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**REGIONAL AND GLOBAL PRIORITIES: CLIMATE CHANGE, FOOD SECURITY  
AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN****Summary**

This document analyses the implications of three globally important topics namely, climate change, food security and empowerment of women, as well as related issues addressed by ESCWA activities or listed in its work programmes for the coming years.

Scientific expectations indicate that the negative impact of climate change on natural resources in ESCWA member countries will involve numerous economic and social aspects that can limit the possibilities of achieving sustainable development in these countries. Hence, there is a need for adopting effective policies and programmes to cope with and alleviate these negative effects within a framework of regional and international cooperation.

The first part of this document addresses the challenges of climate change to sustainable development in the countries of the region, positions of the Arab countries on climate change issues, and the ongoing negotiations in this regard. It also presents the most significant outputs of the Fifteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention; the Fifth Session of the Conference of the Parties Serving as a Meeting of the Kyoto Protocol (Copenhagen Conference), held from 7 to 18 December 2009; and the related activities carried out by ESCWA in 2009, and those incorporated into its work programmes for the 2010-2011 biennium and within the proposed strategic framework for the 2012-2013 biennium.

Over the past two decades, Arab countries have made great achievements in the empowerment of women in various fields, particularly in legislation, education and health. Most ESCWA member countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. They also regularly pursue the implementation of the resolutions of relevant international conferences, including the Millennium Development Goals, and constantly strive to consider various legislations in view of harmonizing them with international obligations and conventions. Arab countries are making strenuous efforts to empower women at all national, regional and international levels. Most important are their efforts to develop legislations; specifically to combat violence, amend nationality laws and ensure participation of women in political life through a quota system or by direct appointment.

Food security, one of the major challenges facing the ESCWA region, is achieved when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life. While there is a difference between food insecurity and food crisis, the ESCWA region is witnessing both. Countries in the region have been affected by the global food crisis due to their dependency on food imports, which represent 50 per cent to 100 per cent of their food needs and account for 5-10 per cent of total imports into the ESCWA region. While Gulf countries import 100 per cent of their staple foods, their economy is cushioned by oil-fuelled cash surpluses. Whereas non-oil exporting countries in the region are more fiscally challenged and face public contention and discontent as a result of high prices.

Furthermore, instability in the region remains one of the most acute factors contributing to food insecurity. It not only affects access to, availability and utilization of food, but also undermines policy interventions aimed at tackling food insecurity. Recognizing the need for Governments and organizations to tackle the food crisis and address food insecurity, ESCWA proposes to begin by focusing on the region's crisis-affected countries to direct research on the ramifications of the food crisis and food insecurity and develop medium-term capacity-building models for Governments. Countries are requested to discuss this document and make related comments and suggestions.

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## I. CLIMATE CHANGE

### A. CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE ARAB REGION

1. The Fourth Assessment Report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2007 points out that, like other developing countries, the countries of the Arab region are considerably less historically responsible for the climate change problem. However, they will not be immune to the effects of climate change. On the contrary, they are more likely to be among the most vulnerable areas to its potential impacts and various consequences, given its negative impact on economic and social development, as well as on possibilities of achieving sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals. Hence, climate change issues in the Arab region should be incorporated within sustainable development strategies and integrated into their programmes.

#### 1. *Challenges of sustainable development in the Arab region*

2. In their quest for sustainable development, Arab countries face numerous challenges exacerbated by the potential impacts of climate change; in particular: (a) the steady increase in population and the low effectiveness of poverty alleviation programmes; (b) the increased demand for natural resources, scarcity of water and deterioration of its quality; (c) the unsustainable production and consumption patterns of water and energy resources; (d) limitedness of land resources and their vulnerability to degradation and desertification; (e) political and security tension in the region and insufficiency of integrated social policies.

