



On 31 July, Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom joined Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his call for action to meet the Millennium Development Goals. According to Mr. Brown, millions of lives are at stake in what amounts to a development emergency.

Webcast: <http://webcast.un.org/ramgen/specialevents/se070731.rm> (38 minutes)

Audio summary: <http://radio.un.org/story.asp?NewsID=7475> (1 minute)

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Be seen, be heard

Young people everywhere are being called upon to participate in the life of society and in decision-making.

The world's 1.2 billion young people are being called upon to stand up and make their voices heard on International Youth Day, which will be celebrated on 12 August. The observance is a reminder to youth that their contribution to the development dialogue is valuable, and that their participation matters. To participate means not only to have a seat at the political table, but to play an active role in development by contributing their skills and energy to the improvement of their communities..

The benefit of young people's political participation has been widely recognized. But youth empowerment

for self-development and engagement in economic activities, such as employment, education and entrepreneurship, "has not been stressed enough, although it is vital to advancement of youth and their communities," says Patience Stephens, UN focal point on youth in the DESA Division for Social Policy and Development. Investing in policies that promote youth employment, for instance, pays off in the fight against extreme poverty and hunger. According to estimates of the International Labour Organization, halving the world's youth unemployment rate, and thus bringing it in line with the rate for adults, could add as much as \$3.5 trillion to global gross domestic product. The largest relative gains would be in sub-Saharan Africa where GDP could improve by as much as 12 to 19 percent.

Boosting decent jobs for youth, those aged 15 to 24, is moreover essential for the sustainability of universal pensions for older persons and unemployment insurance in many countries, the

Review of National Action Plans on Youth Employment, a DESA publication, reminds us.

A burgeoning pool of young working poor

Despite the virtuous circle triggered by youth participation in development, too many youth are unemployed or underemployed, between jobs or working in the informal economy, and too many work but are poor. Today's young people constitute the first generation whose choices in education, training and work are being made against the backdrop of a global economy in which high levels of education are not leading to improved job prospects. "Globalization has increased unemployment, as well as job flexibility and 'casualization', which have exacerbated the social exclusion of youth in many contexts," highlights the Secretary-General in his report on follow-up to the World Programme of Action for Youth.

Globally, youth unemployment has grown from 74 million in 1995 to 89 million people today, according to ILO. However, these official figures only represent the tip of the iceberg as many more millions of youth have been forced to seek a living in the informal economy, often in dangerous circumstances, with no social protection, and working for long hours at very low wages. These individuals form a burgeoning pool of young working poor.

One out of every three youth in the world, says the report, is either seeking but unable to find work, has given up the job search after unsuccessfully compete with a large pool of peers for few jobs, or is working but still living on less than two dollars a day. Barriers to decent jobs for young people stem from a shortage of decent work opportunities, lack of employability, discrimination, forced labour, work in hazardous occupations, extreme poverty, armed conflict, forced migration or poor health and HIV/AIDS.

Incapacity to find a job in early life is far from a harmless footnote in a young person's transition to adult life, as popular perception sometimes suggest. According to several studies, prolonged lack of work during youth can permanently undermine future prospects for work, future earnings, and access to quality jobs.

The World Programme of Action for Youth adopted by the General Assembly in 1996 called for youth participation "in the life of society and in decision-making," while world leaders pledged in the Millennium Declaration to "develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real

chance to find decent and productive work." This commitment was later included in the Millennium Development Goals, and embodied in 2000 in the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network, a global initiative to facilitate the attainment of this target, with the assistance of ILO, the World Bank and other specialized agencies, and with the participation of young peoples themselves.

The school-to-work transition

The Youth Employment Network promotes young people as an asset – a catalyst for development – rather than as passive beneficiaries for whom employment must be found. "Entrepreneurship, by which the young become their own employers, is an important avenue for youth empowerment," stresses Ms. Stephens; especially at a time when many young people, even the best educated, find the transition from school to work difficult. Microfinance initiatives in many parts of the developing world have produced largely favourable results. Mexico, for instance, has gone down this path providing support to young men and women in formulating project proposals, obtaining access to finance, and running small enterprises.

Indeed, entrepreneurship, along with employability, equal opportunities and employment creation constitutes one of the four global priorities set by the High Level Panel on Youth Employment, which advises the Secretary-General on the Youth Employment Network. Employability, understood as investment in education and vocational training for young people, is being promoted in different countries. The United Arab Emirates, for example, provides young nationals with training and enhanced career opportunities through a skills development fund.



Providing youth with work experience is also viewed as a key element for preparing them for the world of work. To this end, Japan offers a youth trial employment scheme that provides financial incentives to companies offering short-term on-the-job training to unemployed youth, while Croatia subsidizes employers taking on salaried apprentices and interns. A combination of training and on-the-job experience underpins the German dual-track training system, which has helped keep the youth unemployment rate close to the rate for the general population. The German model has been replicated in different forms to suit national circumstances by many other countries.

Yet according to the High Level Panel, all these efforts to prepare young people for the world of work will be doomed to failure unless matched by measures to stimulate demand and create new job opportunities for the newcomers to the labour market. Macroeconomic policy must have job creation as “a central goal, and not as a by-product” of government policies for investment and economic growth, says the DESA Review of National Action Plans on Youth Employment.

