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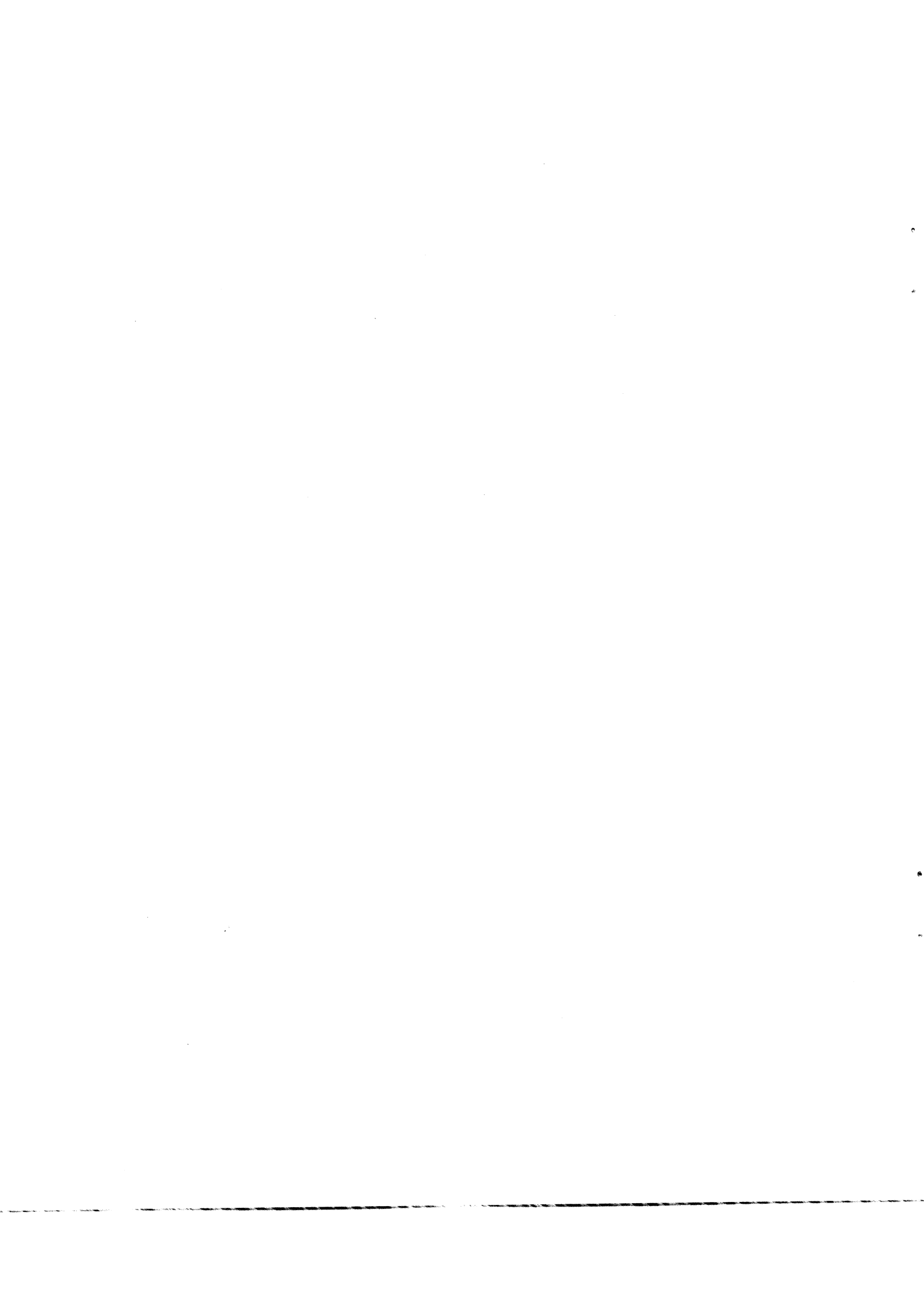
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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION**

**PROGRESS MADE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993**

Report on

Progress of implementation of the Arab Declaration
on Environment and Development and Future Prospects



INTRODUCTION

1. The present report was prepared under the environment subprogramme of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in implementation of one of its activities and in view of the growing importance of environmental issues within and outside the United Nations system. Issues related to environment and sustainable development have recently gained momentum in most of the 15 technical subprogrammes of ESCWA.

