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**PROGRAMME AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES
AND MODIFICATIONS MADE BY ESCWA SINCE 1994***

Note by the Executive Secretary

1. The reform of the United Nations is an issue that has taken on great magnitude and that has become a matter of equal concern to both Member States and the Secretariat of the United Nations. The debate on the role of the regional commissions continues, with a divergence of opinions between the developed and developing countries.
2. The ongoing debate about the reform of the United Nations in general and the regional commissions in particular is a direct product of the changing international political and economic context and the emergence of a new world environment. Though many developmental issues are global in nature, their solution is possible only under specific and regional conditions.
3. Within this context, the five regional commissions¹ issued a joint mission statement in 1996 to illuminate the debate on the role of the regional commissions (annex I). The statement clearly outlined the comparative advantages of the regional commissions, including (a) their geographic proximity to the member States; (b) their accumulated body of expertise and experience; (c) their established, efficient intergovernmental machineries; (d) their status as the only permanent intergovernmental bodies within the United Nations system with a membership of countries in their respective regions that provide a comprehensive framework for regional cooperation; (e) their sectoral expertise as well as multidisciplinary capabilities; and (f) their cost-effectiveness in terms of productivity levels and size.

* The main body of this report was submitted as an input into the Secretary-General's report on regional cooperation, to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session in July 1997.

¹ By order of founding, the regional commissions are: the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE); the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP); the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA); and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

4. As a United Nations regional organization, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has before it a genuine opportunity to succeed, and it is the responsibility of ESCWA to act as the catalyst and the forum for one of the most unsettled regions of the world—a region that is still in the making. The legacy of fragmentation, wars and internal strife in the region for the past 40 years has prevented ESCWA from fully utilizing its potential as a United Nations regional organization. In any consideration of the future of the ESCWA region, it is imperative to take into account the importance of the end of the cold war, the globalization process and, especially, the prospects for peace: all come together to create a new political, economic, social and cultural world environment to which the region must adapt. Because dealing with this new environment requires a new approach, Western Asia needs, now more than ever, to coordinate positions, establish an order of priorities, muster resources and properly direct their use.

5. Certain factors give the ESCWA region its specificity, and these are the region's intrinsic characteristics. Of all the world's regions, Western Asia is perhaps the most compact and well defined, with a homogeneity of geography, language, history, culture, customs and attitudes. Yet, despite this homogeneity, the region lacks cohesive economic and commercial ties. Therefore, notwithstanding its cultural and political specificity, economic cooperation in Western Asia is something that must be created and not simply managed. ESCWA offers an ideal forum for discussion, within a regional context, of issues that transcend language and culture. These issues include trade, capital and labour flows, environment, energy, water, transport, communications, tourism and the challenges of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Such issues would not be successfully addressed by regional organizations based on ideology and/or specific values. ESCWA, as a neutral, universal body, is best prepared to deal with the emerging geo-economic issues of the post-peace era.

6. Reform at ESCWA is an integral part of the overall United Nations reform process, and it follows the general principles of system-wide United Nations reform while taking into consideration the particularities, needs and aspirations of ESCWA member States. ESCWA regards reform as a continuing process aimed at both improvement and change. The restructuring exercise at ESCWA was the product of a number of elements, most important of which was the recognition by the United Nations at large, by ESCWA member States, and by the ESCWA secretariat in particular, of the need to revitalize the Commission in order to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing international and regional environment. This exercise was undertaken in response to General Assembly resolutions 32/197, 45/264, 46/235 and 47/212. Special attention is drawn to paragraph 6 of the annex to resolution 46/235, which states that "the regional commissions should be enabled fully to play their role under the authority of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council."

