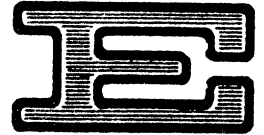




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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION**

Cooperation among developing countries and
regional organizations



INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with cooperation among developing countries and regional organizations, the main purpose of which is the promotion of collective self-reliance and interdependence under the modalities of technical cooperation among developing countries and economic cooperation among developing countries (TCDC/ECDC).

The responsibility for upgrading and strengthening the level of cooperation and collective self-reliance rests primarily with the developing countries themselves. However, the United Nations development system is expected to play an important catalytic and supportive role in enhancing such cooperation.

During the period under review, the programme of work and priorities of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) involved several activities that emphasized the need to strengthen collective efforts that would ultimately lead to regional and interregional cooperation. A summary of these activities is presented below.

A. ESCWA regional TCDC/ECDC activities

An agreement was signed between the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and ESCWA on 29 March 1989 to co-finance a project entitled "Assessment of water resources using remote-sensing techniques in the ESCWA region." The project aims at producing hydrological/hydrogeological maps and analysing hydrological conditions in the region. It has also been agreed between ESCWA, IDB and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) that UNEP will undertake complementary activities related to the implementation of the project.

Terms of close cooperation were agreed upon between ESCWA and the United Nations regional commissions, particularly the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), for involvement in the Interregional Symposium on Gas Development and Market Prospects by the Year 2000 and Beyond, held in Damascus from 20 to 26 June 1992. (Prior to the Symposium, cooperation had also been pursued with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries [OPEC] and the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries [OAPEC] regarding participation in the Symposium and contributing to the promotion of appropriate recommendations for the development of natural gas on the regional and interregional levels.)

Further memorandums of understanding were signed on 17 September 1989 between ESCWA and the Near East North Africa Regional Agricultural Credit Association (NENARACA), the Regional Centre for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in the Near East, and the Regional Food Marketing Institutions in the Near East and North Africa. Another memorandum of understanding was signed on 8 November 1989 with the General Arab Federation of Fish Producers, and with UNEP. A cooperation agreement with the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC) was signed on 13 November 1989, and another agreement was signed on 23 October 1989 with the International Council for Building Research Studies and Documentation.

Joint project cooperation and coordination between ESCWA and the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO) continued during the biennium 1990-1991. The main areas covered by the joint activities are outlined below:

(a) The development of capital goods (a diesel engine project), which is presently being co-sponsored by AIDMO, the Arab Industrial Investment Company (AIIC), the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) and ESCWA. Under this continuous activity, launched in 1986, four full-fledged feasibility studies were prepared on: (i) diesel engines of 40 to 300 HP; (ii) pistons; (iii) valves; and (iv) starters and alternators. The next phase, related to the promotion of candidate projects, is currently under way;

(b) Pre-investment studies on the establishment of engineering infrastructure projects in the Arab countries. This project is being executed by ESCWA and sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), AIDMO, AFESD, IDB and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Phase I of this project, related to the identification of business opportunities and the preparation of project profiles, was completed in February 1990; owing to the Gulf crisis, however, all subsequent actions were delayed, though necessary preparations for completing feasibility studies and for the promotion of candidate profiles are currently under way.

ESCWA and AIDMO have long felt it necessary to expand the areas of cooperation between the two organizations. The Executive Secretary of ESCWA and the Secretary-General of AIDMO met on 24 October 1991 to review existing cooperation, with the aim of identifying new joint activity areas. The minutes of the meeting, drawn up at the meeting's end, covered a wide spectrum of activities to be coordinated by ESCWA, AIDMO and other organizations. Included are:

- (i) A sectoral study on electronics;
- (ii) Activities related to the management of pollution;
- (iii) A conference on the prospects for industrial development in the occupied Palestinian territories;
- (iv) A special programme for industrial development in the Arab countries;
- (v) An industrial survey, informatics activities, training workshops and seminars.

ESCWA also cooperates with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) through the Joint ESCWA/UNIDO Industry and Technology Division; in this respect, ESCWA participated in the preliminary inter-agency meeting held in Vienna from 20 to 23 November 1990 for the promotion of industrial development in the Arab countries. ESCWA also participated in several meetings organized by UNIDO, such as the Annual UNIDO Workshop on Regional Economic Forecasting for the Global Report and the Expert Group Meeting on Issues in Managing Technological Change within the Context of Arab Electronics Firms, co-sponsored by UNIDO and convened at Cairo, 18 to 19 December 1991. Other conferences include:

(a) The First Arab Conference and Investment Forum on Electronics Industries in the Arab Countries, held in Algiers from 6 to 10 May 1990;

(b) A meeting of officials responsible for biotechnology in the Arab countries, organized by the Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ALESCO) from 14 to 16 December 1991 in Amman, Jordan;

(c) The twelfth session of the Federation of Arab Scientific Research Councils, convened at Cairo from 10 to 12 December 1991.