2. The report reviews specific aspects of environmental issues within the activities of ESCWA subprogrammes for the biennium 1992-1993. These activities take into consideration the general recommendations and objectives of the environment programme in the Arab world contained in the Arab Declaration on Environment and Development and Future Prospects which was adopted by the Arab Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development (Cairo, 10 September 1991) and presented to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 3 to 14 June 1992.

3. The report is based for the most part on ESCWA programme activities related to environment and sustainable development and the follow-up of UNCED and the programme areas of Agenda 21. It should be read together with the report of the Executive Secretary to the Commission on the implementation of its resolution 180 (XVI) of 2 September 1992 on regional cooperation and coordination in the field of environment and sustainable development.

I. OVERVIEW

4. The Arab Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development, held in Cairo from 10 to 12 September 1991, recognized that the preservation of the environment in the Arab world requires overcoming basic obstacles, such as poverty, ignorance and disease.

5. The political dimension stands out clearly in the Arab Declaration on Environment and Development and Future Prospects. Emphasis was placed on the distinctive character of the Arab region, which continues to be the cradle of civilizations and religions that enjoin concern for man, the environment and shared heritage and history as well as the homogeneous geographical location that affects and is affected by the natural environment as a result of development and human activities. The Arab Declaration also expressed deep concern over the continued effect on the Arab region of enormous environmental risks resulting from wars, armed conflicts and continued tensions arising from the failure to arrive at a just resolution of the question of Palestine, which leads to the hindering of development, the destruction of resources and increased environmental degradation.

6. The Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment declared their commitment to work individually and collectively for the achievement of sustainable development and for the satisfaction of the needs of current generations, without prejudice to the rights of future generations, through programmes of Arab environmental cooperation, in particular by making every possible effort to do the following:

(a) Encourage fair participation in sustainable development at the country, Arab and international levels;

(b) Integrate environmental considerations in planning and economic and sectoral policies;

(c) Devise policies for the use of natural resources and of development planning based on the principle of prevention and on the protection of the environment;

(d) Contribute to international efforts to find solutions to urgent environmental problems at the global level.

7. The Arab ministers thus resolved to work individually and collectively to accomplish the following:

(a) To guarantee the use and conservation of land, marine and freshwater resources in an environmentally sustainable manner;

(b) To preserve the biological diversity of the Arab region and protect critical ecosystems;

(c) To consider the study of the environmental effects of development projects as an inseparable part of the economic feasibility study;

(d) To curb pollution from waste and waste treatment and management.

8. In order to guarantee the continuation of the characteristic harmony between Arab people and their environment, the Arab ministers recognized the importance of taking socio-economic factors into consideration in activities relating to the management of natural resources and population policies through the following:

(a) Adopting population and consumer policies that promote sustainable development;

(b) Undertaking programmes of education, training, scientific research, and dissemination of information to increase public awareness and understanding of the environmental and cultural heritage, and to encourage society, particularly women, to adopt positive attitudes towards preserving the environment;

(c) Facilitating the introduction of appropriate techniques at an acceptable cost, as well as the development of human resources, skills, training, research and information;

(d) Incorporating health considerations and nutritional needs in development planning;

(e) Guaranteeing the effective use of funds allocated from national budgets and international sources for the protection of the environment and the achievement of sustainable development in the Arab world;

(f) Increasing opportunities for private-sector participation in the achievement of sustainable development.

9. The Declaration affirmed the right of individuals and non-governmental organizations to learn about environmental issues relevant to them, to have access to data and to participate in the formulation of decisions that may affect their environment. It called upon the international community to respect the right of the Arab people, as guardians of their environment, to protect their natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations. It declared the commitment of the ministers to joint action to develop the legal framework for the protection of the environment, to implement pertinent regional conventions and to strengthen regional and national Arab capacities for the achievement of sustainable development.