7. The first response of ESCWA to the need for reform came in 1992, when the Commission convened the Intergovernmental Meeting to Review the 1992-1997 Medium-Term Plan (Cairo, 8-9 January 1992) in the light of the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Decade. The Intergovernmental Meeting highlighted the role of ESCWA as a regional think-tank and centre of excellence, combining the theoretical and analytical with the practical and operational. In the final report² of the Intergovernmental Meeting, the ESCWA member States emphasized important issues for ESCWA to address

² The report (E/ESCWA/PPTCO/1992.IG.I/4) was submitted to the ESCWA sixteenth session (Amman, 30 August - 3 September 1992) as an annex to the Note by the Executive Secretary on "Restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic and social fields: role and functions of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia" (E/ESCWA/16/10).

in its revised 1992-1997 medium-term plan. The ESCWA sixteenth session reiterated the conviction that ESCWA could play a central role in coordinating and undertaking activities for the development of the member States. At the sixteenth session, the Commission, in its resolution 191 (XVI), authorized the Executive Secretary "to reorganize the secretariat of the Commission in consultation with the Secretary-General to enhance the effectiveness of its activities." At the same session the Commission adopted the revised medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997 and the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993 by its resolutions 194 (XVI) and 195 (XVI) respectively.

8. In his report on regional cooperation submitted to the Economic and Social Council,³ the Secretary-General expressed his determination to strengthen the role and contribution of the regional commissions as the socio-economic agents of change at the regional level, and emphasized the need for the commissions to operate within a coherent organizational strategy, for decentralization of resources, and for greater delegation of authority. In follow-up, the Secretary-General requested the Office of Inspections and Investigations to send a mission to the regional commissions. In its report of 16 November 1993 on the programme and administrative practices of the secretariat of ESCWA, the mission team of the Office of Inspections and Investigations concluded that "there is no doubt that ESCWA can produce work of real relevance to the region, and recent political events in the region make it even more necessary for ESCWA to be at the forefront of development efforts."⁴ The mission recommended a fundamental reappraisal and restructuring of the work programme of ESCWA, emphasizing the importance of the replacement of the sectoral structure with a thematic structure that would facilitate an interdisciplinary approach in addressing the region's problems, to be followed by a consequential reorganization of the secretariat. In the same report, the Office of Inspections and Investigations stated that ESCWA had completed the restructuring exercise and that no further action was necessary.⁵

9. Nevertheless, ESCWA continued the process of reform, which included consultations with the staff of the Secretariat at all levels, with experts,⁶ and with member States at the seventeenth (Amman, 29 - 31 May 1994), eighteenth (Beirut, 22 - 25 May 1995) and nineteenth (Beirut, 5 - 8 May 1997) Commission sessions, and at the biannual meetings of the Advisory Committee of representatives of member States. Three main priority areas were identified: namely, the management of natural resources and environment; the improvement of the quality of life of the people of the region; and the creation of an environment conducive to economic cooperation. In addition, the new realities of the globalized economy (factors exogenous to the region), compounded by political instability, internal strife and military conflicts (factors indigenous to the region), have a direct impact on the three priority areas mentioned above. These considerations were

³ E/1993/85 of 24 June 1993.

⁴ A/49/891, para. 6.

⁵ Ibid., para. 11.

⁶ Report of Consultation on the Restructuring of ESCWA Programmes (Amman, 31 January - 3 February 1994), submitted to the seventeenth Commission session (Amman, 29 - 31 May 1994) as an annex to the Note by the Executive Secretary on restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic and social fields: restructuring of ESCWA programmes (E/ESCWA/17/9/Rev.1); and Report of the Meeting of Eminent Persons on the Role and the Future of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (Amman, 18 - 19 December 1996 [E/ESCWA/CAB/1997/1]), submitted to the nineteenth Commission session (Beirut, 5 - 8 May 1997) as an annex to the Note of the Executive Secretary (E/ESCWA/19/5).

reflected in the revised medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, the revised programme of work and priorities for the biennium 1994-1995, and the programme of work and priorities for the biennium 1996-1997. Further priority-setting was carried out in the preparation of the medium-term plan for the period 1997-2001 and the 1998-1999 programme of work and priorities. Both documents are to be reviewed by the Commission at its nineteenth session. In these two documents, setting of standards, norms and legislative instruments is the overriding theme of most of the activities.

10. The reform process entailed moving the focus of the ESCWA programme of work from 15 sectoral subprogrammes to 5 thematic subprogrammes,⁷ with the adoption of multidisciplinary activities as a modality for implementation. The total number of activities was reduced from 265 in the 1994-1995 programme of work to 158 in the 1998-1999 programme of work, resulting in a 40 per cent reduction in the number of ESCWA activities.

