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UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS (UN DESA)

Regional Expert Group Meeting on Development Challenges for Young People  
28-30 March 2006  
Bangkok

## FINAL REPORT OF THE MEETING

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## 1. Background to the Workshop

1. From 28 to 30 March 2006, the Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD), UNDESA, organized an Expert Group Meeting, organized in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in Bangkok, Thailand. The meeting brought together experts and representatives of universities, United Nations Member States, United Nations agencies and programmes, and intergovernmental organizations, to identify and discuss major youth development challenges in Asia in preparation for the World Youth Report 2007.
2. The World Youth Report is the biennial major publication of the United Nations Programme on Youth, DSPD/DESA. The World Youth Report 2007 will provide a regional overview summarizing the major youth development trends in the fifteen priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth. Further, for each region, four topics that are highly affecting the lives of young people are identified for an in-depth discussion. The four inter-related topics that were identified for the Asian region are globalization, urbanization, education, and information and communication technologies.
3. The largest proportion of the world's youth (defined as those between age 15 and 24) living in poverty are in Asia. Five of the ten countries with the largest concentrations of young people living on less than US \$ 1 a day are found in Asia. At the same time, in the last decennium, various Asian countries have made major developmental achievements. Compared to other regions, globalization has arguably had the most impact on the rapidly growing Asian economies. While many young people have benefited from new industries that moved to Asia attracted by low-wages and production costs, others have not been able to find employment, or are being exploited by these same industries in the absence of protective labour regulations.
4. Urbanization, the emergence of mega-cities home to millions of people, is another direct consequence of the economic growth and of the shift from agriculturally to industrially based economies. Today, one in three Asians lives in a city, and this number will have increased to one in two by 2020. It is argued that young people are more likely to move to cities in order to gain economic opportunity, lowering the average age in cities in comparison to rural areas. This massive urbanization increases the pressure on the environment and required infrastructure in cities, calling for proper city planning.
5. Economic development also places new demands on the education system. Curricula need to be adapted to prepare students for new jobs in the labour market, a fit that is not always established yet. As the global economy is increasingly based on technological innovation and information, students need to stay longer in school to receive the amount of education required for decent employment. With large numbers of youth who cannot afford to go to or stay in school, the chances for the poor to climb up the social ladder become very small.
6. Information and communication technologies have contributed to the speed in which the globalization process is taking place. Besides the economic impact of the digital revolution, the influence is found in the increasingly globalizing youth culture. The Internet, instant messaging, cell phones, online gaming, chatting and global television are all products of the last decennium with profound impacts on youth culture and intergenerational relations. The digital divide presents another obstacle for the poor to participate fully in the globalized world.
7. The objectives of the meeting were thus as follows: (i) to increase knowledge on the social-economic situation of young people in Asia by identifying and discussing some of the four

challenges facing young people in the ESCAP region discussed above; (ii) to identify possible policy and programme interventions; and (iii) to collect inputs to the World Youth Report 2007.

## 2. Opening of the Workshop

8. In his opening remarks, Mr Kitti Samanthai, Director General of the Office of Welfare Promotion, Protection and Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand, indicated his Government's appreciation to ESCAP for hosting the Meeting in Thailand. He also highlighted the importance and relevance of the four topics of the Meeting to young people in Thailand, and outlined some recent initiatives taken by the Thai Government in support of young people's participation in Thai society.

9. In here welcoming remarks by Ms. Thelma Kay, Chief, Emerging Social Issues Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), highlighted the importance of the ten priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond to Asian youth. Five additional topics had been agreed upon during the recent observation of the tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action by the General Assembly. She stressed the relevance of those issues, namely globalization, ICT, HIV/AIDS, youth in armed conflict, and intergenerational relations, to the situation in the ESCAP region. Ms Kay reminded participants that there had been a call to scale up investments in youth by the General Assembly at that occasion.

10. In the introductory message by Mr. Johan Schölvinnck, Director, Division for Social Policy and Development, DESA, delivered by Mr. Joop Theunissen, UN Focal Point on Youth, DESA, deliberated on the four topics chosen for discussion at the Meeting and their relevance to the preparation of the World Youth Report 2007. It was argued that while young people had too often been seen as a social and demographic group at risk, they were also key agents for social change, development and innovation. They were contributing every day to the creation of not only more competitive societies, as often emphasized in the region, but also to more just, open and democratic societies.