10. The Arab Declaration on Environment and Development listed the general objectives of the environment programme in the Arab world. These objectives are common efforts to achieve the integration of the following diverse factors which until now had been considered separately:

- (a) Sustainable and environmentally safe development;
- (b) Promotion of environmental management;
- (c) Development of human settlements;
- (d) Combating desertification and development of the desert;
- (e) Energy uses;
- (f) Management of the industrial and hazardous environment;
- (g) Protection of the marine environment;
- (h) Development of water and agricultural resources;
- (i) Education about and protection of heritage and rare natural resources;
- (j) Promotion of popular participation in environmental protection programmes;
- (k) Support for Arab and international cooperation;
- (l) The provision of financing for international, regional and national projects;
- (m) Legal responsibility for damage and destruction to the environment.

**II. ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM IN IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION
PROPOSALS OF THE ARAB DECLARATION ON ENVIRONMENT AND
DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE PROSPECTS, AND AGENDA 21**

11. The transition to sustainable development clearly requires fundamental changes in man's outlook on the way natural resources are used. This is certainly a complex exercise, one of its basic elements perhaps being scientific cooperation, especially in providing technologies that are not

detrimental to the environment, and in the building of technical institutional capacity in the region to implement sectoral programmes related to the environment and sustainable development. This was the subject of great and constant attention at UNCED and is dealt with in a number of programmes mentioned in the 40 chapters of Agenda 21.^{1/} Success in the implementation of this Agenda requires that coordinated and regular attention be given to interdependent programme areas at the national, regional and international levels.

12. It is worth noting that many Arab delegations attending UNCED called for programmes on capacity-building designed especially to help developing countries build their infrastructure and institutions, train their human resources and facilitate the participation of all concerned in decision-making. Since the ability of a country to follow the path of sustainable development is determined by the capabilities of its people and institutions, many delegations supported the introduction of "Capacity-building 21", a programme for capacity-building that strengthens Agenda 21.

13. Discussions in many forums have shown that one of the main obstacles to implementing sustainable development is the lack of capabilities and expertise in developing countries, including Arab countries. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will make every effort to assist developing countries and will cooperate with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other organizations of the United Nations system in order to build the national infrastructure required to achieve sustainable development. UNDP, like other international organizations, will strive to ensure that all its projects and programmes are environmentally sound. It is especially important in this context to stress the vital role that UNDP regional offices can play in this field and the importance of coordinating their work with the regional commissions.

14. UNEP has an important role as a catalyst and coordinator in areas where it has proved its ability, such as in (a) drafting an international environment law; (b) exchanging information on environmentally sound technologies; (c) monitoring and evaluating the condition of the world environment; (d) scientific cooperation in the field of environment and sustainable development; (e) strengthening early-warning systems and their operation; (f) giving advice to various entities in the United Nations system in the formulation of policies in order to coordinate activities in the field of environment; and (g) giving legal and institutional advice to developing countries and managing international projects.

15. Several other organizations, such as the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the regional commissions could take an active part in the implementation of the action proposals of the Arab Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development and the proposals of Agenda 21. The activities of these organizations in the field of environment and development should be integrated and coordinated as best possible in order to use the available capabilities more efficiently.

^{1/} "Summary of Agenda 21", 25 November 1992 (E/ESCWA/ENV/1992/16/Rev.1).

16. Having adopted resolution 165 (XV) of 18 May 1989 on environment and development in the ESCWA region, ESCWA pursued its initiative to establish a joint commission for Arab organizations and international organizations of the United Nations dealing with environment and sustainable development in the Arab world.