#### 2. *Potential impacts of climate change on the Arab region*

3. Climate change has negative effects on natural resources and socio-economic sectors in the Arab region.

#### (a) *Effects of climate change on natural resources*

- (i) Global warming will lead to increased droughts and shortages in rainfall, thus exacerbating the scarcity of water resources and increasing the rates of desertification and land degradation, which, in turn, will lead to a decline in the agricultural food productivity and affect biodiversity in the countries of the region;
- (ii) The rise in sea-level between 50 and 100 cm will lead to the flooding of coastal areas and displacement of their populations in several Arab countries (including Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Tunisia) and increase the likelihood of flood and hurricane disasters.

#### (b) *Social impacts of climate change*

- (i) Possibility of regional conflicts over impaired natural resources, particularly water, and as a result of waves of internal and external migration of people displaced from areas affected by flooding or drought;
- (ii) Increase of unemployment and decrease of income due to loss of agricultural lands and discontinuation of several economic activities, which, in addition to potential natural disasters, will lead to an increase in the rates of poverty and the number of marginalized persons.

(c) *Economic impacts of climate change*

- (i) Reducing opportunities for urban development in areas prone to drought and increasing the costs of measures needed to address the problem, and difficulty in providing food and rise in its cost as a result of the exacerbation of problems of desertification and land degradation;
- (ii) Negative effects on key economic sectors and on the infrastructure, especially tourism and agriculture in coastal areas, the construction sector, and power and water utilities, as well as heavy financial losses resulting from potential floods and hurricane disasters.

B. ARAB POSITIONS ON THE ISSUES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ONGOING NEGOTIATIONS

4. Realizing the importance of taking urgent and decisive action to face the political, social, economic and environmental challenges posed by climate change, Arab countries have started identifying appropriate frameworks and national strategies for enhancing possibilities of sustainable development and adopted voluntary procedures and plans to address the problem. At the regional level, at its ninth session (Cairo, 5-6 December 2007), the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment issued the Arab Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change, which emphasized the fundamental considerations of the Arab position and the commitment of the region to this issue, in anticipation of entering into relevant international negotiations and agreements. Moreover, at its twenty-first session, the Council issued the Arab Ministerial Statement (November 2009) on Copenhagen negotiations, calling for the preparation of an Arab Framework Action Plan on Climate Change. This document sets out the key points of the ministerial declaration and statement referred to above.

1. *Basic considerations of the Arab position on negotiations*

5. The Declaration called for: (a) continued commitment by developed countries and the international community to the seventh principle of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development on joint but different responsibilities of developed and developing countries; (b) commitment of developed countries to the achievement of ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the long term up until 2050 in ways that do not adversely affect sustainable development in developing countries; (c) provision of new funding, in addition to official development assistance, for the implementation of a comprehensive international programme of adaptation aimed at strengthening the capacity of developing countries to confront the negative impacts of climate change; (d) provision of support for developing countries to enable them to benefit from available funding mechanisms, and develop and transfer clean technologies, especially technologies of carbon dioxide capture and storage under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).

2. *Framework of Arab commitment*

6. The Declaration stressed the importance of taking the following measures: (a) incorporation of policies for dealing with climate change into national and regional sustainable development strategies; (b) adoption of national and regional action plans for dealing with climate change issues, assessment of their potential impact and development of programmes for adaptation and mitigation of their effects; (c) Governments playing a pivotal role in implementing these plans in collaboration and coordination with civil society organizations and the private sector.

7. The Declaration gave priority to programmes of adaptation to climate change, and identified the areas upon which adaptation and mitigation programmes should focus as follows:

(a) *Adaptation programmes*: providing the infrastructure necessary for limiting the potential risks of climate change, as well as appropriate mechanisms for insuring against these risks and improving the efficiency of the management of natural resources, using monitoring, surveillance and early warning systems and related technologies;

(b) *Mitigation programmes*: producing and using cleaner fuels, improving energy efficiency in all sectors, diversifying energy sources depending on the economic and social conditions prevailing in each country and taking advantage of carbon trading and its markets.

