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Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other  
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#### **OTHER MATTERS**

(Item 8 of the provisional agenda)

#### **KEY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EVALUATION <sup>\*/</sup> OF THE FLAGSHIP PUBLICATION OF ESCAP, THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SURVEY OF ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (NOVEMBER 2005 - APRIL 2006)**

<sup>\*/</sup> Prepared by an independent external evaluator (Janet Billson, Group Dimensions International, United States of America)

## BACKGROUND

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As principles of results-based management (RBM) are given increasing importance at the ESCAP secretariat, key elements of the programme of work are being reviewed to ascertain their programmatic alignment and results-orientation.

In this context the Executive Secretary proposed to undertake an evaluation of one of ESCAP's most prominent outputs under its "Poverty Reduction" Theme Group, namely the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific* (hereafter referred to as the *Survey*). The evaluation was conducted between November and December 2005 under the supervision of the Programme Management Division (PMD). The final report was presented to PMD in April 2006. To ensure an objective assessment, an external independent evaluator, Ms. Janet Billson, Group Dimensions International (GDI), United States of America, was contracted to undertake the evaluation.

The objectives of evaluation were to (i) review the role (relevance) of the *Survey* in the context of ESCAP's overall programme of work, (ii) ascertain its value added (effectiveness, impact) within the region, (iii) appraise its production process (efficiency), including design, analysis, drafting, desk-top publishing, printing and dissemination, and (iv) propose recommendations accordingly.

The evaluator effectively utilized several strategies and methodologies to achieve an impartial analysis and high quality product. These included the creation of an Evaluation Framework and a Desk Review comparing the *Survey* to similar selected publications. Several other qualitative and quantitative methods were also employed including:

- ◆ In-person executive and focus group interviews with internal ESCAP staff members and managers (including the past and present *Survey* producers);
- ◆ In-person, telephone, or written interviews with external users (potential and actual, including ACPR members, producers of the *Asian Development Outlook*, middle-level government officials, research institutes, and journalists);
- ◆ Analysis of *Survey* hits on the ESCAP website;
- ◆ Analysis of the dissemination patterns.

It is expected that, based on the conclusions and recommendations of this evaluation, ESCAP will be in a stronger position to deploy a major publication, with the scope of the *Survey*, for strategic programmatic purposes, and thus to further enhance the developmental contribution of ESCAP to the Asia-Pacific region.

The following report contains the Executive Summary from the Evaluation of ESCAP's Flagship Publication and a short edition of chapter four of this 132-page evaluation report.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This evaluation of the flagship publication of ESCAP, the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific*, affords an opportunity to help it better reflect the organization's mandate, give voice more effectively to divisions' operational work and become more useful to member States.

Both internal and external respondents identified several strengths of the *Survey*: It provides regional data and analysis over time that is accessible in hard or soft copy; offers a user-friendly format; and is supported by a strong staff and regular budget funding. Respondents view the *Survey* as a relatively useful and important document, although readership varies by type of audience. Internal respondents were low in readership and lacked a clear understanding of whether and how member countries are using the *Survey*; many external respondents were vague about the *Survey* and its contents, readership, or purpose.

The *Survey* also faces several challenges. It lacks a general sense of ownership within ESCAP. Even though it is mandated to be an organization-wide flagship publication, the *Survey* is seen as the product of the Poverty and Development Division (PDD). Leaving the *Survey* producers in the current horizontal structural arrangement fails to foster cross-divisional collaboration in general. The current placement of the *Survey* also contributes to a disconnect between those responsible for production of the *Survey* (PDD) and ESCAP's official organizational centre for preparing databases, the Statistics Division (SD). Elevating the *Survey* within ESCAP will require rethinking the relationship between SD and PDD with regard to data-gathering, management and analysis. This would enable ESCAP to gather data for most or all of the member States and would help streamline *Survey* production. Other links with SISS should be strengthened, such as taking advantage of the section's potential for building statistical capacity in house, wherever appropriate.

At the heart of this incompletely realized potential are three additional disconnects:

- ◆ The relative absence of social data and analysis, which is critical to development policy, planning and implementation in the region.
- ◆ The incomplete relationship between the *Survey*'s core function (lodged in PDD) and the core statistical data (lodged in the Statistics Division). In fact, data exist in other divisions as well that may or may not be utilized efficiently in *Survey* production.
- ◆ The incomplete relationship between ESCAP's normative and analytical work (which is adequately reflected in the *Survey*) and its operational work (which is not well reflected in the *Survey*).

Significant recommendations made by internal and external respondents include:

- ◆ Integrating the social dimensions of development more prominently into the publication;

- ◆ Creating better links between macro- and micro-level analyses, economic and social analyses, and normative, analytical and technical cooperation;
- ◆ Highlighting policy implications of data trends;
- ◆ Incorporating best practices and examples of policy or implementation successes;
- ◆ Becoming the nexus between understanding regional data and subregional data through more intentionally linking data and policymaking;
- ◆ Setting aside more funding to support a more dynamic dissemination strategy.

Internal respondents recommended:

- ◆ Involving more ESCAP divisions routinely in producing the *Survey* and generally improving its organizational ownership;
- ◆ Streamlining editorial and production processes;
- ◆ Maximizing the *Survey's* impact after the annual launch by conducting workshops and seminars throughout the region to highlight *Survey* messages and to strengthen member States' policymaking.

Although the *Survey's* original mandate dates back almost 50 years to the founding of ESCAP, the impact of the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) must be taken into account in interpreting the *Survey's* mandate. Incorporating the *MDG Report* into the *Survey* would maximize organizational efficiency in publishing and would integrate the social dimensions of development more systematically into the flagship publication of ESCAP.

The *Survey's* audience needs to be redefined to include ESCAP staff and managers, who would then become emissaries of the publication and the organization, and to determine more closely who the primary external readers are or could be. As a flagship publication, the *Survey* should better reflect the Commission's analytical role and normative function, and should more effectively support ESCAP's comparative advantage as a strong regional player. Because the ESCAP region (compared with Africa and Latin America) includes countries that are experiencing different levels and stages of development (e.g., least developed countries and rapidly growing economies such as India and China), future *Surveys* should address possible partnerships, especially in relationship to the MDGs and other cross-regional and subregional initiatives.