11. It was also deemed important that ESCWA expand the scope of its activities in areas critical to the development of the region and not covered by other bodies and agencies in the United Nations system. Other activities already undertaken by other United Nations bodies would be selected only if they were important to the region because of their multidisciplinary nature and regional perspective. ESCWA thus expanded the scope of its activities in water, energy, and transport as well as in human development, gender and statistics, especially within the context of an integrated approach to follow up world conferences. At the same time, ESCWA reduced its activities in agriculture from 52 to 13 and in industry from 54 to 11 in the 1994-1995 and 1998-1999 programmes of work, resulting in an approximately 75 per cent reduction in the number of activities in these two areas.

12. The reform had also direct implications for the structure of ESCWA. The new organizational structure⁸ reduced the previous seven substantive divisions to five, with consolidation of three divisions (Agriculture, Industry and Transport) into one multisectoral division, the Sectoral Issues and Policies Division. While activities dealing with transport were expanded in scope in view of the absence of any United Nations specialized agency dealing with this sector, activities dealing with agriculture and industry were introduced into the programme of work on the basis of their substantive interaction with other relevant areas within a regional perspective.

13. In order to check the validity of its action for reform, in 1996 ESCWA convened a meeting of eminent personalities⁹ in the region to review the prevailing conditions in the region and identify the challenges confronting it. The eminent personalities endorsed the priorities adopted by ESCWA. These priorities are reflected in the ESCWA programme of work and priorities for 1996-1997 and the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1997-2001.

⁷ The five subprogrammes in the 1998-1999 programme of work and priorities are: Management of natural resources and environment; Improvement of the quality of life; Economic development and global changes; Coordination of policies and harmonization of norms and regulations for sectoral development; and Development coordination and harmonization of statistics and information.

⁸ See ST/SGB/Organization, Section: ESCWA/Rev.1 dated 6 October 1994.

⁹ See the Report of the Meeting of Eminent Persons on the Role and the Future of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (Amman, 18 - 19 December 1996 [E/ESCWA/CAB/1997/1]), submitted to the nineteenth Commission session (Beirut, 5 - 8 May 1997) as an annex to the Note of the Executive Secretary (E/ESCWA/19/5).

14. The reform also dealt with the need to strengthen the consultations between ESCWA substantive staff and government officials dealing with the same area of competence. It was therefore decided to establish intergovernmental bodies that would allow member States to participate in programme identification, monitor its implementation and coordinate selected activities among themselves within the regional context. Taking into consideration the trend within the General Assembly to limit the number of subsidiary intergovernmental bodies, and at the same time knowing that ESCWA had no such substantive committees, ESCWA member States recognized the need to establish a limited number of such committees that would meet biennially to review priority areas, namely statistics, social development, energy and water.¹⁰ The proposed activities in the areas of statistics, social development and water resources were reviewed by their respective committees in February and March 1997; the proposed activities in the area of energy will be reviewed by the Committee on Energy in September 1997.

15. The Secretariat-wide reform process also included the Office-Led Efficiency Review, which was undertaken during the first six months of 1996. The ESCWA Office-Led Efficiency Review concentrated on the area of administration, with recommendations to increase the efficiency of administrative processes, bring about cost savings, enhance office technology, achieve a better balance between substantive and administrative support staff, and establish common services with United Nations agencies at ESCWA headquarters in Beirut. These recommendations are in line with the measures announced recently by the Secretary-General.¹¹

16. The reform gave special attention to the development of staff skills as well as to the recruitment of the expertise necessary to complement the skills already available at ESCWA. In this context, it is important to note that the chronic vacancy rate problem at ESCWA is diminishing and reaching a level acceptable at this point in the United Nations. Until the beginning of 1996, and as a result of the freeze imposed on recruitment, the vacancy rate reached 34 per cent. It is expected that this vacancy rate will decrease to 16 per cent by June 1997, meeting both the 6.4 per cent vacancy rate mandated by the General Assembly and the goal of US\$ 2.3 million in savings in the 1996-1997 programme budget.