17. In order to provide the legislative authority for such coordination and cooperation machinery at the Arab level, ESCWA prepared the studies and background information on the basis of which it adopted a resolution on regional coordination and cooperation in the field of environment and sustainable development with the aim of strengthening and consolidating Arab cooperation in identifying and implementing activities and initiatives, and supporting the implementation of Agenda 21 in the Arab region (resolution 180 (XVI) dated 2 September 1992). ESCWA was the host of the preparatory meeting of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab World, held at Amman on 7 and 8 April 1993, to discuss and adopt the statute of the Committee and its work plan for the transitional period 1993-1994. The proper authorities were also called upon to join the Committee without delay.^{2/}

III. ESCWA OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

18. Due to their long experience and knowledge in dealing with intersectoral and multidisciplinary issues, United Nations regional commissions, including ESCWA, possess unique characteristics that enable them to undertake activities in the priority areas already identified in the recommendations of the Arab Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development and UNCED. It is in this context that the substantive divisions of ESCWA are undertaking the following activities:

(a) Implementing capacity-building programmes to enable member States to solve their environmental problems, and strengthening technical and administrative skills through symposia, training, research and development, technology transfer, exchange of information, contacts with institutions dealing with the environment and sustainable development, and protection of natural resources;

(b) Conducting periodic reviews and assessments of conditions and trends in environment and development through national and regional studies on the status of the environment, and reports on the region as a whole. This includes designing and applying systems of environmental indicators and statistics related to conventional national accounts;

(c) Identifying environmental problems at the national and regional levels and formulating policies, strategies, methodologies and preventive measures to encourage sustainable development;

(d) Formulating and executing environmental management plans for environmentally sensitive States or regions;

^{2/} See E/ESCWA/17/5/Add.2.

(e) Developing and implementing regional and subregional environmental legislation for the common protection of the environment and the conservation of natural resources;

(f) Encouraging the restructuring of important economic sectors so as to integrate the environmental dimension and management in programmes and policies related to environment and sustainable development in these sectors;

(g) Encouraging and strengthening regional and Arab cooperation in the field of environment and development, and rationalizing the use of natural resources through consolidated links between the environment and technology, the economy, industry, agriculture, transport and energy;

(h) Encouraging the discussion and understanding of issues related to the implementation of Agenda 21 at all levels in order to proceed with the execution of plans and programmes and to encourage bilateral and multilateral cooperation among member Governments in following up Agenda 21.

19. Since most of these issues are of a multisectoral nature, it has become increasingly important to adopt a multidisciplinary regional approach in dealing with the social, economic and environmental problems of the Arab region, and make it the basis of encouraging regional cooperation among Arab States. The success of the United Nations system at the regional level depends, to a great extent, on the consolidation and coordination of measures taken by all the bodies of the system within the framework of an integrated approach to sustainable development. Member Governments have long acknowledged that ESCWA is capable of adopting a multidisciplinary and integrated approach by virtue of its proximity to the countries of the region. In order to preserve the link between the efforts made by the United Nations to achieve the integration of environment and development and the needs and concerns of member States, more regional and subregional activities could be assigned to ESCWA. This requires introducing technical and administrative changes in the work programme that should be taken fully into consideration in the preparation of future budgets.

20. Since, it is neither advisable nor practical to undertake all the measures included in the Arab Declaration on Environment and Development and Future Prospects and in Agenda 21, in view of the fact that the number of measures that can be undertaken simultaneously depends on the availability of additional resources and the ability of member countries to absorb the activities involved, ESCWA has introduced the concept of sustainability in its sectoral programmes and has taken environment into consideration in the implementation of its work programme. Its substantive divisions devoted special attention to introducing the environmental dimension in all operational programmes and activities during 1992 and 1993.

21. Concerning ESCWA activities in promoting agriculture and sustainable rural development as well as combating desertification and aridity, the Food and Agriculture subprogramme planned to carry out the following activities during the period 1992-1993 (some of which have already been executed while others are still in progress):^{3/}

^{3/} See "Report of the Executive Secretary on the Activities of the Commission: Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Work for the period 1 January 1992-30 June 1993" (E/ESCWA/C.1/17/3) (presented to the Technical Committee at its eighth session [11-13 October 1993]).