If the *Survey* is to enhance ESCAP's reputation, it must have a clear, unmistakable editorial focus worthy of a flagship publication. While resource constraints must inevitably be balanced with commitment to quality, the *Survey* needs more cutting-edge and targeted analysis.

In order to achieve these improvements, the core team should be modified to include at least one or two full-time social scientists to help integrate social analysis into the *Survey* in general and to play the leadership role on targeted social issues. The team should include another macroeconomist, who is also a statistician, in order to strengthen the publication's economic analysis. Defining the *Survey* as part of all work programmes and making it easier for all ESCAP personnel to contribute to the *Survey* will help systematize contributions from all divisions. Ownership across ESCAP will be enhanced by seconding members of any division to the core team (e.g., for four months during

production and dissemination). At the same time, contributing to the *Survey* should be woven into the context of the formal reward and personnel evaluation system.

To further elevate the *Survey's* quality and status in the world community, ESCAP should hire a substantive, external (paid) reviewer with Asia-Pacific expertise. Enhancing peripheral supports entails assigning more full-time positions to an overtaxed Editorial Unit; rethinking the role of the Eminent Persons Meeting and the Expert Group Meeting, which come at different times in the process and focus on different aspects of the *Survey*.

To make the *Survey* a strong, leading flagship publication, the culture surrounding it must be recreated. Review by highly regarded economic *and* social analysts and editors should become part of a valued process of critical thinking and excellence. Critical analysis should be encouraged and expected. Addressing controversial issues (and adopting an advocacy position) should be acceptable as long as both sides of the issue are explored and documented. The *Survey* cannot reach top-flight status if its authors are discouraged from engaging in responsible critical analysis.

A paradigm shift must occur so that the *Survey* is clearly defined and regarded as a product of ESCAP rather than of PDD. This paradigm shift can be accomplished by relocating the *Survey's* core team (or at least oversight of its key functions) to a higher structural level, preferably the Office of the Executive Secretary. Structural changes alone will not enhance the *Survey's* quality, impact, and value, but they will help elevate the publication to true flagship status.

Finally, the publication's format, dissemination and production quality need modernizing to communicate ESCAP messages more effectively. ESCAP could be a leader in transforming the original mandate into a more contemporary, vital and useful framework for a regional survey.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### I. OVERVIEW

This part addresses the key evaluation questions by presenting a summary of strengths and challenges facing the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific*. It concludes with recommendations that derive from the evaluators' synthesis of the desk review and all internal and external data, including specific suggestions made by internal respondents for improving publication planning, preparation, production and dissemination. Section II presents key strengths and III offers recommendations related to each challenge. The linkages between challenges and recommendations appear in Table 4.1. In Section IV, the evaluators suggest some possible structural changes that might address issues surrounding organizational climate and strengthen the *Survey*. Section V provides the reader with a short analysis of ESCAP's corporate culture and Section VI constitutes the conclusion.

### II. THE SURVEY HAS MULTIPLE STRENGTHS

At the beginning of each interview, both internal and external respondents were asked directly to outline the *Survey's* strengths. They emphasized the *Survey's* advantage in linking regional inputs to a global outlook, and in providing regional data and analysis. These strengths were confirmed by the Desk Review and evaluators' analysis.

- The *Survey* is an essential part of ESCAP's mission – not just because it is mandated but because it provides subregional coverage that constitutes a unique niche that is “very useful” to the member States.
- For the most part, respondents viewed it as a user-friendly publication that can be accessed in hard copy online.
- The *Survey* covers timely and new issues (e.g., economic shocks, development impacts of natural disasters such as the 2004 tsunami, how to tackle terrorism, and human rights).
- It contains generally solid regional data and analysis supported by continuity of data over time and across the region.
- The *Survey* benefits from generally strong staff and is funded through the regular budget.

### III. CHALLENGES IN RELATION TO RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents recommendations made by respondents, synthesised by the evaluators and placed into the context of the analytical framework of the evaluation: the *Survey's* Comparative Advantage, Impact, Relevance, Effectiveness and Efficiency. The challenges and recommendations are presented in this order. Thus, Comparative Advantage and Impact are seen as stemming from the *Survey's* Relevance, Effectiveness and Efficiency. Each is integrally related to all the others, however. For example, insofar as the *Survey* is efficiently disseminated, its impact is maximized; the *Survey's* strategic relevance in contributing to regional policymaking depends heavily on how well the

publication meets its mandate of presenting both economic and social analyses that readers find useful.

The challenges are rank ordered within each of these evaluation categories in terms of relative importance. As with the categories of the Evaluation Framework, however, this study strongly suggests that it may be conceptually possible to separate each recommendation but they are for the most part interdependent within categories and, in many cases, among categories. For example, strategic relevance depends on the *Survey's* capacity for making strong links between development realities and best practices on the one hand and development policymaking on the other hand. Improving strategic relevance depends upon ESCAP's organizational capacity for empowering the full range of its staff in contributing knowledge to the *Survey*. Nonetheless, an attempt has been made to separate and prioritize both the challenges and the recommendations within each challenge. Finally, although Resources and Budget are placed last under Efficiency, greater resources would undoubtedly facilitate improvements throughout the table. That line should not be considered the bottom priority but an enabling priority that affects everything above it. Resources are also listed under Dissemination because funding for dissemination emerged as a specific and major recommendation from a wide variety of respondents.