### 3. *Draft Arab Framework Action Plan on Climate Change*

8. The draft plan formulated a set of action programmes for both reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the potential impacts of climate change. Taking into consideration a set of objective factors related to the brittleness of the natural, economic and social environment in the Arab region, and the impact that adaptation measures can have on saving lives and reducing the risks associated with climate fluctuations, the draft gave priority to adaptation programmes. These addressed climate, water, land, biodiversity, agriculture, forestry, industry, energy, transportation, building and construction, human settlements, health, seas and coastal areas. Moreover, the draft sought multi-objective programmes, in order to contribute to international efforts to reduce emissions, while achieving at the national level economic and social benefits that would boost the drive towards sustainable development, help reduce poverty and enhance the resilience of economic sectors vulnerable to climate change. ESCWA contributed to the preparation of the draft by identifying the measures related to the energy and transport sectors.

### C. COPENHAGEN CONFERENCE,<sup>1</sup> FROM NEGOTIATIONS TO RESULTS

9. Copenhagen Conference was held from 7 to 18 December 2009, in an effort to reach an international agreement on dealing with climate change issues. This document summarizes the themes of the conference, positions taken by international groups, mechanisms for cooperation, and the most significant points of the draft resolution of the Conference.

#### 1. *Basic objectives of Copenhagen Conference*

10. Copenhagen concluded with the following set of goals:

(a) Defining obligations of the developed countries to reduce emissions for the period beyond 2012, end date of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol;

(b) Estimating positions of the developing countries and their requirements to succeed in achieving emissions reductions;

(c) Identifying the sources of funding and technical cooperation programmes necessary for helping developing countries to implement adaptation programmes designed to alleviate impacts of climate change and identifying the methods for managing the mobilized resources.

#### 2. *Positions of international groups in relation to negotiations*

11. The positions of the various countries in Copenhagen negotiations varied. However, they may be classified under the following major groups:

(a) Group of 77 and China: This group was of the opinion that developed countries ought to bear their historic responsibility for cutting their emissions at high rates, thereby allowing the economies of developing countries to grow. However, significant differences among the various economies of this group led to sub-groups with various negotiating positions (including small islands and developing economies);

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<sup>1</sup> Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Copenhagen (December, 2009).

(b) Group of African Countries: This group showed great sensitivity towards the effects of climate change and their connection to poverty issues. It called on more advanced developing countries, such as China, India and Brazil to reduce emissions;

(c) European Union, with its twenty-seven states, formed one negotiating front, with which the industrialized countries that are not members of the European Union sided. This group, which is called upon by the Kyoto agreement to reduce emissions, was of the opinion that developing countries should commit themselves to participation in the exerted efforts;

(d) United States: The United States, which did not sign the Kyoto Protocol, was of the opinion that the Protocol should be incorporated into the Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was opposed by developing countries. The United States did not provide specific commitments. Instead, it declared its intention to cut emissions from 2005 levels by 17 per cent by 2020 and 83 per cent by 2050. However, until the convening of the conference, Congress had not approved such an intention.

### *3. Negotiation mechanisms and their directions*

12. During the conference, the mechanisms of negotiations were identified to be within two main tracks: (a) The Ad Hoc Working Group under the Kyoto Protocol (AWGKP) for the years beyond 2012; (b) The Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action.

13. Negotiations followed the two following directions:

(a) A political executive agreement: working on developing a political executive agreement that is not legally binding and incorporates both the Convention and the Protocol. Thus, each State identifies its targets and methods for achieving them in accordance with its domestic laws. The United States supports this direction. However, developing countries oppose it and are of the opinion that it is necessary to commit to goals internationally and provide a mechanism for putting pressure on developed countries to make sure they meet the set goals;

(b) Two protocols for cooperation: working on issuing an Annex to Kyoto Protocol that ratifies the results and achievements approved by the participants in the summit, and attaching to the Annex a legally binding agreement along the lines referred to in paragraph (a) above. This is supported by most developing countries.