While many countries speak of a “mismatch” between skills and the kinds of labour market opportunities available, “the overall problem of youth employment relates to the inability of most economic policies to create employment opportunities of the quality which responds to the expectations... of young people,” the Review adds. “Rather than asking them to lower their expectations, policymakers should be working to foster employment-intensive economic growth in both quantitative and qualitative terms.”

Coping with HIV/AIDS

Any comprehensive youth development strategy must address the disadvantaged position of vulnerable groups, with an emphasis on participation of women and the poor, recommends Ms. Stephens. All too often, it is women who suffer from poverty and disempowerment, and young women are no exception.

According to Ms. Stephens, the growing burden of HIV-affected households in some parts of the world creates pressure on young people, women in particular, to drop out of school in order to provide financial support or care for their family members. In addition, an estimated 13 million AIDS orphans worldwide – many of whom have become heads of households and breadwinners – are growing up

without adequate education and social support to enable them to handle adult roles and responsibilities. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, HIV/AIDS is rising among women, to the extent that 76 percent of youth living with the virus are young women. Due to economic necessity, young people are compelled to join the workforce before they are ready.

Encouragingly, “young people are not complacent and are organizing to confront the issues. Increasingly, they want to be seen and be heard,” says Ms. Stephens. The International Youth Day in New York will spotlight Young Professionals for International Cooperation, an NGO that carried out a campaign in which youth helped youth by building schools for AIDS orphans in Africa. Thousands of Caribbean youth – nearly 60,000 in Honduras and Guatemala alone – have learned how to protect themselves from HIV, thanks to an initiative supported by UNFPA and other partners.

The initiative encouraged governments and NGOs in the region to give greater priority to this important social issue. HIV prevalence rates in the Caribbean are the second highest in the world, after sub-Saharan Africa. Most importantly, the project engaged youth in a variety of imaginative ways: In Guyana, awareness was promoted through training of 160 disc jockeys and production of music CDs containing prevention messages. In Costa Rica, on its part, the project helped put in place alliances among 42 organizations and trained more than 1,000 youth volunteers. Similar youth-led initiatives have flourished all over the world in recent years.

ICT: power tool of the young

Many of the initiatives led by youth take advantage of information and communication technologies, which young people tend to use with ease. These are becoming “truly hubs for the communication and social networking of youth,” explains Ms. Stephens. A presentation on using the internet for youth-led development will be delivered at the International Youth Day in New York. The event will provide examples from an international youth-led network empowered by technology to show how youth can use the internet to take action in their local and global communities.

As a positive note, the fact youth are for the most part technologically savvy increases their chances of harnessing the benefits of globalization. In addition to access to knowledge, ICT is opening up new options education such as e-learning and distance

education. The World Youth Report 2007, scheduled for release in October, will show how ICT has improved access to schooling in several Asian countries. In China, for example, there are more than 2,700 radio and television universities offering 18,000 classes. Provisional statistics from UNDP suggest that there may be up to 10 million graduates of these universities.

While globalization may have facilitated the spread of technology, too many youths are on the wrong side of the digital divide, according to the Secretary-General report, and therefore fail to reap the benefits of technology access.

Alternative forms of political activism

While information and communication technologies are said to have increased opportunities for political participation, many youth still feel that their views are disregarded by the adult world. This had led to disaffection in many countries, with apathy towards formal political processes translating into low electoral turnout. In a 2004 survey of Latin America, only 56 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 24 said they would choose democracy to authoritarianism or other forms of government – far cry from the political fervor that once characterized the region. As the World Youth Report 2007 indicates, “too many young people feel that their views do not matter, that they cannot influence outcomes, and that democracy does not work for them.”

Cynicism and lack of active engagement in existing political structures, however, does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest in political issues. Sometimes, according to the World Youth Report 2007, when youth do participate they are “more inclined to engage in non-conventional forms of political activism,” mirroring the degree to which they feel unrepresented.

Youth participation for development can take many forms. In one of the presentations to be made at the International Youth Day observance in New York, for example, a member of a student-led organization that mobilize universities and coordinates a national student network on the Millennium Development Goals, will show how young people can make a contribution to development that is constructive, visible, and engaging.

For more information on the UN programme on youth, including the World Programme of Action for Youth: <http://www.un.org/esa/socev/unyin/>

The geographical name game

With tens of thousands of unrecorded place names, and variations aplenty, the question “Where are you from?” may not be so easy to answer after all.



The oldest city of South Africa is Cape Town. It is also Kaapstad, eKapa, Le Cap, Kapstadt and Kapkaupunki. Which of these names is correct?

Which are in current use? Place names may vary due to language, Romanization methods, even politics, but successful communication depends on an appropriate use of names on maps, in the media, and in legal documents. At the ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, which opens on 21 August in New York, experts from around the world will gather for ten days to discuss the myriad challenges of promoting accuracy and consistency in nomenclature.

While it is tempting to think of the globe as Terra Cognita, in fact many places have names known only to the local people, or are so new that gazetteers and cartographers have a hard time keeping up. In China alone, rapid development is generating more than 20,000 new urban names every year. Meanwhile, in nearby Indonesia about half of the 17,000 islands making up the archipelago have not yet been labeled on maps. The government has had to embark on an intensive field survey, visiting each of the islands to ask locals how they refer to their own home.