B. Cooperation between ESCWA and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC)

ESCWA participated in the 4th General Meeting between the secretariats of the United Nations system and the Organization of Islamic Conference, held at Geneva from 19 to 23 November 1991. This meeting dealt with the priority areas of cooperation, including food security and agriculture, science and technology, the development of trade, investment mechanisms and joint cooperation among Islamic countries.

In reviewing the programme of work and activities of both OIC and ESCWA, and after discussing the progress of cooperation between the two organizations, and in order to strengthen the existing cooperation, OIC recommended that a memorandum of understanding be signed by the Secretary-General of OIC and the Executive Secretary of ESCWA to lay the foundations for fruitful joint cooperation in various fields pertinent to both organizations' mandates. A memorandum of understanding was subsequently prepared, and is currently under review and awaiting signature by both organizations.

The science and technology programme of ESCWA continued its close cooperation and coordination with Arab national and regional organizations, as well as with international organizations concerned with science and technology for development. In this context, coordination was made with the following offices:

1. Islamic Foundation for Science, Technology and Development (IFSTAD)

IFSTAD has already shown its interest in cooperating with ESCWA and contributing to the implementation of ESCWA projects on new and advanced materials technology, and on the integration of science and technology in the development process. To this end, ESCWA and IFSTAD have prepared a draft or a framework agreement which is currently under review and awaiting signature in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

2. Islamic Development Bank

ESCWA and IDB held a joint meeting in Amman, Jordan on 23 and 24 September 1991. The main objectives of this meeting were:

(a) To exchange views on modalities of cooperation between IDB and ESCWA;

(b) To review and determine priority projects that could be co-sponsored by ESCWA and IDB;

(c) To reactivate the pledges that had already been made by IDB to finance new and ongoing projects.

Also underscored was the possibility of establishing close cooperation between the two sister institutions, with specific reference to jointly developing and co-sponsoring seminars and workshops for the benefit of common member countries. This exercise is proposed to be undertaken in the form of an annual programme between IDB's technical cooperation programme and ESCWA.

The representatives of IDB discussed with ESCWA the Bank's interest in two projects in the field of science and technology; discussion to define the exact form of the Banks's contribution is currently under way.

3. Federation of Arab Scientific Research Councils (FASRC)

ESCWA has contributed a paper to the Meeting organized by FASRC on the Development of Managerial Capabilities in Arab Scientific Research Institutions. The two organizations have exchanged their respective programmes of work for the current biennium and have identified some prospective areas of cooperation and are exploring others for further cooperation. ESCWA has already intimated to FASRC that its activities in new and advanced materials technology and in space science and technology constitute good areas for joint action.

UNIDO is participating with ESCWA in the implementation of new and advanced materials technology, and has shown readiness to cooperate in other science and technology activities. The United Nations Outer Space Affairs Division has been working closely with ESCWA to set up, in the ESCWA region, a centre for space science and technology education.

Together with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization/Regional Office for Science and Technology in the Arab States (UNESCO/ROSTAS), the ESCWA secretariat sponsored the ROSTAS Regional Workshops on Simulation Techniques in Hydrology, convened in Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic from 28 October to 4 November 1991. The main purpose of the workshops was to present and discuss state-of-the-art simulation techniques and their applications in surface-water hydrology.

Training workshops on the design, construction, operation and maintenance of biogas units for rural areas were also organized by the ESCWA secretariat in Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic from 3 August to 3 September 1991. The workshops were held in cooperation with the Syrian Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, with financial support from UNDP.

ESCWA participated in and contributed to the Regional Seminar on Marketing Performance, Food Subsidies and Price Policies organized by the Agricultural Food Marketing Association for the Near East and North Africa (AFMANENA); ESCWA also cooperated with NENARACA in the establishment of a Financial Management Information System (FMIS) for some NENARACA member banks in the ESCWA region.

C. Areas of cooperation with the League of Arab States (LAS)

Within the context of the agreement on cooperation in statistics between the LAS and ESCWA, a number of joint activities (described below) were undertaken between 1989 and 1991.

ESCWA continued its participation in annual meetings of the Arab Standing Committee on Statistics, and is a member of the technical advisory committee for the Pan Arab Project for Child Development (Papchild project). This series of national health surveys aims at examining the health status of children and mothers in the Arab world, and at training national professionals.

LAS and ESCWA also co-sponsored the UNDP Pan-Arab Conference on Social and Economic Challenges of the 1990s: Arab Women's Contribution to Development, which was convened at Cairo in May 1990.