## 3. Election of officers

11. The meeting chose the following persons as office-bearers for the Meeting: Ms Roosmalawati Rusman, Assistant Deputy Minister for Social Sciences and Humanities Ministry of Research and Technology, Indonesia, as Co-Chairperson; Ms Rashila Ramli, Associate Professor, FSSK, School of History, Politics and Strategic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia, as Co-Chairperson; and Ms Dong Xia, Deputy Director, International Department, All-China Youth Federation, Beijing, as Rapporteur.

12. A list of participants to the Meeting is contained in Annex I.

## 4. Adoption of the agenda

13. The meeting adopted the agenda as contained in Annex II of this report.

## 5. Summary of deliberations

14. Ms Charlotte van Hees, UN Programme on Youth, made a presentation on the global situation of young people on the basis of the findings of the World Youth Report 2003 and 2005. She discussed developments in some of the fifteen priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth and resolution 60/2 on youth policy adopted by the General Assembly in

October 2005. It had been estimated that some 130 million young people in Asia lived below the poverty threshold of \$1 per day. From this background, some global trends in education, employment, HIV/AIDS, and in information and communication technology and its impact on young people, were discussed.

15. Ms Keiko Osaki, Chief, and Ms Kim Xuan Nguyen, ESCAP Focal Point and Social Affairs Officer, Population and Social Integration Section, Emerging Social Issues Division, made regional overview presentation on youth development in Asia. Topics discussed included the changing share of the youth population in the demographic compositions of the countries of the region; the general postponement of first marriage across the region over the past three decades; changing family and social support structures that affect the current generation of Asian youth; the high level of youth unemployment in the region; adolescent reproductive health issues; young people experiencing poverty; and the development of national youth policies by the Governments of the region.

### Globalization

16. In his keynote address on globalization and its effects on young people in Asia, Mr Graeme Hugo, Professor and Director, the National Centre for Social Applications of Geographic Information Systems, University of Adelaide, Australia, depicted some profound changes in Asia's changing youth population, including the reduction of their share in the population, and the fact that while there were still differences among the countries of the region, the "youth bulge" had generally subsided in the region. The region had made an apparent benefit of enjoying globalization and a large growth in the youth population at the same time. Mr Hugo also described some trends in mobility of young people, to be distinguished from migration, within and outside the region, including the various economic and social effects of greater mobility on young people as individuals, on their relations within the changing family, their community, their nation and even within the region.

17. In her presentation on the effects of globalization on the situation of girls and young women in Asia, Ms Rashila Ramli, Associate Professor, School of History, Politics and Strategic Studies, FSSK, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, discussed a number of gender issues and topics of relevance to girls and young women. The influence of economic development and changes in education on changes in youth culture was discussed, particularly in relation to the situation of girls and young women.

18. In a presentation on globalization and its effects on youth employment trends in China, Dr. Zhang Libin, Senior Research Fellow and Deputy Director, Labour Market and Employment Department, Institute for Labor Studies (ILS), Ministry of Labor and Social Security, People's Republic of China, highlighted the youth employment situation in China from the background of globalization. She also discussed social partners' challenges and measures taken in response to the impact of globalization on the youth employment situation in China.

19. Ms Elizabeth Morris, Senior Labour Market and Human Resources Policies Specialist, ILO Subregional Office for East Asia, made a presentation on globalization and its effects on youth employment trends in Asia. She introduced some trends in the Asian labour force, the importance of employment for young people in Asia, some of the factors explaining current labour force trends, and strategies to create decent and productive work for young people.

20. In a presentation on globalization and its impact on youth health in Asia, Ms Cai Cai, Health and Development Section, Emerging Social Issues Division, UNESCAP, a framework of globalization on health was presented. A number of trends related to changing values and

lifestyles were presented, which included a general drop in the age of initiation of sex and drug use. At the interplay of globalization and poverty, issues related to migrant workers, human trafficking and transactional sex were discussed. At the interplay of globalization and non-communicable diseases, some trends in obesity and smoking among Asian youth were highlighted. Finally, a brief discussion was held on trade agreements and trade liberalization on health and an health-related services for young people.