**Table 4.1. Challenges and Recommendations (Overview)**

<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
<b>I. IMPACT, POLICY AND STRATEGY ISSUES</b>	
A. The <i>Survey</i> lacks priority within ESCAP, which hampers its comparative advantage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Elevate the <i>Survey</i> in ESCAP</li> <li>2. Strengthen the core team</li> <li>3. Strengthen external reviews</li> <li>4. Strengthen interdivisional input and collaboration (II.E)</li> <li>5. Build in a five-year evaluation plan</li> </ol>
B. The <i>Survey</i> lacks strategic relevance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve the <i>Survey's</i> links to development realities</li> <li>2. Improve the <i>Survey's</i> impacts on policymaking</li> </ol>
The <i>Survey</i> should have greater impact	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthen its role as a regional advocacy document</li> <li>2. Improve the <i>Survey's</i> impacts on development planning</li> </ol>
<b>II. CONTENT AND QUALITY ISSUES</b>	
C. The <i>Survey</i> lacks editorial focus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarify and strengthen editorial focus and messaging</li> <li>2. Clarify the <i>Survey's</i> role in relation to the Commission theme study</li> <li>3. Blend the <i>Survey</i> and the <i>MDG Report</i></li> </ol>
D. The <i>Survey</i> lacks balance between economic and social analyses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthen social analysis</li> <li>2. Improve the balance/linkages between economic and social analyses</li> <li>3. Strengthen economic analysis</li> </ol>
E. Cross-divisional involvement needs strengthening	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Remove the barriers to involvement, consultation and collaboration</li> <li>2. Make the <i>Survey</i> more relevant to division or sector work</li> </ol>
F. Data-collection needs upgrading	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve data-collection and management</li> <li>2. Streamline the relationship between SD (SISS) and PDD</li> <li>3. Improve data presentation and statistical analysis</li> </ol>
G. Production quality and processes need modernizing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve the editorial and production processes</li> <li>2. Improve format, presentation and production quality</li> </ol>

III. PRODUCTION QUALITY AND PROCESS ISSUES	
H. Production quality and processes require modernizing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthen the editorial team</li> <li>2. Improve the editorial and production processes</li> </ol>
IV. READERSHIP AND DISSEMINATION ISSUES	
I. Dissemination is narrowly defined	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve the breadth and depth of dissemination</li> <li>2. Increase funding for dissemination</li> </ol>
V. RESOURCE ISSUES	
J. Resources and budget are marginally sufficient	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve the <i>Survey's</i> resources and budget</li> <li>2. Specific lines to increase</li> </ol>

ESCAP must address these challenges in order to improve the *Survey* in both quality and impact. It is time to take the *Survey* beyond its accomplishments to date and link it into all subprogramme objectives. Most critically, the *Survey* should reflect a unified picture of ESCAP's regional contributions. This will require creativity and careful examination of the possible linkages among ESCAP's normative, analytical and operational work.

#### A. THE SURVEY LACKS PRIORITY, WHICH HAMPERS ITS COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

##### 1. *Elevate the Survey in ESCAP*

The *Survey* must be considered an essential output for all staff across divisions, and as a management tool to advance the United Nations Charter and ESCAP goals. Planning within ESCAP is supposed to be done within a results-based framework – a “mandatory compliance-based programme cycle”, but planning for the *Survey* is not done strategically. Rather, it is seen as a routine annual obligation that is not tied closely to the organization's objectives. The process of delineating “expected accomplishments” as part of the biannual expenditure framework is not very flexible in terms of making it possible for the *Survey* to address emerging regional issues.

- ◆ More clearly define the targeted audience and include internal staff in the definition;
- ◆ Provide leadership for this paradigm shift “from higher up”;
- ◆ Elevate the *Survey* by convening a meeting before launch and asking the Economic Officers of each division and the ESDD Division Chief to discuss the view of ESCAP as a whole. Thus, the insight and perspectives of ESCAP might more readily be achieved and, at the very least, the entire organization will be more aware of the document's significance, contents and messages.

##### 2. *Strengthen the Core Team*

The quality of the *Survey* always boils down to the quality and reliability of its authors and the role of the PDD Division Chief. Regardless of whether the publication remains in PDD, the quality and composition of the core team is central to its success. The team must be multidisciplinary and bridge the various types of ESCAP work. Content will be driven by core team specializations and training. If the content is to be integrated, coherent and of flagship status, so must the core team. This means expanding the core team to represent ESCAP's mandate:

- ◆ The core team should be modified to include at least one or two full-time social scientists with subject matter expertise in sectors such as health and education, and preferably in a cross-cutting issue, such as gender. This would help integrate social analysis into the *Survey* in general. These staff members would play the leadership role on social issues, whether or not they are mainstreamed throughout the publication or addressed in a separate chapter or chapters.
- ◆ Hire another macroeconomist who is also a statistician.

### 3. *Strengthen External Reviews*

The current editorial process does not receive sufficient substantive editing in addition to copy editing. The *Survey's* place as a flagship publication of note in the development world could be enhanced by improving the current external review process:

- ◆ Substantive, external (paid) expert review by an expert with Asia-Pacific expertise would elevate the status and quality of the *Survey* but would also require more lead time for producing it. The Eminent Persons Meeting and the Expert Group Meetings also serve as expert, substantive review processes, but come at different times in the process and focus on different aspects of the *Survey*.
- ◆ Invite one or two pre-eminent scholars to do an external review; cast it as an honour with prestige and recognition; make sure these contributions are highlighted in the Acknowledgements.
- ◆ The Editorial Unit should be strengthened to generate the equivalent of three full-time positions; currently, editing of the *Survey* strains the system and has to be fit in around other duties. Training and other capacity-building efforts should be conducted to support the Unit.

### 4. *Build in a Five-year Evaluation Plan*

As the *Survey* represents a significant investment in human and financial resources, routine evaluation should be instituted. Attempts to ascertain reader feedback via a pull-out questionnaire has not generated much response. A five-year plan of monitoring and evaluation should include:

- ◆ Annual monitoring of expenditures compared with resources.
- ◆ Annual evaluation, conducted by PMD, on editorial focus.
- ◆ A five-year external evaluation that includes all aspects (structured closely to the present evaluation to afford comparison over time on key factors). An external evaluation affords the opportunity for more “honest” and less politicised responses than does an internal review.

## **B. IMPROVING THE SURVEY'S STRATEGIC RELEVANCE**

### 1. *Improve the Survey's Links to Development Realities*

Since globalization affects all countries in the region, the *Survey* must keep up with development realities “on the ground”. The most recent volume covered emerging issues in the social area related to the three ESCAP themes: poverty reduction, globalization and emerging social issues. The *Survey* should reflect regional data, patterns and concerns in all three areas. This means addressing social issues in a systemic and analytical way, rather than simply presenting raw data or trends. At the

same time, economic analysis should link back to development realities that Governments, NGOs and the international development agencies are struggling with every day.