More than a curiosity, lives and livelihoods depend on knowledge of local geography and availability of a reliable toponymy to match. In Pakistan, provision of humanitarian aid to the victims of the 2005 earthquake was delayed by lack of information on inhabited areas, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Not surprisingly, OCHA has expressed the need for a global toponymic database to address urgent humanitarian needs. Tensions can also arise from changes in usage linked to political developments, boundary changes, or recognition of local customs that call common toponyms into question.

The need for reliable, authoritative and accessible toponymic data, which is common to each of these

examples, provides “great opportunities, but for most, also many challenges and issues,” recognizes Helen Kerfoot, Chairperson of the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names which will meet on 20 and 31 August, immediately before and after the main event. The Conference and the expert group meeting will give participants a chance to discuss problems of authorizing, storing, and disseminating geographic information in an easy to access and timely fashion. About 300 representatives from 100 countries are expected to take part, among them diplomats, senior officials from national surveying and mapping institutions, scientists and academics.

Asserting national authority

Experts will deal with the technical problems involved in the domestic standardization of geographical names, and will prepare draft recommendations for the procedures, mainly linguistic, that might be followed in the standardization of their own names by individual countries. But what does “standardization of geographical names” mean? According to the UN Group of Experts Manual for the National Standardization of Geographical Names, published by DESA, determining and selecting the best or most appropriate place names in their written form is the answer. “Standardization means being consistent, having a systematic approach in recognizing names used within countries, an approach based on formalized rules,” says Ms. Kerfoot. These rules can be modified with experience and as needs evolve.

A nation’s people regard geographical names as an essential part of their cultural heritage. The UN experts recommend creating a national names authority in each country to establish and record official place names, rather than relying on nongovernmental or international map-makers, atlas publishers and gazetteers. According to Ms. Kerfoot, “Having a single names authority avoids overlapping work among government departments which do not have a clear authority to say how a name should be spelled.” And, she adds, such authorities could play an important part in preserving the oral tradition of indigenous people and minority groups.

That said, the conditions for standardization will depend on the resources and organization of each government, the number of languages involved and the cultural or political relationships within and among regions of a country. No two countries with effective programmes approach standardization in the same way and their organization, principles, policies and procedures vary widely. According to the

standardization manual, no one method is preferred to than another as long as each sets “consistently written names that are nationally accepted and agree with local spoken and written usage.”

Fifty countries currently have some form of national authority on names. In some cases, decisions on names are handled by national governments, while in others provinces or states may register official names under the guidance of a central committee, as is the case in Australia, Canada, and Malaysia. National standardization is the cornerstone on which international standardization is based, Ms. Kerfoot reminds us. “Clearly a UN goal is that every country have such a mechanism in place and can provide their names data for international use.”

Standardization of geographical names in developed countries certainly did not occur overnight. It is an expensive proposition requiring a great deal of time and effort. Yet developing countries do not need to walk the same path, says Yacob Zewoldi, head of the Statistical and Geographic Conferences Unit in the Statistics Division in DESA. They can study the experiences of other countries to find shortcuts, and they can take advantage of the support provided by the UN Group of Experts. Mozambique, which has recently hosted two training courses on geographical names with the assistance of the expert group, is a case in point.

The role of names in development

In Mozambique, some place names are written in Portuguese but not in the local language, marked in the wrong place, or not marked on maps at all, a situation that is common in low-income countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Given the continent’s 2,000 languages and dialects and limited government budgets, standardization of geographical names is seriously hampered “either by lack of resources, lack of expertise or both,” says Mr. Zewoldi.

In sub-Saharan Africa, there are obviously more pressing needs than a set of good maps, but standardization of place names is crucial for air travel, road transport, and inter-jurisdictional exchange, all preconditions for expanded trade, which can, under the right conditions, spur development and fight poverty.

“For the good of humanity, toponyms certainly do not rank as highly as clean water or health,” says Ms. Kerfoot, “but do contribute to the well-being of society if they are well known, unambiguous and can

contribute to the infrastructure for rural and urban planning, risk management, postal and services delivery, mine removal, etc.” Geographical names are pivotal to presenting the practical results of spatial data analysis and interpretation in such areas as tsunami warnings, danger of forest fires, loss of natural habitat and climate change vulnerability. In all those cases, clear place names are essential to the planning and provision of emergency and humanitarian aid.

Jumping on board the internet

Today, the massive use of internet and other multimedia tools to disseminate information and growing demand on cartographic services face experts on geographical names with important challenges. “Although technological advances in communications have given us a great boost,” acknowledges Ms. Kerfoot, “the new environment is certainly demanding: there are bigger expectations to meet.” Geographical names can now be shared and used around the world. Last year, an estimated one hundred million people across the globe used Google Earth, a virtual planet drawn from the superimposition of images obtained from satellite imagery and aerial photography on a three-dimensional globe within a geographic information system.

Three years ago, the Group of Experts on Geographical Names recommended the development of a global data storage system to collect, manage and disseminate names of countries and major cities in the world with a population of more than 100,000. As a result, the Statistics Division in DESA, which houses the secretariat of the Expert Group, will be releasing a global database prototype at the conference in a multilingual, multi-scriptural and geo-referenced format. In the database, names for places in the world link to a map, so that information on names, spelling and pronunciation can be accessed, including links to standardized forms. Websites of national governments can have links to the new UN database, providing countries and general users with a reliable and consistent source of information on geographical names.