The second and third editions of the Unified Arab Statistical Abstract were published and distributed. This publication covers all ESCWA and non-ESCWA Arab member countries. In this publication, data were presented and tabulated by topic rather than by country to facilitate comparability.

It was also agreed that a compendium of social statistics for the Arab countries would be issued. The main tables were prepared and discussed at a meeting between the statistical department of LAS and the ESCWA Statistics Division in January 1990 at ESCWA headquarters in Baghdad.

The Second Arab Conference on National Accounts was planned to be organized in October 1990 in Kuwait in cooperation with LAS, AFESD, the Arab Monetary Fund and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics. The main aims of the planned Conference were to formulate and adopt a unified Arab position concerning the national accounts methodology in the light of the revision of the System of National Accounts proposed by the United Nations.

As a preparatory step to the Conference, an Arab Expert Group Meeting on National Accounts was held in Tunis from 11 to 16 June 1990 to review the revised System of National Accounts. A final report of the Meeting was prepared, copies of which were sent to the United Nations Statistical Office and to the United Nations Statistical Commission, which held its session in February 1991 at New York. Unfortunately, the Conference was not convened as planned, and consultations with the concerned parties are currently under way to find alternative venues.

ESCWA attended for the first time, as an observer, a meeting (the 50th) of the Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States, first at the expert and permanent representative level from 2 to 3 February 1992 and subsequently at the ministerial level on 5 February 1992.

Further discussions were also held on 6 February 1992 between the Executive Secretary of ESCWA and the Deputy Secretaries-General of the League of Arab States' economic, social, political and Palestinian affairs offices. The discussions centred upon strengthening joint activities and cooperation between ESCWA and LAS. Joint activities currently include: coordinated efforts pertaining to the revision of the United Nations System of National

Accounts; the proposed regional preparatory meeting for the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, to be convened under the title "Arab Regional Population Conference", scheduled to be held in Amman from 4 to 8 April 1993; and the high-level Arab regional meeting for children in 1992 (the last item was initiated by LAS). ESCWA has also been invited to attend the general meeting between LAS and United Nations bodies to be held in 1993 to evaluate completed cooperative activities and to formulate a priority programme for further ESCWA-LAS cooperation during the coming stage as well as the mechanism or modalities for cooperation between the United Nations and LAS. In this respect, ESCWA is (among other things) expected to play an important role as a coordinator and focal point between the United Nations and LAS.

ESCWA also cooperated with LAS in convening the Arab Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development at Cairo from 10 to 12 September 1991, and collectively participated in the formulation and adoption of the Arab Declaration on Environment and Development and Future Prospects. The Conference supported ESCWA's efforts in coordinating environment and development activities; these include effective efforts to implement the plan of action for promoting sustainable development in the Arab region. Toward this end, and as a follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) recommendations -- particularly Agenda 21 -- ESCWA, in cooperation with UNDP and other regional organizations concerned with environment and development, will call for a meeting to coordinate activities and to implement the regional components of UNCED.

ESCWA also participated in the establishment of the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE) in Damascus, in July 1991, and in the Meeting of the Executive Bureau of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment and the Meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment (Damascus, 20 to 24 December 1991) to discuss mechanisms for the implementation of the above-mentioned projects and of other priority environmental projects in the Arab countries.

In order to strengthen the capabilities of national professionals, public officials and administrators to effectively control urban growth, develop a network of expertise from the region and promote interregional activities, ESCWA undertook the following activities:

(a) Coordinated efforts with regional organizations such as the Islamic Development Bank and the Arab Urban Development Institute, and with national governmental agencies such as the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in Yemen for logistic and substantive preparations for holding the Symposium on Low-Cost Housing in the Arab Region;

(b) Held meetings with officials from the Economic Commission for Europe, the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, the Commission of European Communities and the Swiss Centre for Appropriate Technology to formulate joint activities in various fields of human settlements -- notably, the Symposium on Low-Cost Housing in the Arab Region and the Workshop on Environmentally Conscious, Low-Energy Housing.

In cooperation with AIDMO and within the framework of the agreement signed with AIDMO on 24 October 1991, the following activities will be jointly executed:

- (a) Issuing a joint publication on industrial statistics;
- (b) Organizing a joint workshop in the field of industrial statistics in 1993;
- (c) Cooperating in the establishment of industrial databases and in the exchange of information and of publications.

In addition to the regional activities mentioned above that the secretariat has organized in order to promote and strengthen regional cooperation, the secretariat -- and more particularly the regional advisers -- have also assisted in strengthening national and regional institutions in the following main areas: agriculture, data processing, energy, environment, human resources development, industrial development, national accounts and economic statistics, science and technology, sampling, transport and communications, and water-resources development. (For further information, see session document on technical cooperation activities of the Commission -- E/ESCWA/16/3(Part II).)