Bring the *Survey* to a higher level of flagship status by making it more analytical and by adding forecasting and modelling. The Asian Development Bank does modelling, which gives it a distinct advantage. The difficulties in doing so can be resolved by adding resources and targeting resources differently in order to add new personnel to the core team who are capable of these functions and ensuring that it is always evidence-based. The *Survey* would benefit from more sophisticated analytical capacity in ESCAP as a whole:

- ◆ As attrition progresses (for whatever reasons), hire new staff with strong analytical (and perhaps modelling) capacity as a key criterion for employment [on-going].
- ◆ Conduct a systematic needs assessment among current administrators, officers and line staff to determine training and capacity-building requirements that are directly related to producing a high quality flagship publication [2006-2007].
- ◆ Provide budgetary and time resources to enable administrators, officers and line staff to obtain the training and capacity-building they require.
- ◆ Hold monthly in-house analytical discussions in a “brown bag” seminar mode to discuss the pros and cons of various analytical statements, proposed advocacy statements, best practices, or lessons learned [2006 – no cost improvement].

## **2. *Improve Impacts on Policymaking***

A number of external and internal interviewees suggested that the *Survey* should present best practice cases and/or policy recommendations, partly also because ESCAP as an impartial and neutral organization would be in a good position to present them. As ESCAP’s flagship publication, it would seem thoroughly appropriate for the *Survey* to contribute to both economic and social analyses that “promote economic development and cooperation in Asia and the Pacific”. All other recommendations and detailed suggestions in this part of the evaluation report can be expected to contribute, then, to enhancing the policymaking capacities of member States, to the extent that high quality data, analysis and advocacy can lead to better planning and policymaking.

## **C. BROADENING AND DEEPENING THE SURVEY’S IMPACT**

### **1. *Strengthen Its Role as a Regional Advocacy Document***

Advocacy was mentioned because respondents believe that member States would benefit from “controversial voices...who are not always saying the same things”. ECLAC was cited several times as doing this well, as opposed to simply reporting on economic performance. ESCAP was seen as overly academic.

- ◆ A more intentional advocacy stance could help ESCAP to contribute specifically to eradicating poverty, increasing political commitment to emerging or critical issues, gender analysis and sustainable development. It would also lend coherence to the organization’s work and distinction to its image.
- ◆ Consider providing data relating to human rights issues and cross-cutting issues such as gender. Careful analysis and data-driven “advice” (linked also to ESCAP’s

operations work) will help improve the publication's immediate impact by improving relevancy. This will also help readers understand what ESCAP does.

- ◆ Base the *Survey* on a "consensus model" of experts who contribute to a web-based draft of solutions and best practices, policy advocacy statements and lessons learned. This could be available in all member countries. Interested stakeholders could comment on the statements, which would form the basis of developing a consensus. Naturally, the final draft would have to undergo internal ESCAP review before becoming a part of the annual publication.
- ◆ Address the gender implications of economic growth, governance and poverty. Include the gender dimension on core economic data for key tables, charts and databases.

## 2. *Improve the Survey's Impacts on Development Planning*

The *Survey's* most likely comparative advantage resides in its capacity for regional and subregional analysis of both *social and economic* issues and data. This niche can be maximized:

- ◆ Adopt a multidisciplinary rather than a primarily economic outlook;
- ◆ Address cross-sectoral issues (such as economic growth impacts on the environment; differential impacts and experience of poverty on females and other vulnerable populations);
- ◆ Pay attention to gender differentials in all economic and social databases/analyses;
- ◆ Compare subregional to regional trends whenever possible, with examples from member States.

## D. SHAPING MORE POWERFUL CONTENT AND QUALITY

### 1. *Clarify and Strengthen Editorial Focus and Messaging*

Most suggestions from both external and internal respondents pointed to the need to distinguish the *Survey* more clearly from other similar publications, such as the *Asian Development Outlook*. However, concrete ideas varied on how this should or could be done. One possibility mentioned was to emphasize the *normative* and *analytical* aspects of the *Survey*. Others wished to increase the cooperation with ADB and other organizations, also in order to jointly define and fine-tune the specific contribution of the *Survey* in relation to the other publications that cover macroeconomic issues that discuss the Millennium Development Goals, for example.

The *Survey* lacks coherence among its various editorial frameworks. A flagship publication should contain "pertinent issues". At least 40 per cent of the *Survey* should focus on one strong theme that affects the entire region. A strategic focus on a limited number of regional issues is preferable to a scattershot approach. Trying to cover all issues leads to superficial analysis and lack of editorial focus or coherence:

- ◆ Analysis of issues being covered by ADB and the World Bank should be taken into consideration (as they are now), but ESCAP's unique contribution to the issues should be pinpointed and developed;
- ◆ Hold an annual "messaging workshop" to decide on prime messages and to develop a story line that helps readers integrate social, economic and cross-cutting issues;

- ◆ Prepare an Executive Summary for distribution with or in lieu of the *Survey*. This should include at least one page of policy recommendations; print it in companion format with *Survey*;
- ◆ Include the country profiles and/or Thematic Studies in the *Survey*;
- ◆ Address issues of development intervention;
- ◆ Make it more scenario-based and more forward looking, in order to provide benchmarks that countries can discuss.

### 2. *Clarify the Survey's Role in Relation to the Commission Theme Study*

The multiplicity of “themes” and “special topics” has led to some confusion and a lack of coherence in the *Survey* and between the *Survey* and other ESCAP work. The “theme topic” for the *Survey* refers to the special topic to be addressed in Chapter III; this is determined by PDD, possibly with some other divisional input. The “cover topic” is the theme to be addressed in Chapters I and II.

- ◆ Hold a participatory planning exercise with all divisions in a horizontal fashion. This could be led by the Executive Secretary.
- ◆ Achieve consensus on the main theme, how each division’s work might contribute to it, and how specific individuals might be involved: “The MGM process is vertical within the division; we need some interdivisional discussion and debate”.