Yet this much broader audience only enhances the need to give a greater impulse to the standardization process, stresses Ms. Kerfoot. The relatively unreliable nature of place names on the web is a weak point. For this reason, the Group of Experts on Geographical Names is working with Google Earth to ensure that reliability on geographical names is at the

heart of the services offered by this application. A pilot project between the two is being set in motion.

The UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names is correcting inaccurate place names contained in Google Earth, starting with Finland’s geographical names. This country has claimed that about thirty percent of Finnish toponyms in Google Earth contain some kind of error due in large part to the omission of names that have been approved in more than one language (Finnish, Swedish and Saami), and the misrepresentation of characters in the written forms of names in these languages. The Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names will be also hearing a presentation by a representative of Google Earth. “We have to jump on board rather than pretending that Google Earth does not exist,” Ms. Kerfoot underlines. “We clearly want to work with them. We do not want geographical names to be the best kept secret, but rather to make them as well known and accessible as possible.”

Complete information on the Conference, and the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names, can be found at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/>.

Global dialogue on development

A more pragmatic and action-oriented ECOSOC

The 2007 substantive session served as a testing ground for the Annual Ministerial Review and the Development Cooperation Forum, while adopting resolutions on hunger, employment, operational activities and a host of other issues.

The four-week substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, which concluded on 27 July in Geneva, was a “ground-breaking” meeting, according to Dalius Čekuolis, the Council President, with the new Annual Ministerial Review and Development Cooperation Forum taking centre stage. The two new functions have made the Council “more pragmatic, action-based and action-oriented.” They have infused new meaning in the Council annual meetings, turning them into vehicles to improve the effectiveness of aid and strengthen accountability for the realization of the internationally agreed development goals.

This year a wide range of resolutions were adopted – on the role of the Council in the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of and follow-up to major UN conferences and summits, on the UN role in providing full and productive employment and decent work for all and on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the organization, among many others. With regards to its subsidiary bodies, the Council adopted recommendations contained in the reports of the Statistical Commission and the Commission on Population and Development.

It also adopted a resolution from the report of the Commission on the Status of Women in which it called upon the international community to continue to provide urgently needed assistance to alleviate the dire humanitarian crisis being faced by Palestinian women and their families, and approved a text on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child. Other texts adopted were a decision on the flow of information for the follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society, and a decision on social development, including new partnerships for Africa’s development.

The Council also endorsed the recommendations of the Committee for Development Policy that Samoa

be graduated from the list of least developed countries; and recommended that the General Assembly take note of the recommendation. It decided not to recommend to the General Assembly the inclusion of Papua New Guinea in the list of least developed countries.

Commitment to eliminate hunger

The Council adopted a ministerial declaration by consensus that signaled the international community’s unanimous commitment to “prioritize actions and allocate resources to eliminate hunger and malnutrition in all countries,” and to undertake measures to increase access of malnourished people to food. The ministerial review focused on eradication of hunger and poverty – Millennium Development Goal one – featuring national voluntary presentations by the ministers of six developing countries: Bangladesh, Barbados, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Ethiopia and Ghana. Ministers provided details of the issues, successes, policy directions and initiatives these countries are undertaking to achieve the internationally agreed development goals.

Five central messages were conveyed. National development strategies are working but not at the pace required; therefore, the implementation process should be speed up and scaled up. The global partnership for development should be more effective. The global economic environment should be made pro-development and pro-poor. Accountability and monitoring of the implementation of commitments should be strengthened. Lastly, emerging threats such as climate change and desertification hamper efforts to realize these goals, and should be urgently addressed.

Towards an inclusive Development Cooperation Forum

The launch of the Development Cooperation Forum served to recognize the forum as an impartial, inclusive and universal platform that will aim to bolster quality, impact and coherence of development cooperation. A key challenge will be to ensure that the process is truly inclusive and country-driven. It is widely recognized that development assistance has a greater impact when it is accompanied by national ownership and government leadership, without overlooking domestic and international accountability.

The Council stressed that predictable and stable funding of operational activities, coupled with

effective monitoring of aid quality, is essential to enhance the impact of development cooperation. The Forum is expected to contribute to aid effectiveness and donor harmonization by bringing in a range of voices – from donor countries and UN agencies, to non-governmental organizations, the private sector and academia. With the groundwork in place, participants in next year’s inaugural session are expected to be able to offer strong guidance on coordinated provision of international development assistance.

Resolution on decent and productive employment

During the Council’s coordination segment, a resolution was adopted on the role of the UN system in providing full and productive employment and decent work for all. The Council called on the funds, programmes, and specialized agencies of the United Nations to assess and adopt in their action plans a three-phased approach to promote full employment and decent work. The resolution calls for coordination of employment and decent work-related activities, and for the promotion of a coherent, mutually-supporting, multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral approach to the issue. The Secretary-General is requested to encourage the agencies of the United Nations system to review the integration and implementation of the policies and plans to achieve decent and productive employment.

In addition, the Council also decided that to focus on the role of the United Nations system in implementing the ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration of 2007 at its 2008 coordination segment.