17. The reform process has also highlighted the need for coordination in the United Nations system. Beyond strengthening the long-standing bilateral relations that exist between ESCWA and the various United Nations Departments, programmes, specialized agencies and funds, ESCWA, acting as the coordinator of social and economic development at the regional level, has also worked to establish what is proving to be an effective mechanism for regional coordination. The Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group was

¹⁰ The ESCWA Statistical Committee, established by resolution 179 (XVI) of 2 September 1992; the Committee on Social Development, established by resolution 198 (XVII) of 31 May 1994; the Committee on Energy, established by resolution 204 (XVIII) of 25 May 1995; and the Committee on Water Resources, established by resolution 205 (XVIII) of 25 May 1995. With the exception of the Statistical Committee, which met in 1995 and 1997, the other three committees are meeting for the first time in 1997.

¹¹ See the letter addressed to the President of the General Assembly of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, dated 17 March 1997, on "Strengthening the United Nations System. Programme Budget for the Biennium 1998-1999" (A/51/829).

established in April 1995.¹² So far, the Group has met five times and its work includes sharing of information on priority issues related to the United Nations and the ESCWA member States and projecting a unified United Nations image and presence in selected activities. It is also in the process of reviewing a joint programme of action for follow-up of world conferences, which, as noted above, will be submitted to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a flagship project. It will be the first test of the cooperative commitments made by the Group. Most recently, the World Bank requested ESCWA to execute a regional project on international comparative pricing. The World Bank also invited ESCWA to participate as one of the conveners of the First Meeting of the Mediterranean Development Forum: Knowledge and Skills for Development in the Information Age, to be held in Marrakesh, Morocco, from 12 to 17 May 1997.

18. More frequent contacts have also been established with various regional organizations, with agreements being signed with the League of Arab States and some of its specialized organizations, as well as with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Arab Planning Institute, to name a few. ESCWA also receives extrabudgetary resources from the Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development. However, in addition to the traditional bilateral agreements it concluded, ESCWA is being progressively recognized for its work and is increasingly being called upon, in particular by the League of Arab States, to act as a partner in joint implementation of projects and activities providing substantive inputs and technical support of activities undertaken by regional organizations.

19. The reform process has also had an impact on the relationship of ESCWA with the public at large, an audience which was neglected in past. More efforts are being directed to the media, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, universities, research institutions, and others. The most tangible reflection of this effort was the first-time issuance of the ESCWA 1995 Report, a publication addressed to the general public rather than those already knowledgeable about and familiar with the United Nations.

20. In conclusion, and in summary of the above, it should be noted that ESCWA reconfirms its commitment to provide quality services to its member States and to implement the relevant mandates for its work. Though it operates in a very rapidly changing region that has within it elements of both hope and frustration, the Commission is successfully adapting to the current conditions, within the prevailing political and financial constraints. It should also be noted that ESCWA is continuing to strengthen its capacity to meet the priorities of the region within the streamlined programme of work and with a strengthened relationship with its member States and its various partners, both in the United Nations system and in the region.

¹² The following participate in the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group: the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat); the International Telecommunication Union (ITU); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); the World Food Programme (WFP); and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Annex I

**JOINT MISSION STATEMENT
OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS**

Mandate of the regional commissions—role and responsibilities

The regional commissions share a common mandate for raising the level of economic development and cooperation among the countries of their respective regions and between them and other parts of the world. In responding to the needs and expectations of their member States, each commission adapts to the specific needs of its region by functioning in a different context, pursuing different priorities and by adopting different work methods. Nonetheless, there is an overriding commonality in the role and functions of the commissions as the regional presence of the Organization.

There seems to be a consensus emerging that a workable system of international economic governance is not solely based on global arrangements, and thus regional integration is currently receiving much attention, since some issues are best dealt with regionally rather than globally.

The regional commissions' overriding *raison d'être* lies in the realm of regional cooperation. While they have been succeeding in fostering such cooperation, much still remains to be done. This holds true also for the need to tie such regional cooperation together through interregional cooperation efforts, where regional cooperation is the building block towards the United Nations central role of promoting development and international cooperation.

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned commonality in the role of functions of the regional commissions, it is evident that the strength of the regional commissions lies in the fact that each commission operates under a unique set of circumstances based on different needs and priorities which vary from region to region.