(a) Formulating a national plan of action to combat desertification (United Arab Emirates);

(b) Desertification control projects (Bahrain, Yemen);

(c) Combating hashish and opium in Lebanon, and replacement of undesirable crops (Yemen);

(d) Rehabilitation of the agricultural sector (Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territories);

(e) Assessment of the current status of agricultural marketing in the Syrian Arab Republic;

(f) Rationalizing food consumption and food distribution (Oman);

(g) Current situation of agricultural marketing in Jordan and its development prospects;

(h) Assessment and evaluation of agricultural extension institutions (Syrian Arab Republic);

(i) Assessment and evaluation of rural development policies and programmes at the national level (Oman, Lebanon).

22. Group training activities included the following training workshops:

(a) National training workshop on project planning and project analysis in Oman;

(b) National training workshop on farm management and project planning and analysis in Lebanon;

(c) Regional training workshops on agricultural policy analysis;

(d) National training workshop on the use of computers in farm-management surveys, data processing and project analysis.

23. Within the framework of combating poverty, regional and international cooperation to achieve sustainable development in the ESCWA region and related national policies, the subprogramme on development issues and policies undertook the following activities:

(a) Survey of economic and social developments in the ESCWA region;

(b) Review and analysis of progress made by Yemen in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s;

(c) The conceptual framework and guidelines for activities relating to wealth, poverty and income distribution;

(d) Assessment of progress made in the implementation of economic cooperation between the least developed member country and other countries of the region.

24. The environment subprogramme focused on coordination with the League of Arab States and cooperation with the Executive Bureau of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment in the review of the regional dimension of the recommendations and resolutions of UNCED and of Agenda 21 in particular. In this context, the following reports were prepared and distributed to all Arab countries in cooperation with the League of Arab States:

(a) Summary of Agenda 21 (in Arabic);

(b) General framework of an advanced environmental programme for the Arab region;

(c) Assessment of the regional dimension of UNCED.

25. Furthermore, under the subprogramme a project was executed to introduce the environmental dimension into the decision-making process by strengthening planning and management capabilities in the field of environment and development in Jordan. The project involved contracting 24 experts and technicians from relevant Jordanian ministries and departments to work on combining environment and development at the policy, planning and management level to provide an effective legal and organizational framework and consequently to achieve efficient utilization of economic tools, market incentives and other incentives and to set up integrated systems for environmental and economic accounting. These issues were discussed together with the technical reports at a national workshop held in the third quarter of 1993.

26. Pursuant to its resolution 180 (XVI) dated 2 September 1992 on regional cooperation and coordination in the field of environment and sustainable development, and with the aim of strengthening coordination and Arab cooperation in identifying and undertaking the activities and initiatives needed in the ESCWA region in accordance with Agenda 21, ESCWA, in cooperation with the League of Arab States and other international parties, took the initiative of establishing the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab World. ESCWA acted as a host for the concerned parties at a meeting held in Amman in April 1993 to establish the said committee (for details, see the report of the Executive Secretary on the subject).

27. As for promoting sustainable development in the human settlements field and, in particular, providing adequate shelter, improving human settlements management, providing sustainable energy systems, promoting human settlements planning and management in areas vulnerable to catastrophes and promoting sustainable activities in industry, the human settlements subprogramme will undertake the following activities:

(a) Appropriate human settlements planning in the ESCWA region;

(b) Provision of shelter and public amenities in rapidly changing urban areas;

(c) Guidelines for appropriate planning and design standards;

(d) Low-cost housing in the Arab region;

(e) Social and cultural framework of architectural planning in the Arab city;

(f) Energy-efficient and environmentally sound housing;

(g) Organizing a competition on the theme of "the autonomous village, alternative human settlements planning and design methods."

28. Within the context of environmentally sound management of biotechnology, the industrial development subprogramme participated in the convening of the Second Arab Conference on Perspectives of Biotechnology. The Conference dealt with the issues of biotechnology, the environment, industrial applications, genetic engineering, agricultural applications and commercial investment opportunities. It also covered the devising of modalities for the development of new technologies and the environmentally sound application thereof.