Humanitarian assistance: From strength to strength

The Council’s work in the humanitarian segment has moved from strength to strength, Nikhil Seth, Director of the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination at DESA, said on behalf of Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. The Council clearly stressed the importance of capacity-building of national, local and regional organizations, promoting broader partnerships among humanitarian organizations, incorporating a gender perspective in humanitarian operations, and improving humanitarian stand-by capacities.

National ownership of operational activities

This was a year for the Council’s triennial comprehensive policy review, and thus a chance to

take a critical look at the impact of the UN’s operational activities. Delegates debated the efficiency and effectiveness of UN system support to Member States in realizing national development strategies, and in moving towards the internationally agreed development goals. The importance of national ownership of development objectives emerged as one of the main themes of the policy review, along with the potential for faster transition from relief to development in countries emerging from conflict through enhanced coordination with UN peacebuilding efforts. And, above all, increased and more predictable core resources for operational activities are needed.

There was broad agreement that the review remains the best forum for Member States to evaluate the effect, scope, scale, and distribution of operational activities of the UN system as a whole, and as such is a unique tool of UN reform.

Partnerships in action

The “spirit of partnerships” was a defining feature of the substantive session, said Mr. Seth on behalf of Under-Secretary-General Sha. The practical reflection of partnerships was shown by exhibitors at a first-ever Innovation Fair held during the high-level segment. A dozen UN agencies, along with several non-governmental organizations and private sector firms, exhibited practical solutions for the reduction of hunger, malnutrition and poverty. According to Under-Secretary-General Sha, broad-based participation in the Fair demonstrated that the Council can attract key actors in these important areas of development. Mr. Sha hoped that similar events in future would become the hub for promoting partnerships for implementing the UN development agenda. “ECOSOC has changed,” concluded Mr. Seth, “and, as home to all development actors, it should become the platform to make the changes for economic and social progress everywhere.”

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

Trends and analysis

Indigenous peoples at risk from water pollution

Experts search for ways to improve security of indigenous peoples in Eastern Russia.

The security of indigenous peoples is being jeopardized by pollution, as inhabitants of the Amur River basin in the Russia Federation can readily attest. Transborder contamination of the river over the last fifteen years has contributed to the spread of cancer and other tumors, claiming the lives of hundreds of indigenous peoples. A group of experts will gather in Khabarovsk, Russia, from 27 to 29 August to address the issue and recommend ways to improve the health of indigenous peoples and their environment. The meeting has been organized by the Division for Social Policy and Development, the Government of Khabarovsk, the Association of Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North, Siberia and the Far East, and the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation.

The average life expectancy of indigenous peoples in the Amur River basin is 40 to 45 years, which is significantly less than the Russian average. At the same time, contamination of the Amur is putting the economy and cultural traditions of the local population at risk. The flesh of the fish is a staple in the region, and the skin is widely used in production of traditional crafts.

Experts will review rights enshrined in international standards and policies – such as the right to life, health, adequate food, information and participation – and suggest ways of translating those rights into protection of the land on which the health of the indigenous population depends. Strategies for evaluating the impact of harmful substances on the traditional lifestyles will be proposed, with an emphasis on regular health checks. They will also consider measures for mitigating the impact of dangerous substances on the environment. A recommendation will likely emerge that UN agencies assist in finding ways to reduce the adverse consequences of contamination of the Amur River. Finally, the group is being asked to develop guidelines for cultural, environmental and social impact assessments involving indigenous peoples.

A full report of the meeting will be submitted to the seventh session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in April next year.

For more information:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/>

The women's bill of rights at twenty-five

The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has been widely influential, but too few judges know about the treaty.

The Committee monitoring implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the “women’s bill of rights,” has just celebrated its 25th anniversary. A commemorative session on 23 July was an opportunity to take stock of achievements, and envision challenges for the future.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, a 23-person expert body, was set up in 1982, after the Convention entered into force in 1981. The special event last month recalled that the Convention has since become part of the international human rights treaty system, aiming to secure equality for women in the enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, without discrimination on the basis of sex.

Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, President of the General Assembly, described the Convention as a landmark tool for setting out global standards of gender equality. The Committee’s monitoring and guidance have significantly enhanced State accountability for women’s enjoyment of their human rights. “The Committee has made us aware of the need to examine laws that appear to be gender neutral,” she said, “but which, in fact, have adverse effects on women.” Ms. Sheikha Haya added that the Committee has consistently voiced its concern about reservations entered by States in respect of the Convention, while raising awareness of the impact on women of major global trends such as globalization, human trafficking and HIV/AIDS.

Rachel Mayanja, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, hailed the Convention’s impact on the legal and socio-political development of States parties. Ms. Mayanja said such an impact was visible in the strengthening of constitutional provisions for the protection of women’s rights, efforts to bring existing legislation

into conformity with Convention principles, improvements in the capacity of national institutions to guarantee equality between women and men, and increasing use of the Convention, coupled with the Committee's general recommendations, by domestic courts.

Evidence of the Convention's influence can be found, for example, in the South African and Ugandan constitutions, which contain significant provisions guaranteeing women's equality based on the Convention's principles, on Nepal's Supreme Court which has relied on the Convention in directing the government to address discriminatory laws, and on Canada's Supreme Court which drew on the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation on violence against women in considering a case of alleged sexual assault.