Regional commissions' strengths and comparative advantages

In An Agenda for Development, the Secretary-General enumerated the tasks before the Organization as a whole in the economic and social sectors, namely: the provision of a focal point for international deliberation and action; the forging of multilateral agreement on the handling of transnational issues, such as norms and standards; information-gathering, -processing and -interpretation; monitoring of economic, social and environmental change; the drawing of attention to issues of broad importance, and to consensus-building and, in general, adapting the international framework for development cooperation to changing needs; and the promotion of coherence and compatibility in international policy-making. The regional commissions are already actively engaged at the regional level in these endeavours and thus can make important contributions within their regional sphere of competence to the aims of the Organization as a whole.

In particular, the regional commissions enjoy a number of comparative advantages based on their geographic proximity, relative homogeneity and cultural and economic affinity within the regions they serve. This permits more in-depth analysis and debates. In addition, a community of interests and necessity for peaceful coexistence permit initiatives or agreements which would be difficult to reach at the global level.

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Comparative advantages in such areas as information-gathering, monitoring of economic events, promoting cooperation and, especially, providing technical assistance and training are the result of the following:

(a) By virtue of their proximity to their member Governments, the regional commissions foster a sense of involvement and participation in the work of the Organization among these Governments, and provide the flexibility needed to respond rapidly to their members' particular needs, including the critical needs of newly emerging States;

(b) The regional commissions have accumulated a body of expertise and a wealth of experience not available elsewhere in the Organization;

(c) The regional commissions have established an efficient intergovernmental machinery, able to support multifaceted cooperation both at the expert level and also at the policy-making level to elaborate standards, regulatory measures and legally binding instruments and regional strategies. This same machinery provides a forum for ministers responsible for international development to meet periodically to review the Organization's capacity to meet their Governments' priorities and needs;

(d) The regional commissions remain the only permanent intergovernmental bodies within the United Nations system, and in some cases as a whole, that comprise all the countries of their respective regions and thus provide a comprehensive framework of region-wide cooperation. They are also the only forum in which all the countries of each region can participate on an equal footing, including the newly emerging States. This compares favourably with non-United Nations bodies active at the regional level;

(e) In addition to their sectoral expertise, the regional commissions possess a multidisciplinary capability which enables them to take up regional issues of a cross-sectoral nature (sustainable development, poverty eradication, infrastructure development, human development). By virtue of their interdisciplinary approach, the activities of the commissions have become intricately interwoven with the economic and social programmes of the countries in the regions they serve. The commissions have thus acted as catalysts in the integration of economic development and cooperation;

(f) The regional commissions are cost-effective in terms of productivity levels, with smaller and better focused secretariat units, modest budgets, and programme delivery supplemented by strong inputs from Governments.

Relations with global entities

Within the United Nations system, General Assembly resolution 32/197 of 20 December 1977 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system established the regional commissions as the main general economic and social development centres, with the in-house multidisciplinary capacity to undertake interdisciplinary issues. This role was confirmed subsequently by the Secretary-General, when he called on the regional commissions to be the regional arms of the United Nations.

Within the context of a unitary United Nations, the regional commissions can play a unique role of building relationships between individual member States, taking into account their individual needs and encompassing regional parameters and global trends. These relationships within the system should be founded on the principle of "subsidiarity", whereby the centre need only undertake those functions that cannot

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be effectively pursued at local levels; this is contrary to the earlier "residual" concept in favour of assigning to the commissions only those matters not covered by the central departments. This approach would, for example, apply to the preparations and follow-up of global conferences by the regional commissions. In following such an approach, one could expect a sharper delineation of global and region-specific concerns and an increase of the regional commissions' participation in the implementation of global conferences, as stipulated in the decisions of these conferences.

In the same vein, increased contributions by the regional commissions to conceptual efforts by global entities would enhance the region-specific approach.

Another important aspect of this issue, which seems to have been neglected to a large extent, concerns the generalization of regional initiatives by global entities or other regional commissions. Advocating greater emphasis on regional initiatives—as opposed to decisions handed down by global bodies—goes to the heart of the matter of distributing activities within the economic and social sectors and the issue of comparative advantages. While the regional commissions reflect the global decision portfolio in their own work programmes, their input into the decision-making process at the global level is often only marginal.

