

## 5. CONCLUSION

We conclude the report by suggesting six broad actions for the governments in the region to meet the dual challenges of accelerating progress toward the MDGs and simultaneously responding to the opportunities and risks of globalization and economic change:

- **Focus on the poor.** Faster progress toward the MDGs will be made if efforts are focused on the poor (Bryce et al. 2006) and on disadvantaged subregions in countries. Greater efficiencies in public services can be achieved through innovative partnerships with the private sector, lower tiers of governments (decentralization), and civil society.
- **Respond effectively to the new global opportunities and challenges.** Policy makers need to be aware of the implications of global and regional trends for the social sectors. We suggest using the transitional framework presented in section 3 of this report to investigate the opportunities, challenges, and policy options in consultation with the stakeholders. The capacities and resources of the region's governments are already stretched by current challenges. Hence, effective responses to new challenges will need support from the private sector and civil society, and through regional cooperation.
- **Enhance the responsiveness and agility of the social sectors.** The ongoing trends open new opportunities for the region. The opportunities provided by globalization are based on competitiveness at a global scale. Successfully adapting to the global environment will require more flexibility in labor's skills and knowledge mix, which will need to keep evolving. The region's education systems need to be transformed to adapt to the new realities. Education relevance and quality must be improved at all levels: primary, secondary, postsecondary, and tertiary (ADB 2004f). Technical and vocational education as well as higher education should be aligned with emerging global and domestic market demands. Alignment will require comprehensive sector governance and greater management capacity.
- **Proactively address the potential inequity of the transition.** The immediate global, technological, and labor market opportunities will benefit the richer sections of the society faster than the poorer ones—posing the serious risk of aggravating inequalities. Governments need to take effective pro-poor measures to ensure that the benefits of growth are equally distributed. In the long run, the most effective measures will focus on strengthening

human capabilities to enable individuals to qualify for productive and remunerative employment (Ali 2007).

- **Leverage ICT to address current and transitional challenges.** Strengthening public institutions, improving governance and the quality of public services, strengthening regulation, increasing awareness of citizens about important social sector issues, and creating the right incentives for improving public service delivery can all be addressed to some extent by effective use of ICT.
- **Prepare the social sectors for a “borderless world.”** Governments have to examine policy options from the perspective of a new world with porous borders. Governments need to reach out to the private sector—both domestic and multinational—to understand the global trends so that the social sectors can capitalize on the emerging opportunities and mitigate the potential threats. New forms of regional cooperation should be forged to reconcile general national self-interest with international mutual interest and to exchange experiences dealing with common problems (Frenk and Gomez-Dantes 2002).