21. The debate on globalization focused on a number of issues, such as the increased mobility of young people to review a number of options for employment within their community, the city, or temporary relocation abroad. It was thus observed that traditional measurements of migration may not adequately capture the increased mobility of Asian youth. There was also a debate on the perceived growth in youth populations, also known as the “youth bulge.” While the youth bulge had clearly passed in some parts of the region, some other countries were still experiencing large groups of young people in their demographic composition, which provided different challenges on the education system and the employment situation.

### Urbanization

22. In a keynote presentation on urbanization and its effects on youth development in Asia by Mr. Om Prakash Mathur, Professor Urban Economics and Finance, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, India, for subthemes that would be included in the draft chapter were discussed. These included the nature and structure of the urbanization process in Asian countries, the impact of urbanization on cities, the risks faced by urban youth, and policy options and alternatives for addressing problems related to urbanization.

23. Mr Deibel Effendi, Special Envoy for International Cooperation for the State Minister for Youth and Sports, discussed some major trends in the urbanization process in Indonesia and the role of young people therein. He highlighted some demographic trends, trends in education, youth unemployment, and urbanization in Indonesia, and discussed the impact of the investment climate on youth employment. An assessment of young people’s livelihoods in urban centers was also presented.

24. Mr Malcolm Hazelman, Senior Extension, Education and Communications Officer, FAO, made a presentation on the topic of rural youth development alternatives to urbanization. He reminded participants of the fact that the majority of Asia's poor, including the youth, live in rural areas. Despite the fact that urban migration will continue in Asia, providing alternatives for youth will enable those that choose to stay in rural areas to live fruitful and sustained livelihoods. This, however, requires investments in creating a favourable environment for rural youth, including removal of social constraints, providing market access and higher productivity through use of appropriate technologies and practices including learning from the many examples of innovative practices being followed by successful projects and activities of rural youth organizations and agencies in the region.

25. Ms Nguyen Thi Hoang Van, Director-General, International Department, Vietnam Youth Federation, made a presentation on youth promotion and development through the recent adoption of a new, comprehensive, Vietnam Youth Law. The new law defined rights and obligations of youth, as well as the responsibilities of Government, family and society for young people.

26. The discussion on urbanization included a debate on the continued relevance of the traditional dichotomy between rural and urban areas, given the many observed trends in mobility of young people, as well as the general decreased growth of urban centres in Asia. Another topic of discussion was the perceived social networks of young people who migrated to the city. While

in earlier periods, the extended family had been an important feature of rural life, and families in the city were more nuclear in nature, current and past trends in urbanization and mobility had created a more mixed picture of the family structure in rural and urban areas, with an emergence of single households in cities in some countries.

### Education

27. In a keynote presentation on educational challenges for young people in Asia, by Professor Siri Hettige, Department of Sociology, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, the following topics were discussed: basic education and progress in literacy in the region; infrastructure barriers to education; the impact of globalization and trade liberalization on education; changing directions in education; developments in science and technology and research and development; the relationship between migration and education; and potential role of education on national integration.

28. In the discussion on education, it was observed that while very often, education has been seen as a competitive tool for Governments in their quest for economic development and international competition, education as a means to achieve sustainable livelihoods for young people as individuals continued to be of foremost importance. The role of education towards healthier life styles, combating crime and violence and to promote democratic values was also discussed.

29. A presentation was made on educational challenges in Indonesia by Dr Roosmalawati Rusman, Assistant Deputy Minister for Social Sciences and Humanities of Indonesia. Issues of accessibility to education; limited household resources for education; quality and relevance of education; challenges of the vocational education system; the rapid increase in labor market entrants with higher educational attainment; and the limited number of job opportunities for better educated youth were presented as some of the pressing issues related to education in Indonesia.