Regional governance

The success of the United Nations system at the regional level is heavily dependent on concerted and coordinated action within the system, and an integrated approach to development. With this in mind, the Governments of the different world regions have entrusted multidisciplinary programmes of work to the regional commissions. The work of the regional commissions can be seen as complementary to that of the specialized sectoral organizations, which lack a cross-sectoral perspective. Similarly, subregional organizations, which may be multidisciplinary, lack the region-wide perspective of the regional commissions. Accordingly, the regional commissions combine not just a broad spectrum of specializations, but also a cross-sectoral analysis and a regional overview which no other United Nations body can match. The commissions have thus become the focal points within their regions for the integration of economic and social development and cooperation.

The regional commissions have an important role to play in the realm of regional governance. Given the complexities of global management, global institutions cannot address all problems, or even most of them, and it is absolutely vital that there be considerable devolution of tasks and functions to the regions, where some of them can be discharged more effectively.

The Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions should be the principal representatives of the Secretary-General for economic, social and related activities in their respective regions. Further consideration should also be given to the way in which Resident Coordinators relate to the regional commissions, and to the possibility of linking regional activities with national activities through networking between the commissions and the Resident Coordinators. The presence of regional offices and bureaux of United Nations programmes, including UNDP OPS (Office for Project Services) offices, at the seat of the regional commissions must also be taken into account in considering the overall delegation of authority to the Executive Secretaries of the commissions. Improvements in the interaction between the regional commissions and other parts of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations will make the system as a whole more responsive to the needs of member Governments.

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A first step in this direction has been made with the establishment of "regional ACCs (Administrative Committees on Coordination)", which attribute a role of facilitator to the regional commissions in promoting interagency cooperation for analysis of regional trends and operational activities.

The regional commissions have also recently taken steps to ensure a greater involvement with non-United Nations entities, notably non-governmental organizations and the business community.

Relations with UNDP and other funding bodies have been impeded by the tendency of the funding bodies and agencies to expand and incorporate operational activities into their mandates instead of adhering to their original mandate as funding agencies. This results in the waste of scarce resources, as the funding agencies do not possess the necessary interdisciplinary and multisectoral expertise which constitutes the strength of the regional commissions. Other obstacles to such arrangements at the regional level include the following:

- (a) The absence of an institutional structure allowing for a recognized arrangement to facilitate and enable the exchange of information on the respective programmes of work: this would ensure more concrete action to avoid duplication and make it possible to maximize the use of resources;
- (b) The variance in geographical areas of responsibilities among agencies and organizations;
- (c) The differing cycles in which these agencies and organizations develop their programme of work, in terms of both timing and frequency;
- (d) The varying degrees of decentralized authority in programming matters among the regional offices of various agencies and organizations.

Decentralization of management

Many aspects of the day-to-day functioning of the regional commissions are hampered by a lack of decentralization of managerial matters. Although there have been ongoing discussions regarding possible remedies, concrete decisions have yet to be taken.

Annex II

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

REFORM AT ESCWA 1993 - 1995

Based on the Report of the Office of Inspections and Investigations in November 1993 (A/49/89), ESCWA initiated action to introduce changes in its programme and structure. In February 1994, a multidisciplinary consultation, in which high-level experts participated, was held: the purpose was to have a dialogue with ESCWA programme managers on priority and critical issues in the region, the areas handled by ESCWA programmes, and the role that ESCWA could play in relation to its member States.

Based on these consultations, a revision of the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997 took place through internal consultation with the staff, in a "bottom-up" approach and the organizational structure of ESCWA was changed accordingly. The reform action is still in progress: emphasis is being placed on ensuring improved quality products and expansion of extrabudgetary resources. Reform also emphasizes the strengthening of the institutionalized managerial processes and staff-management relations. Most important however, is the importance given to strengthening relations with the member States.