### 3. *Blend the Survey and the MDG Report*

Although the *Survey* has focused primarily and historically on macroeconomic issues, bringing in the social side of development would clearly bring it into the realm of regional progress towards the MDGs. If this were to occur, the *Survey* might substantially overlap with the *MDG Report*. In fact, several respondents suggested that it may be time to blend the two into one high-quality flagship publication.

- ◆ A combined *Survey/MDG Report* could serve to keep the pressure and focus on the MDGs, highlighting linkages among them and the impacts of progress or lack of progress: “The MDGs are the overall guiding principles of our work programme”.
- ◆ If a blending of the two documents is not feasible, the executive summary of the *MDG Report* could be reproduced as an appendix to the *Survey* as a way of bringing in the social data overview.

## E. BALANCING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ANALYSES

The comparative advantage of the *Survey* and of ESCAP in producing the *Survey* lies in the capacity to engage in regional and subregional analysis. The more specific the data for countries—cast in the framework of regional and subregional trends—the more useful the analysis is to ESCAP member States. The *Survey* should incorporate best practices and examples of policy or implementation successes and highlight policy implications of data trends.

- ◆ Make the *Survey* the nexus between understanding of the region and subregions, showing the connections between data and policymaking within an overall strategic framework.

## 1. *Strengthen Social Analysis*

Although its stated mission is to give “technical support to Member Governments for socio-economic development through direct advisory services, information and training, sharing regional experiences and inter-country networks”,<sup>1</sup> the *socio* part, both external and internal respondents said, has been given a lower priority than the *economic*. Many external respondents advocated the increased inclusion of social data in the *Survey*.

Internal respondents stressed that social analysis is an “afterthought” that does not fully reflect ESCAP’s work. This also contributes to a disconnect between those who write the report and those who make policy in member States, which some respondents observed is not true either for the *Surveys* of the African or Latin American commissions. At the same time, divisional publications sometimes overshadow the *Survey*. This makes it difficult to define the *Survey* as ESCAP’s true and premier flagship publication.

Several mergers have resulted in an organizational context for the *Survey* that is “somewhat confused”. As a reflection of the weakening of the social division as an entity (with restructuring over the years), the publication’s social analysis has taken a back seat. Ironically, this is exactly an area that respondents and the desk review indicated as a weak area for competitive publications. There is an opportunity here for maximizing ESCAP’s comparative advantage.

Most respondents thought that the *Survey* should remain at the macro level of analysis, for both economic and social chapters. Social issues are not described (or experienced) necessarily at the micro level or only with qualitative data. One can do macro-level statistical analyses of social indicators, however, without turning it into economic analysis:

- ◆ Include definitive tables showing major social trends every five years, with special social issues chapters in depth for each of the other four years;
- ◆ Offer balanced, objective analysis of social trend data as a comparative advantage in regard to the *Asian Development Outlook* or World Bank publications;
- ◆ Task ESID with analysing core education and health data produced by SD and PDD;
- ◆ Include a sectoral or cross-sectoral analysis each year produced by a specific division; it could be revisited in five years to determine changes.

## 2. *Balance and Link Economic and Social Analyses*

The *Survey* lacks analytical *balance and linkages between* economic and social issues. Few examples of synergies were offered by internal respondents between analytical and operational activities and the *Survey*. The core team said that issues covered in the *Survey* are supported by findings or lessons learned in technical cooperation activities, but the linkages are not made particularly explicit. The *Survey* also lacks sectoral integration.

The lack of embedded social scientists and the lack of balance among normative, analytical and technical cooperation work serve to weaken its content and contribute to the social dimension being treated as a residual category of economic analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> <[www.un.org/issues/reg-comm.asp](http://www.un.org/issues/reg-comm.asp)>.

- ◆ Link conceptually Chapter II and III, which currently do not connect well with each other, and seem like two publications in one;
- ◆ Show interconnections between areas; for example, show the implications of economic growth for the environment or the connections between poverty and gender;
- ◆ Explore in depth the economic impacts of natural or man-made disasters or disease, beyond estimates of percentage declines in economic growth or GDPs;
- ◆ Link special themes to policy dialogue and practical operational applications;
- ◆ Hold regional and national conferences on policy dialogue to sharpen the publication's analysis and understanding of development realities.

### 3. *Strengthen Economic Analysis*

Even those who are satisfied with a predominantly economic *Survey* said that the macroeconomic analysis (regression, econometrics, etc.) needs buttressing. Conclusions are sometimes drawn that lack supporting data. Respondents said that analysis should be at a very high level, with attention to issues such as stabilization:

- ◆ Ensure that treatment of "timely issues" (such as the "Dealing with Shocks" issue) is based on solid data and analysis. This may be difficult for the *Survey* team to accomplish, given the planning cycle that militates against rapid response to emerging issues;
- ◆ Improve the level and depth of data utilized in tables and diagrams and the quality of analysis: "The analysis rests mostly on intuition or emotion, not scientific proof";
- ◆ Make analytical acuity the hallmark of the publication's chapters.

## F. FACILITATING CROSS-DIVISIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

### 1. *Remove the Barriers to Involvement, Consultation and Collaboration*

Inter-divisional task forces are now being established, which might help change the ESCAP culture away from silos towards cross-disciplinary work. If contributing to the *Survey* were to be incorporated into the strategic framework for all divisions, then division chiefs could allocate resources and staff members accordingly, as spelled out in individual job descriptions and the Performance Appraisal System.

Some respondents argued that the question of whether the *Survey* should be produced with other divisions must address the "reality that attempts to bring them in have been met with mixed success". Contributions must be done as a responsibility, not "as a favour". The *Survey* operates on a tight schedule and finding contributors with drafting skills of publication quality is an issue in some cases.

When asked what parts of their divisional work are relevant in terms of affecting economic and social development, the response was, "all of it". The major problem is that "work cycles are full" and interdisciplinary work is complicated. Would it be helpful to get other staff more involved? Respondents were positive about this possibility, but also said that it seems to be more difficult than people thought it would be. On the other hand, some staff resent the fact that the *Survey* is not a vehicle to carry their voices into the development world.