30. In his presentation on the role of non-formal education for young people in Asia, Mr Shahnewaz Khan, Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Bangladesh, highlighted the educational needs of young people in some countries in Asia in relation to non-formal education (NFE) and technical and vocational education. Non-formal education provided the missing link between the formal system and the needs of the labour market. The majority of client groups of NFE were young people with particular educational needs that would enable them to facilitate their entry in the labour market. Validation of NFE by both employers and by the government were still a challenge.

31. Ms Saipan Sripongpankal, Ministry of Education, Thailand, presented some recent developments on curriculum reform in Thailand. A national youth council had been established that facilitated feedback from young learners towards the Government on the educational system. It also provided the Government with a way to learn of other aspects of importance to young people in Thailand. The results of a survey that health and social problems, as well as educational challenges were presented.

### Information and communication technology

32. Mr. Jonathan Zhu, Professor in the Department of English and Communication, City University of Hong Kong, presented the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) among youth in East Asia. Due to the unavailability of reliable data, he was not able to make firm statements on the impact of ICT on youth development. Included in his analysis are the usage patterns of Internet, cell phones, and audio-video media. The available data from Hong

Kong showed that youth generally make more use of ICT than adults, but showed no significant difference between young men and young women. Mr. Zhu believed that the existing digital divide in East Asia is a temporal issue and will disappear in a few years.

33. Mr. Sang Min Whang, Professor of Psychology, Yonsei University, Republic of Korea, presented the developmental challenges of youth in Korea, the impacts of Internet and IT. He discussed the increased usage of internet in Korea and its effects on youth culture. The Internet was used by young people to create their own identity, they present themselves via mini-homepages to each other on the Internet, often creating their own reality. As such, virtual experiences are not virtual only, as they directly impact on self esteem and community formation. He further presented data on the usage of online games and the Internet.

34. Mr. Rajendra Mulmi, Founding President of the Association of Youth Organisations Nepal, presented his views on the effects of youth activism in Asia based on his extensive contacts with youth around the world. He presented the huge differences between Internet usage in Asia. Due to ICT young people are more actively involved in the social, political and economic arena, and they have increased access to information, resources and the international community. Some of the positive effects are capacity building, global brotherhood, an increase in youth-led initiatives, and a change from youth volunteering to participation in decision-making. He concluded naming several challenges to be tackled, including the digital divide, language of the Internet, the weakening social ties with family, the increase in spam and fraud.

35. In the discussion the feeling was expressed that a lack of data should not prevent the report writers from describing general trends. Also, the chapter on ICT in the World Youth Report 2007 should also include an analysis of ICT use in the other Asian regions. A suggestion was made to include an analysis of the linkages between migration and ICT. Because of ICT, young migrants maintain close ties with their family back home, making the decision to migrate easier. It was stated that the usage of Internet in India is very cheap, enabling many people to access the Internet, either at home or in the Internet cafes. Concern is expressed about sexual exploitation via the Internet, which should be included in the report.

36. Ms Jenivie Anne Ramirez-Salmo, Assistant Division Chief in the Policy Monitoring and Evaluation Division, National Youth Commission, Philippines, presented the Influence of Information and Communication Technologies on Youth Development in the Philippines. She introduced the Medium-Term Youth Development Plan (MTYDP) 2005-2010 focusing on health risk behaviour, education and employment. Data on the usage of ICT in the Philippines were shared, indicating that young people are the main users of the Internet and the majority of them belong to the upper and middle classes thereby creating a digital divide. There is a need for the development of more policies for youth protection and promotion of cyber wellness.

37. Mr. Benjamin Vergel de Dios, Assistant Project Officer, ICT in Education Unit, UNESCO Bangkok, presented the main figures of education and youth in Asia. Asia and Africa are the two regions in the world where access to computers and Internet and the least established. ICT can assist in reaching some of the other educational goals, including the expansion of educational opportunities by providing distance education, increasing the quality of learning and teaching and ensuring life-long learning. UNESCO has set the goal to ensure that by 2008, all member states in the Asia-Pacific region will have: a national ICT in education policy; ICT as a component of pre-service teacher training; a process of developing relevant, multilingual and appropriate educational content; networks for sharing knowledge and experiences; and key indicators to monitor development and to form strategies.

## 6. Adoption of the report of the Workshop

38. The meeting adopted the report on 30 March 2006.