Louise Arbour, High Commissioner for Human Rights, highlighted the Committee's general recommendations which provided its members' collective view of measures States should take to fulfil obligations under the terms of the treaty. The Committee's general recommendation on female circumcision was the first by a UN treaty body on that practice. The Committee was also the first to adopt a general recommendation on HIV/AIDS. Its general recommendation on violence against women, she pointed out, was "a crucial building block in the recognition of gender-based violence as a violation of human rights," which provided the impetus for adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the establishment of a Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, and various regional human rights instruments. Likewise, the Committee's general recommendations on equality in marriage and family relations, women in political and public life, and health, were, in her view, widely influential.

Looking at the Committee's main challenges, the Committee Chairperson Dubravka Simonovic, recalled that in too many countries discrimination against women persists both in fact and in law. Furthermore, the Convention is applied by the courts in too few countries, and too few judges know about the treaty. Sadly, "de facto discrimination against women remains universal."

Also speaking in honour of the Committee's anniversary were Julio Peralta, Vice-Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, Jackie Shapiro, President of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, and Sapana Pradhan Malla of the International Women's Rights Watch Asia Pacific.

Carolyn Hannan, Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women in DESA, read out a statement on behalf of one long-time Committee member, Hanna Beate Schopp-Schilling.

The 39th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women runs from 23 July through 10 August in New York. Under article 18 of the Convention, States parties are requested to report periodically on the legislative, judicial, administrative, and programmatic measures they have taken to put the Convention into practice, and on tangible progress achieved in the elimination of discrimination. At this session, the Committee is examining reports of 15 States parties: Belize, Brazil, Cook Islands, Estonia, Guinea, Honduras, Hungary, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea and Singapore. The Committee welcomes country-specific information from NGOs in the form of alternative or shadow reports which can be submitted prior to or during this session.

For more information:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/25anniversary.htm>

Emerging trends in data dissemination

Recent trends and issues in data dissemination will be explored in a three-day seminar to be held in Kuala Lumpur from 1 to 3 August. The DESA Statistics Division has invited participants to gather for a discussion of audience requirements including those related to micro data access. The objectives of the seminar are to share country practices on emerging trends on data dissemination, inform on ongoing regional and international activities, identify possible areas where convergence and harmonization would be useful, and collect feedback on the UN's new data access system, known as "UNdata." Data dissemination at the international level will be on the agenda, as will best practices in the dissemination of official statistics.

For more information:

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/newsletter/unsd%5Fworksops/malaysia07/>

Technical cooperation

Boosting national gender statistics

Inter-regional workshop targets statistics on women's economic participation

In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action pointed out a need for better data on the contribution of women and men to the economy. Better data in turn implies enhanced capacity of countries to collect, disseminate and use reliable gender statistics. An inter-regional workshop is being organized by DESA's Statistics Division from 6 to 10 August, in collaboration with UNFPA in New Delhi, as part of its global gender statistics programme.

The workshop is intended to provide participants with the skills needed to identify relevant issues in the production and dissemination of official gender statistics. Emphasis will be placed on labour market segregation, informal employment, time use, and access to and ownership of economic resources. At the end of the workshop, participants will be better able to support their respective national gender statistics programmes, and contribute to statistical activities at the regional and international levels. The workshop is hosted by the Government of India.

For more information:

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/wshops/>

Energy indicators for sustainable development

Collecting reliable data remains a challenge in Southern Africa

Building capacities to improve basic energy statistics and indicators in the Southern African Development Community area is the goal of a workshop to be held from 21 to 24 August in Port Louis, Mauritius. The Statistics Division and the Division for Sustainable Development in DESA are teaming up with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the SADC Secretariat to prepare for the event. Mauritius has an impressive system for collecting energy statistics that could serve as a model for other SADC countries, where data compilation methods are less advanced.

Among other things, close cooperation between energy authorities and statistical offices is required to produce authoritative numbers, but inter-agency collaboration is not always as smooth as it could be.

Another aim of the workshop is to encourage regional cooperation, provide a forum for exchange of information on the status of the national energy statistics, and foster development of a network of energy statisticians in SADC countries.

For more information:

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

Publications and websites

Technical reports



Innovations in Governance in the Middle East, North Africa, and Western Balkans: Making Governments Work Better in the Mediterranean Region

Produced by the Division for Public Administration and Development Management, this title provides an analysis of the challenges and opportunities of innovation faced by governments in the Middle East, North Africa and Western Balkans. All the initiatives highlighted, whether large or small, in one agency or across the board, a major transformation or a first step towards reform, are significant in that they demonstrate openness to new ways of thinking about public service. Part one gives an overview of practices nominated for the UN Public Service Award between 2003 and 2006. Part two is a collection of case studies in innovation from eleven Mediterranean countries. Part three turns to key lessons of the studies presented, and offers insight into the drivers of successful government innovation.

To download:

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UN/UNPAN025283.pdf>



The Challenges of Restoring Governance in Crisis and Post-Conflict Countries

This title examines the tasks and challenges of restoring effective governance in crisis and post-conflict countries, including the role of government, international organizations and donor countries based on more than three decades of experience with post-conflict reconstruction. Drawing on cases from around the world, rebuilding trust in government emerges as a central theme alongside restoration of the capacity to govern. The types of assistance provided by international organizations, donors, and development finance agencies in post-conflict situations, and the factors that affect implementation, are described and

assessed. Produced by the Division for Public Administration and Development Management together with UNDP, and issued as part of a Government Reinvention Series launched in June.