29. As for water resources development and the rationalization of their uses, the activities of the natural resources subprogramme included enhancing regional cooperation in areas of shared water resources (surface and ground), taking the initiative to establish a committee on natural resources in the ESCWA region by first establishing a regional council for water resources. The subprogramme also prepared a technical study on the operation and maintenance of dams in selected ESCWA countries, which included the economic, social and environmental aspects of planning such projects. ESCWA is endeavouring to set up a regional network for training in the field of water resources and in this context has prepared forms for the collection of information on water resources in an attempt to build a database on water sources in the region. A regional symposium on water use and conservation was held in cooperation with UNEP and the WHO Centre for Environment and Health Aspects (CEHA) and other organizations during the period 28 November - 2 December 1993 to debate the issues related to water resources development in the region in order to meet the increasing needs of agricultural, industrial and architectural development. At the regional level, ESCWA is carrying out a project for the assessment of water resources using remote sensing techniques financed jointly by ESCWA, the Islamic Development Bank and UNEP.

30. The energy subprogramme prepared reports on the progress made in the implementation of the Nairobi Programme of Action for the development and utilization of new and renewable sources of energy. Within the framework of energy development, efficiency and consumption, the subprogramme prepared a report entitled Optimization of Energy Use in Oil Refining (case-studies of Al-Zarqa oil refinery, Jordan; and Aden oil refinery, Yemen) (E/ESCWA/NR/1993/9). The subprogramme also organized the Interregional Symposium on Gas Development and Market Prospects by the Year 2000 and Beyond.

31. The population subprogramme focused on developing knowledge of existing links between demographic trends and factors and sustainable development. It planned for the following activities in this field:

(a) The publication of Demographic and Related Socio-economic Data Sheets for Countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia as Assessed in 1992 (E/ESCWA/POP/1993/12);

(b) Publication on population movements associated with the Gulf crisis;

(c) The Arab Population Conference (Amman, April 1993), which dealt with a variety of issues, including drawing up integrated national policies that would take into account demographic factors, sustainable development and the environment;

(d) Review and assessment of national policies and measures related to the distribution of the population in selected countries of the ESCWA region.

32. The science and technology subprogramme focused most of its activities on the need to improve communication and cooperation between scientific and technological media and decision makers in the region in an attempt to consolidate the scientific basis of sustainable development and to build scientific capacity and capabilities. Accordingly, it has planned for the following activities:

(a) Workshop on the implications of new and advanced materials for the economies of ESCWA countries;

(b) Integration of science and technology in the development plans of selected countries;

(c) Workshop on integration of science and technology in national development plans.

33. The activities of the women and development subprogramme are focused on regional efforts for the integration of women in the sustainable and fair development process, designing technical cooperation projects for the advancement of women in the food, textile and pharmaceutical industries, as well as developing a database on Arab women in the workforce and undertaking a field survey of the participation of women in development in Yemen. The subprogramme organized a workshop aimed at improving the conditions of women in the region (in particular, identifying issues related to the participation of Arab women in businesses and professional fields, identifying major issues related to making higher education accessible to Arab women, and major issues related to the participation of Arab women in professional training).

34. Concerning field projects, the subprogramme identified and formulated technical cooperation projects for the development of women in the region (for example, six projects within the framework of the project entitled "Dissemination of Bio-gas Technology in Yemen", a project on income-generating commercial institutions designed for the General Federation of Jordanian Women, and a project on strengthening statistical capabilities to encourage the participation of women in development).

35. Finally, the statistics subprogramme, having completed the Statistical Abstract of the ESCWA Region (No. 13), the Bulletin of National Accounts and the Compendium of Social Statistics and Indicators (E/ESCWA/STAT/1993/25), continues to organize courses and workshops to provide technical consultation and to execute projects in the statistics field with the aim of developing statistical work and consolidating international standards, concepts and definitions in the ESCWA region in order to provide the statistical information and indicators necessary for researchers and decision makers in the field of economic and social development.