Programmatic aspects

- The revised medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997 adopted 5 inter-disciplinary subprogrammes to replace the 15 sectoral subprogrammes; consequently, the 1994-1995 and 1996-1997 work programmes were formulated along the same lines. Pilot multidisciplinary task forces for specific activities were established in 1994; more will be established during the current biennium, with closer monitoring of their progress so as to evaluate the experience at the end of the biennium.
- Emphasis was placed on advisory services provided by the Regional Advisers and ESCWA staff as appropriate.
- These 1996-1997 programme of work has been designed with minimal consultancy support, with emphasis on staff travel to member States.
- Focused interaction was undertaken through brainstorming and internal meetings on selected outputs, with the objective of improving the quality of the documents prior to final publication.

Annex II (continued)

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal seminars were held, which included presentations from staff and external experts. • The idea of establishing a board of external readers for ESCWA documents is being finalized; this is in addition to selected senior staff acting as internal readers. • In order to facilitate the planning, monitoring and budgeting process, a relational database has been finalized using internal resources, and is operational within the Programme Planning and Coordination Unit.
Relations with member States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Advisory Committee of Ambassadors of member States represented at the duty station and high-level officials of the host country was established in 1989. It was reactivated in 1994 through consultations between the Executive Secretary and the senior staff and members of the Committee to work on priority issues that require the attention of the member States. The Advisory Committee has been meeting biannually. • In addition, four specialized intergovernmental substantive subcommittees were established by Commission resolutions: the Statistical Committee, the Committee on Social Development, the Committee on Energy and the Committee on Water Resources. • Meetings with heads of missions of ESCWA member States to the General Assembly are progressively being developed as another forum for information-sharing and consultation. • With the current financial crisis, priority in travel is given to visits to member States.
Organizational aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The structure of ESCWA was amended to include 5 substantive divisions, and Technical Cooperation was upgraded to a Division. Oversight of Programme Planning and Coordination was assigned to the Deputy Executive Secretary in order to stress the importance of this aspect of programming.

Annex II (continued)

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)	
Administrative aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The different processes of administration are progressively being reviewed in order to ascertain their relevance, and are being strengthened or amended as necessary with the objective of achieving a better balance between substantive staff and service staff, streamlining the different administrative process, instituting cost-saving measures, training staff substantively and managerially, with more emphasis on accountability and delegation of authority; and developing a clear culture for the Organization, with improved use of technology. The report of the Office-Led Efficiency Review has been completed and it provides proposals for efficiency and the "right-sizing" of the different divisions of ESCWA, with emphasis on the Administrative Services Division.
Staff development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linking the substantive training of staff to the programme of work and thus having staff pursue short-term substantive training that has a direct impact on their performance. Developing a task-oriented, data-processing training programme for staff which would facilitate the assignments to be undertaken. Convening, in cooperation with the ILO (International Labour Organization) Training Centre in Turin, Italy, a training programme on management of technical cooperation activities in which both staff members and civil servants responsible for technical cooperation activities in their countries participate.
Office automation and technological innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a relational database for programme budget planning and monitoring to facilitate the whole process. Establishing a LAN (local area network) in ESCWA Amman to facilitate communication among divisions and with the management; especially necessary since ESCWA staff are in three separate buildings and working with other bodies and agencies in Amman to establish communication among them.

Annex II (continued)

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)	
Special assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In response to General Assembly resolution 50/22 C, the Secretary-General requested ESCWA to lead a United Nations special technical mission to report on the human and material losses and damage resulting from the April 1996 hostilities in Lebanon.
Interagency coordination at the regional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group, with two meetings already convened, closer cooperation with UNDP/RBAS (Regional Bureau for Arab States) and the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Jordan in convening coordinating meetings in two segments: for issues of country concern and for issues of regional implication. Active participation of regional offices of United Nations agencies in Amman (UNESCO, UNFPA/CST (Country Support Team), UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNRWA) and representation of regional bureaux/divisions of agencies outside of Amman: UNDP, UNFPA, WHO, ITU, WFP. Establishment of an Inter-agency Task Force on Gender in follow-up of the Fourth World Conference on Women with other task forces in the initiation stage. ESCWA is to act as distributor of DPI (Department of Public Information) information to all United Nations agencies in Amman for information-sharing; plans are under way for a United Nations Newsletter for Amman-based agencies. UNDP/Amman initiated an inter-agency exercise to assess the costs of services being provided to all United Nations agencies in Amman with the intention of developing a scheme for common services, and efficiency and cost-saving measures.



