statistics Division

Ms. Cynthia Gale, Personnel Assistant, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women

Ms. Maria Martinho, Statistician, Statistics Division

Goings



Mr. Adil Khan retired from the United Nations on 31 May following a distinguished career in policy analysis and development cooperation of more than 30 years. Mr. Khan brought a broad range of

expertise to the organization in such areas as pro-poor development, participatory governance, social charters, microcredit, and state capacity-building.

As head of the Socio-economic Governance and Management Branch in DESA's Division for Public Administration and Development from 2002 to 2008, Mr. Khan oversaw a diverse programme of research on development issues encompassing international conferences, expert consultations, workshops, networking, publications, support to negotiations, monitoring and evaluation. DESA's operational activities in socio-economic governance were also part of his portfolio, and were informed, inter alia, by previous field experience with UNDP in Sri Lanka and Myanmar from 1997-2002.

Before joining the United Nations, Mr. Khan held various research and managerial positions in the public and private sectors, including ten years as director of monitoring and evaluation in the Ministry of Planning of the Government of Bangladesh. He has taught and written extensively on economic development, poverty alleviation, and governance, and holds a Ph.D. in political economy from Western Pacific University in Los Angeles.

The following staff member also retired in May:

Mr. Simon Cunningham, Senior Economic Affairs Officer, Development Policy and Analysis Division

Calendar

June

Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations

Resumed regular session for 2008, New York, 29 May-6 June

DESA/Egypt Conference on Africa Parliamentary Knowledge Network
Cairo, 4-5 June

DESA/RSPC Workshop on Regional Approaches to e-Parliament
Sofia, 9-10 June

Regional Workshop on Census Data Processing
Dar es Salaam, 9-13 June

DESA/Italy Euro-African Partnership for Decentralized Governance
Study Tour, Florence, 11-21 June

DESA/Italy Stakeholder Forum on Aid Quality and Effectiveness
Rome, 12-13 June

Workshop for Francophone African Countries on Distributive Trade Statistics
Bamako, 17-20 June

Workshop on International Merchandise Trade Statistics for Developing Countries
Seychelles, 17-20 June

Informal Hearings with Representatives of Civil Society and the Business Sector on Financing for Development
New York, 18 June

Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting
3rd Meeting and Special Session on Climate Change,
New York, 25-27 June

Economic and Social Council

Substantive session for 2008, New York 30 June-25 July

July

Workshop on e-Government Development in Africa
Kampala, 14-18 July

Expert Group Meeting on Industrial Statistics
New York, 15-17 July

Observances

United Nations Public Service Day

23 June

Public Service Day is celebrated each year on 23 June in recognition of the value of public service to the community and in development, the work of public servants, and to encourage young people to pursue careers in the public sector. United Nations Public Service Awards are presented each year on the Day to honour excellence in public service delivery and professionalism around the world.

This year's winning initiatives – ranging from mobile health care to community development – are from Australia, Brazil, India, Jordan, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, and the United States. The 2008 awards will be presented in a special event at United Nations Headquarters. The Vice-President of the General Assembly, Deputy-Secretary-General, and Under-Secretary-General for Social and Economic Affairs have been invited, along with innovative leaders whose institutions have won the awards this year and in the past. Some 300 participants are expected.

The competition is open to all public organizations and agencies at national or sub-national level, as well as public-private partnerships. Awards are given in three categories: improving transparency, accountability and responsiveness in the public service; improving the delivery of services; and fostering participation in policy-making decisions through innovative mechanisms.

For more information:

<http://www.unpan.org/Events/PublicServiceDayAwards/tabid/92/Default.aspx>

DESA News is an insider's look at the United Nations in the area of economic and social development policy. The newsletter is produced by the Communications and Information Management Service of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with DESA Divisions. Prior to January 2007, DESA News was issued every other month. It is now issued monthly.

Inquiries should be addressed to esa@un.org.