Many models exist for solving these issues, but the essential task is to ensure and enable involvement through work programmes and institutionalization. *The Survey* could function as an “MDG Centre”, with individuals assigned for a particular year and theme. Alternatively, it can function separately from the *MDG Report*, but maintain data and conceptual links with the latter, so that both publications better reflect ESCAP’s mission and organizational knowledge.

Respondents were asked if they could imagine ways in which they could be more involved in contributing to the *Survey*. Depending on workload deriving from other responsibilities, most said they could envision contributing in a meaningful way to the *Survey*. For the “state of environment”, the *Survey* and the theme study both served as input into the Commission. This could occur again in various forms, respondents said. Topics that create a “more holistic view” would generate interest. Longer-term collaboration would require new resources in some cases. For some divisions, it would help if it were not the same person as focal point every year; the topic would determine who contributes.

Many divisions could assist with identification of priority issues and how the *Survey* could be used to disseminate important messages, aimed at underpinning ESCAP’s efforts on various fronts; produce analyses on selected issues and themes; prepare “box stories” drawn from a potential series of policy briefs on pressing issues etc.

Respondents suggested several changes that would help remove present barriers to in-house consultation: the annual *Survey* planning and conceptualization should occur at the highest possible level, involving the broadest participation, in order to maximize contributions from across divisions. The process should be from the bottom up, with divisions bringing ideas and themes to the core team. If divisions are involved from the beginning, their commitment to making quality contributions will be enhanced. Contributions by persons outside the core team must be legitimized, planned, documented and rewarded.

## 2. *Make the Survey More Relevant to Division or Sector Work*

Respondents suggested that the *Survey* has been viewed as a mandated and “very mechanistic process”. For external readers and non-economists, it may focus too heavily on technical information. To make this flagship publication more useful and relevant to the work that other divisions engage in with member States, it must integrate sector work into its pages.

- ◆ Create a short “Guidelines for Contributing to the Survey”. Potential contributors require more explicit instructions as to the nature, context and format of their contributions. This will provide consistency and continuity within the publication, and will also facilitate quality contributions from more staff.

### *The Ideal Core Team*

The *Survey* requires a multidisciplinary approach that involves social, economic and statistical expertise. Core team members should therefore be able to work together; liaise with others inside the division, in other divisions and externally; and have a mix of sectoral expertise and backgrounds, including social perspectives that could be integrated into the economic analysis. Team members should also have a sound understanding of economics, social science, policy issues, the policymaking process and government perspectives, and understand how global issues have an impact on the region. The team should include a mix of “permanent” and ad hoc members. Good writing skills are important.

### *The Future Core Team*

The recent United Nations personnel policy that requires employees to move around the organization every five years engenders a generalist approach, whereas respondents believe that the *Survey's* close statistical work requires a specialist approach. Rotation of staff will raise the need for proper training courses for those without doctorates and/or significant research backgrounds—and unmet training needs already exist. New personnel rotated into the *Survey's* core team would be in a seriously “disadvantaged position” without proper orientation, qualifications and training. Openness to expanding the team to other divisions exists, but it “might not work to have people in for only one year”, depending upon the person’s intended contribution.

## **G. UPGRADING DATA COLLECTION, MANAGEMENT AND PRESENTATION**

### **1. *Improve Data Collection and Management:***

The *Survey's* heavy reliance on secondary data was seen as a liability by many respondents. They suggested that ESCAP should work on improving the number of countries that report their data. The Statistics Division’s role in capacity-building is important in this regard for both counterparts *and* in-house staff who want to improve their statistical knowledge and skills. The process of gathering and managing data requires better inter-divisional planning and coordination than currently exists. While gathering more primary data would elevate the publication’s status, it also raises issues of data replication and validation. The role of the Statistics Division needs rethinking in this regard.

- ◆ Ensure a formulaic approach to track data changes from year to year for certain data points; as the figures change, the text is automatically updated.

### **2. *Streamline the Relationship between SD (SISS) and PDD:***

Production techniques are good but can be improved. Staff should be able to update tables with a click of a button, year to year. If *Survey* tables were produced from the SISS

database, refreshing them would be “effortless in a perfect system”. Filling vacancies with personnel who can develop a computer-based set of core indicators for the *Survey* (maintained by SISS) will help achieve this improvement. Although some indicators are online, many remain to be harmonized and the next data collection is being postponed until that has been accomplished by early 2006. SISS and PDD are discussing which indicators are critical so that “holes in our coverage” can be closed.

Contemporary computer programs afford impressive opportunities for automatically updating frequently used and standard tables used in the *Survey*. With properly trained staff, there is no logical reason that modelling could not become a regular part of SD’s functions. The “value judgements” that come with skill and experience can remain the responsibility of the *Survey* team. At the same time, the statistical experts maintain responsibility for scrutinizing all data tables as a form of peer review.

### ***3. Improve Data Presentation and Statistical Analysis:***

The *Survey* could benefit from improvements in its graphic and table presentations to something “fancier and more impressive”. Using Excel exclusively does neither the data nor the publication justice.

- ◆ Excel meets basic presentation needs and is easy to use; use more sophisticated programs to give the publication a higher-end look;
- ◆ Format tables, graphs, charts and other figures with an eye to their clarity when photocopied; add diamonds, dots, broken lines and end-point values to lines;
- ◆ Include links to data or data sources throughout the publication;
- ◆ Use thematic data maps to display the profile of regional populations;
- ◆ Make headings and subheadings more dynamic;
- ◆ Place the highly detailed analyses on the ESCAP website, with appropriate links highlighted in the *Survey* text;
- ◆ Write an analytical paragraph that sheds new light on it or summarizes broad differences between the countries.

## **H. MODERNIZING PRODUCTION QUALITY AND PROCESSES**

### ***1. Improve the Editorial and Production Processes:***

The publication’s potential could be realized further by being easier to read, well written with the intended audience in mind. That means cutting down Chapter II and paying more attention to links between country issues and regional or subregional issues.