To download:

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UN/UNPAN025512.pdf>



Excellence and Leadership in the Public Sector: The Role of Education and Training

How best to achieve excellence in public administration education and training, and how to prepare government leaders to deal with a world of complexity and uncertainty are the two themes explored in this publication. While some individuals may be born leaders, for the most part the quality of political and administrative leadership in any government can be significantly enhanced through education and training. Not only can leadership techniques be taught, but public administration education also serves to provide government leaders with a broader understanding of critical economic, social, and other issues. In combination, the two areas of study could have a profound impact on the quality of governance worldwide. Produced by the Division for Public Administration and Development Management together with the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration, and issued as part of a Government Reinvention Series launched in June.

To download:

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UN/UNPAN025513.pdf>



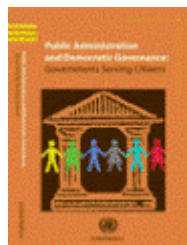
Governance for the Millennium Development Goals: Core Issues and Good Practices

One of the most important aims of UN efforts to promote good governance is to establish the capacity to attain the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the General Assembly in 2000. This title constitutes a first attempt to link governance issues to the MDGs. Theoretical and empirical connections between policy-making and sound governance are explored, as is the question of democratic governance. A number of examples of good

practices implemented by governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector are included along with a proposed eleven-point reform agenda to improve governance in our rapidly changing world. Published by the Division for Public Administration and Development Management, and issued as part of a Government Reinvention Series launched in June.

To download:

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UN/UNPAN025110.pdf>



Public Administration and Democratic Governance: Governments Serving Citizens

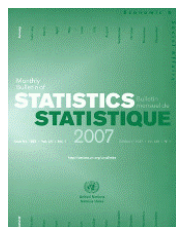
This publication is a collection of papers from around the world on how to achieve more responsive and accountable public

administration within the framework of democratic governance. Strengthening trust, accountability, and participation in government are seen as essential to serving the needs of citizens. Public officials and administrators are provided with conceptual and policy tools to help them understand today's complex challenges, and to pursue ideas that are most likely to enhance service delivery from the citizen's perspective. Published by the Division for Public Administration and Development Management, and issued as part of a Government Reinvention Series launched in June.

To download:

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UN/UNPAN025063.pdf>

Statistical compilations



Monthly Bulletin of Statistics and MBS Online

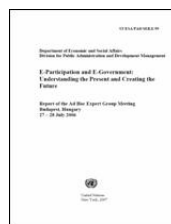
MBS provides monthly statistics on more than 50 indicators from over 200 countries and areas, together with special tables illustrating important economic developments. Quarterly data for significant world and regional aggregates are included regularly.

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Special features in this issue: Indices of world industrial production by branches of industry and by regions; producer price indices; earnings in manufacturing, by sex; construction of new buildings; total exports and imports by regions; volume and unit value indices and terms of trade.

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

Meeting records



Report of the Expert Group Meeting on E-participation and E-government: Understanding the Present and Creating the Future

As part of its ongoing effort to promote ICT for development,

DESA organized a meeting on e-participation and e-government in July 2006. The meeting provided an opportunity to review experiences, and explore methods of building inclusive societies through e-government at the local, national, regional and international levels. This report of the meeting, published by the DPADM, includes information on best practices in e-participation and lessons learned from around the world.

To download:

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UN/UNPAN026527.pdf>

Working papers

Growth, employment and poverty: An analysis of the vital nexus based on some recent UDP and ILO/SIDA studies

This paper explores the role of employment growth in determining the effect of a given rate of economic growth on the rate of change in poverty, based on the findings of sixteen country case studies recently carried out by UNDP and ILO. The principal finding is that the rate of poverty reduction has invariably been lower than expected. The main reasons appear to be the low employment intensity of growth and, with few exceptions, low overall growth itself.

To download:

http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2007/wp49_2007.pdf

A Compendium of Policy Instruments to Enhance Financial Stability and Debt Management in Emerging Market Economies

Drawing on available theory and evidence, this paper attempts to identify some key factors contributing to international financial instability to develop a taxonomy of policy instruments to enhance financial stability and debt management in emerging market economies. Each instrument is related to particular aspects of the broader policy challenge. The analysis suggests instruments that could help increase the efficiency of risk management strategies, such as growth- or GDP-indexed bonds, and enhance the effectiveness of debt management, growth and development policies, such as a stability and social investment facility.

To download:

http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2007/wp48_2007.pdf

Labour Market Flexibility and Decent Work

This paper reviews evidence from both industrialized and developing countries on the relationship between labour market flexibility and employment. It is argued that the notion of flexibility and its impact is often oversimplified. The evidence, such as it is, does not provide much support for the view that greater flexibility results in higher employment. There is more evidence for an impact on the distribution of employment among different groups of the population, but also effects which vary widely between countries. Flexibility needs to be considered within a wider framework of policies and institutions to promote decent work.

To download:

http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2007/wp47_2007.pdf

Rethinking the Informal Economy: Linkages with the Formal Economy and the Formal Regulatory Environment

This paper explores the relationship of the informal economy to the formal economy and the formal regulatory environment. It begins with a discussion of the concept of the informal economy and its size, composition, and segmentation. It then discusses the

linkages between the informal economy and the formal economy and the formal regulatory environment. The conclusion suggests why, and how, more equitable linkages between the informal economy and the formal economy should be promoted through an appropriate inclusive policy and regulatory environment.