As an official publication, the *Survey* must go through ESCAP’s editorial processes and units. In order to improve the *Survey*, these processes and units must be improved. The editorial and production processes are presently strained, fitting around other duties:

- ◆ Strengthen the Editorial Unit to generate the equivalent of three full-time positions;
- ◆ Conduct training and other capacity-building efforts to support the Unit and to ensure capacity for timely, thorough and comprehensive editing of the *Survey* at all stages;
- ◆ Strengthen compliance with suggested editorial changes from CSS;
- ◆ Re-examine and streamline the editorial processes;

- ◆ Provide funding for substantive editing of all chapters prior to typesetting and coordinate it with the copy-editing process.

## 2. *Improve Format, Presentation, and Production Quality*

The *Survey* looks like “every other economic publication” that respondents use on the Internet, but has more appeal than some. Greater financial resources would certainly allow for improvements in production quality and visual appeal. Respondents made many very detailed suggestions about production quality. Key recommendations are:

- ◆ Hire a professional, external graphic design company to recreate the cover, internal presentation and format of the *Survey*;
- ◆ Emphasize interesting and readable text lay-out, dynamic headings and subheadings and more sophisticated tables, charts, figures and maps;
- ◆ Sustain the new image for several years to reinforce recognition and market value.

# I. BROADENING THE SURVEY’S IMPACT THROUGH BROADER DISSEMINATION

## 1. *Improve Breadth and Depth of Dissemination*

Both external and internal respondents observed that a weak communication and dissemination strategy diminishes the *Survey*’s impact. Potential external readers are not universally aware of the document or that the *Survey* is online. If the media do not pick up on key findings that would be important to the target group, those findings may lie fallow. Interviewees suggested improving the publication’s overall availability and dissemination, for example by printing less expensive hard copies, by improving the website and by developing a more strategic dissemination strategy.

Dissemination must be framed strategically as an activity that extends well beyond the launch and distribution. However, members of the Commission should receive more copies, as they are currently the front line of dissemination into government agencies.

The *Survey* should be made more interactive and participatory. External interviewees suggested establishing an online discussion among users and making raw data available to allow users the opportunity of selecting and manipulating data themselves for specific analytical purposes.

People can write to ask for a copy; requests that cannot be honoured can be directed to the website. The ESCAP staff can borrow a copy from the core team. Availability of copies for dissemination is suggested by the fact that at the end of the 2005 distribution, 119 copies were left from the total run. These could easily have been distributed to staff.

### **External Dissemination:**

Dissemination should not rely solely on media interest and distribution, although that is a key part of dissemination that needs to be maximized. Although copies should be given to the embassies, the embassies do not necessarily pass them on to the relevant ministries; therefore, ministries also should directly receive multiple copies sent to specific individuals. This would require maintenance of an up-to-date database.

- ◆ Revamp the *Survey Summary* (which currently is presented in photocopy form) into a slick, spin-off publication of no more than two pages.
- ◆ Develop a Précis version in multiple languages. Language barriers may weaken dissemination of document to the extent of making it inaccessible to mid-level managers (the ostensible target audience).
- ◆ Maintain and vet the central mailing list to eliminate outdated addresses and duplicates and add new organizations and individuals.

### **Internal Dissemination**

Internal dissemination is also weak and is not the place to reduce distribution to cut costs. Many internal staff do not read the *Survey*, partly because it is hard to obtain, even in-house.

- ◆ Distribute a personal copy to every ESCAP staff member. Those who do not wish to retain them in their offices can place them in divisional libraries;
- ◆ Hold cross-divisional brown-bag lunches or meetings to discuss the *Survey*.

#### **2. Increase Funding for Dissemination**

Internal respondents said that they need more money to increase dissemination effectiveness. Enough copies of the *Survey* are printed to cover the mailing list, but the producers need more copies for the launch. The Publications Committee allots the funding (about US\$ 2,500 for all launches). Requests are sent to the Chief of the Conference Management Unit (CMU) in the Conference Services Section (CSS), who will approve or not.

- ◆ Launches in a few member countries each year should be adequately funded;
- ◆ A line item should be incorporated into the budget for mailing the *Survey*, in addition to printing it;
- ◆ Non-profits, other international development agencies and research institutes should be able to request waiving of the mailing costs and perhaps a discounted purchase price;
- ◆ Governments of member States should receive as many copies as they would like, without cost.

## **J. GIVING THE SURVEY RESOURCES COMMENSURATE WITH FLAGSHIP STATUS**

### **1. Improve the Survey's Resources and Budgets**

A major question for any flagship publication is the extent to which its budget adequately reflects its institutional priority and provides ample resources for data collection and analysis. The *Survey*, as mentioned previously, is a regular budget item, with a current total annual budget of US\$ 75,000 plus staff time. The resources allocated to this publication are adequate, some said, but others believed that they are still insufficient to elevate the *Survey* to a higher level of analytical and production quality: this is a very under-resourced activity: production costs are 1 per cent or 10 per cent of ADB and others. In turn, this limits its strategic relevance, influence on development planning and regional policy debates. Budget constraints limit coverage of issues, dissemination and efforts to increase awareness of the flagship publication.

The budget needs to be expanded to more realistically address the content issues and the heavy reliance on secondary data. This means adding another economist and at least one social scientist to the core team.

#### IV. STRUCTURAL ISSUES

As discussed above, a general sense of ownership of this flagship publication in ESCAP currently does not exist. The *Survey* is seen as a PDD publication. Leaving the *Survey* producers in the current horizontal structural arrangement, subsumed under PDD, is not particularly fruitful in terms of achieving organizational collaboration and ownership. The current structure also contributes to a troubling disconnect between those responsible for production of the *Survey* (PDD) and ESCAP's official organizational centre for preparing databases (SD).

Several structural and procedural changes are critical to making the most of ESCAP's comparative advantage. Maximizing ESCAP's position in producing the *Survey* would require several related strategies:

- ◆ Systemize contributions from all divisions by defining *Survey* (work) as part of their work programmes;
- ◆ Allow members of any division to be selected for secondment to PDD for a specified period. This will place contributing to the *Survey* into the context of the formal reward and personnel evaluation system;
- ◆ Rethink the relationship between SISS and DPS/SAS data-gathering processes. The *Survey* should include data on all 59 countries, to the extent possible. SISS does capacity-building in member States regarding statistical data gathering and analysis, so it should target some of the countries that up to now have not contributed reliable or extensive statistics to the *Survey*. Other links with SISS should be strengthened.

To realize the potential strategic role of the *Survey* and to ensure that ESCAP's best work is better reflected in its flagship publication, the evaluators suggest three possible scenarios:

**Option (1).** The core team responsible for producing the *Survey* could be relocated to another location in ESCAP, similar to the independent HDR office in UNDP. The unit's name would be changed and its role clarified. It could be a function of the Office of the Executive Secretary. This change can be accomplished by selecting out the specific individuals who are currently or prospectively *directly involved* in producing the *Survey* and placing them within the OES. Input would be from the divisions; output would be through a Division of Research and Policy Analysis, which would report directly to the Executive Secretary; output would then be directly from the Executive Secretary to the Commission.

**Option (2).** PDD and the Statistics Division could be merged into a Statistics and Analysis Division to reduce redundancy and foster functional integration. This new body (Statistics and Analysis Office or SAO) would operate under a newly created officer – the Statistics and Analysis Officer, who would have parallel position and status with the Principal Economic Officer. Respondents said that the “rhythm and discipline” between PDD and SD are dissimilar: SD is not looking at future trends or predictions –

PDD is engaging in interpretive analysis that may look forward as well as backward. In addition, the Statistical Division produces “real statistics” that take up to two years to verify, and the *Survey* thrives on last-minute data. While there is some merit in these respondent arguments, the two models should be capable of coordination and even merging with the help of a strategic planning workshop.

**Option (3).** Merge PDD and SD, but place the group under the supervision of the Principal Economic Officer. This would be desirable for purposes of elevating the publication’s position within ESCAP (and functional in terms of removing it from the daily purview of the Executive Secretary) but unfortunately also underscores the very criticism that so many respondents articulate: The *Survey’s* social analysis is weak and therefore belies the title of “*Economic and Social Survey*”. This option for structural change might require rethinking the title of “Principal Economic Officer” and eventually replacing current personnel with an officer who has both training and experience in the *social as well as the economic side of development*, and who understands fully the complex linkages among policy, technical operations and advocacy. Such a change would be reflected in a change in title to “Principal Officer” or “Principal Economic and Social Officer”.

These structural changes alone will not enhance the *Survey’s* quality, impact and value, but they will help elevate the publication to true flagship status.

## V. CORPORATE CULTURE: TIME FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

ESCAP does not have a strong organizational culture promoting exchange of ideas, respondents suggested. Because staff members are asked not to contradict the *Survey*, they have to be aware of selected parts in order not to do so. The pledge not to contradict the *Survey* is “in the culture of ESCAP, and is promoted by its management”. Some agree with the “no-contradict rule” and see it as a normal part of publishing: “since the end product should be everyone’s product, there should be no contradiction”. When data do not coincide with data published in the *Survey*, the contradicting evidence can be mentioned in a footnote.

The corporate culture rests on the concept of “let’s not rock the boat”. Some said that there is little or no support from above during controversies. The views expressed in the *Survey* are “compromised by United Nations positions. Certain things cannot be said, even if the data would support them”. ESCAP’s position as a diplomatic organization contributes to this pattern, but the impacts on the *Survey* should be discussed openly. The *Survey* producers face constraints in using human rights terminology, for example, in normative work, but that “does not preclude saying some valuable things. There is nothing they cannot say; they might just have to say it in a different way”. As an intergovernmental body, “ESCAP should not be analysing the development context of individual countries”. Some respondents thought that the culture of self-censorship within ESCAP is unnecessary in that other United Nations agencies (e.g., UNICEF, UNDP or UNCTAD) are more critical.

## VI. IN CONCLUSION

- ✚ **A multi-faceted approach will produce a strong flagship publication:** The first priority for ESCAP is to improve buy-in and involvement of all staff and managers. This is a leadership and managerial challenge. Equally important is to improve the *Survey's* resources, which will support the goal of having a positive impact on regional development planning, policy and outcomes. An unclear editorial focus, tied with the imbalance between economic and social analyses, jeopardizes the *Survey's* status as a flagship publication. Failure to take advantage of its comparative advantage, regional views and social analysis leaves the publication less powerful than it could otherwise be.
- ✚ **In order to make the *Survey* a strong, leading flagship publication among regional commissions worldwide, the culture surrounding the *Survey* must be remodelled:** A paradigm shift must occur so that the *Survey* is clearly defined and regarded as a product of ESCAP rather than of PDD. This means that ESCAP staff and executives must come to see it as “our publication”. Self-criticism should be encouraged and critical analysis expected. Strong messages from senior management will foster the shift. Review by highly regarded economic and social analysts and editors should become part of a valued process of critical thinking and excellence. Addressing controversial issues (and adopting an advocacy position) should be acceptable as long as both sides of the issue are explored. The *Survey* cannot reach top-flight status if its authors (internal or external) are not allowed to engage in responsible critical analysis.
- ✚ **Improving cross-divisional ownership requires more extensive and higher quality in-house consultation and collaboration:** A high premium must be put on inter-divisional sharing of information and giving feedback to editorial plans, selection of topics and themes, and building a current, reliable statistical database. All divisions should be involved in writing for or providing substantial data for the *Survey*. All redesigning or restructuring of the *Survey* must build upon input from all divisions and subdivisions. Improving individual staff member ownership implies that staff will think about how the *Survey* can have an impact on or reflect their work, read it, become fully aware of its main points and advocacy positions, and be responsible for contributing frequently in some meaningful way (a short piece, an example of best practices or lessons learned, a country or comparative data table, or a box describing technical operations or policy debate).

Insofar as ESCAP desires to make this flagship publication “the best of all commission *Surveys*”, revolutionary change may be necessary to the extent of challenging Department of Economic and Social Affairs definition of what makes a quality *Survey*. It is important to plan carefully any fundamental editorial or presentational changes so that the transformation will make sense to both staff and readers and will result in a coherent, focused document. Nonetheless, ESCAP could be a leader in transforming the original mandate into a more contemporary, vital, and useful framework for a regional flagship publication.