To download:

http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2007/wp46_2007.pdf

Inequality in India: A Survey of Recent Trends

This paper analyzes the nature and causes of the patterns of inequality and poverty in India. Since the economic liberalization in the early 1990s, the evidence suggests increasing inequality (in both spatial and vertical terms) as well as persistent poverty. The macroeconomic policies possibly responsible for these trends include—fiscal tightening, regressive tax policies and expenditure cuts; financial sector reform that reduced institutional credit flow to small producers and agriculturalists; liberalization of rules for foreign and domestic investment, leading to more regional imbalance and skewed investment patterns, and trade liberalization, which has affected livelihoods and employment generation.

To download:

http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2007/wp45_2007.pdf

A Growth Model for a Two-sector Economy with Endogenous Productivity

A growth model is developed for an open dual economy. The economy expands due to a higher growth rate of labour productivity in the modern sector through the Kaldor-Verdoorn channel and higher effective demand through a Keynesian channel. The model incorporates a retardation mechanism affecting the slopes of productivity and output growth schedules as labour surplus and economies of scale diminish. A wage or profit-led regime and initial conditions may give rise to: de-industrialization in terms of both output and employment; a growth trap sustaining a situation of structural heterogeneity; or sustainable employment and adequate output and productivity growth.

To download:

http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2007/wp44_2007.pdf

The Conflict-Growth Nexus and the Poverty of Nations

Lack of growth limits poverty reduction while poverty increases conflict risk. Institutional failure and other factors seem to cause both growth failure and civil war. The greed explanation for conflict is common in cross-country econometric investigation, despite its dubious role in directly causing civil war. The relationship between natural resource revenues and conflict onset works through other mechanisms, such as a weakening social contract and withering state capacity. The grievance explanation for contemporary civil war is supported by detailed case studies where horizontal inequality is important. Economic reconstruction following war should therefore be pro-poor and address horizontal inequalities engendering conflict.

To download:

http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2007/wp43_2007.pdf

Comings and goings

Comings

The following staff members were promoted in July:

Ms. Shirley Ang, Statistics Assistant, Statistics Division

Ms. Nimali Ariyawansa, Staff Assistant, Division for Social Policy and Development

Mr. Fred Doulton, Social Affairs Officer, Division for Social Policy and Development

Mr. Daphnis Novoa, Programme Assistant, Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests

Mr. François Pelletier, Chief of Section, Population Division

Goings



Ms. Vasantha Kandiah, Chief of the Demographic Analysis Branch of the Population Division, retired on 31 July following a United Nations career spanning some twenty-five years, devoted largely to the issues of fertility, mortality, and population estimates and projections. Ms. Kandiah has a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Michigan.

The following staff members also retired in July:

Ms. Tanima Bossart, Information Assistant, Division for Public Administration and Development Management

Mr. Joseph Habr, Statistics Assistant, Statistics Division

Ms. Sylviane Khanna, Editorial Assistant, Population Division

Mr. Goran Torner, Statistics Assistant, Statistics Division

Calendar

August

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

39th session, New York, 23 July-10 August

Seminar on Data Dissemination: Emerging Trends and Issues

Kuala Lumpur, 1-3 August

DESA/UNFPA Inter-Regional Workshop on the Production of Gender Statistics

New Delhi, 6-10 August

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

24th session, New York, 20 and 31 August

9th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

New York, 21-30 August

DESA/IAEA/SADC Secretariat Workshop on energy statistics and energy indicators for sustainable development in the SADC Countries

Port Louis, 21-24 August

DESA/Russian Federation/Khabarovsk/AIPRNFE Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Peoples and Protection of the Environment

Khabarovsk, 27-29 August

September

DESA/IFAD Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on Tax Aspects of Domestic Resource Mobilization: A Discussion of Enduring and Emerging Issues
Rome, 4-5 September

DESA/UNESCO/UN-HABITAT Expert Group Meeting on Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration

Paris, 10-13 September

General Assembly

62nd session

New York, opening on 18 September

Meeting of the Steering Committee of the UN Global Alliance for ICT and Development

New York, 19 September

Observances

International Day of the World's Indigenous People

9 August

The International Day of the World's Indigenous People will be celebrated around the world on 9 August. At United Nations Headquarters, core issues and concerns of indigenous peoples will take centre stage in day-long events in New York. Along with a sacred pipe ceremony, the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Sha Zukang, and the Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz will speak in the morning.

A panel discussion follows in the afternoon at the Dag Hammarskjold Library Auditorium on honoring indigenous youth, languages and sacred sites. The New York programme has been organized by the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and the NGO Committee on the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

For more information:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/news.html>

International Youth Day

12 August

International Youth Day gives the world an opportunity to recognize the potential of youth, to celebrate their achievements, and plan for ways to better engage young people to successfully take action for development. It presents a unique opportunity for all stakeholders to rally together to ensure that young people are included in global, national and local affairs and decision-making. The Division for Social Policy and Development will be organizing various activities a UN Headquarters in New York to celebrate on 10 August.

For more information:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/iyd2007.htm>

DESA News is produced by the Communications and Information Management Service of the UN/DESA. Inquiries should be addressed to esa@un.org.