### *4. The Draft Resolution of Copenhagen*

14. At the end of the Conference, a draft resolution, co-drafted by Brazil, China, India, South Africa, and the United States was issued. It emphasized the following:

(a) Presence of a strong political will to limit climate change rapidly, in accordance with the principle of common but varied responsibilities, as well as in accordance with the capabilities of each country for achieving the goal of stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, at a level that reduces the increase in the temperature of the earth surface to less than two degrees Celsius, on the basis of equity and in the context of sustainable development;

(b) Emphasis on the necessity of developing a comprehensive programme of adaptation, with stress on international cooperation, including international support for developing countries by developed countries through provision of technology, adequate sustainable financial resources and capacity-building to help implement adaptation measures;

(c) Recognition that the time frame for achieving the desired objectives will have to be exerted in developing countries, that social and economic development and poverty eradication are at the forefront of

the priorities of developing countries, and that a low-emission strategy for achieving sustainable development should be developed;

(d) Commitment by the parties listed in Annex I, individually and collectively, to the implementation of the quantitative targets for emissions from the various economic sectors for the year 2020, with the secretariat presenting the Convention by January 31, 2010, to be incorporated in the carbon exchange market document; and measurement, verification and documentation of the reductions by the developed countries and the funding they have provided, in order to ensure transparency in the calculation of targets and funding;

(e) Commitment by the parties not listed in Annex I (developing countries) to the implementation of the mitigation measures they provided to the secretariat by January 31, 2010, to be incorporated in the carbon exchange market document; and reporting through national communiqués the mitigation actions taken, measuring and verifying them at the national level, and reporting through the national communiqués on the outcome every two years;

(f) Registration of the mitigation measures that are compatible with local conditions and require international support in a record of relevant technologies, financing and capacity-building; and measurement, verification and reporting of these mitigation measures internationally;

(g) Adoption of a firm policy for reducing emissions resulting from deforestation and degradation of forests, and provision of incentives for developing countries, particularly those with low-emission economies, to monitor progress in this regard;

(h) Commitment by the developed countries to provide through international institutions new and additional resources of nearly \$30 billion for the period from 2010 to 2012, with a balanced distribution between adaptation and mitigation, giving priority in the adaptation programmes, to the most vulnerable of the developing countries, such as the least developed countries and the small developing island states and Africa; and commitment by developed countries to mobilize jointly \$100 billion by 2020 to meet the needs of developing countries;

(i) Provision of the financing referred to above by a wide range of sources, with a major part flowing through the Copenhagen Green Climate Fund, which is the operating entity of the financial mechanism of the Convention and aims to support projects, programmes, policies and other activities related to mitigation, adaptation, capacity-building, and technology development and transfer in developing countries;

(j) Promotion of development and transfer of technology through the establishment of a technical mechanism for accelerating such development and transfer, in support of adaptation and mitigation based on a national approach, and national circumstances and priorities.

#### D. CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF ESCWA WORK PROGRAMME

15. At its twenty-fifth ministerial session, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia issued resolution 281 (d-25) on addressing climate change issues in the Arab region. It requested ESCWA secretariat to do the following: (a) reassessment of the impacts of climate change on economic and social development in the region, with emphasis on freshwater resources; (b) taking the necessary measures for raising awareness of measures for adaptation to climate change and mitigation of its effects; (c) working with the Governments of member countries to launch discussions on the proposed recommendations in this regard; (d) developing the Arab Framework Action Plan on Climate Change, in partnership with the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Program/Regional Office for West Asia, and other relevant regional organizations.

16. Within the framework of implementing this resolution, in keeping abreast of regional and global interest in climate change issues, and in order to support the efforts of member countries in this field,

ESCWA participated in related regional and international activities, especially in respect of the preparation of Arab regional studies and plans and drafting of relevant declarations and statements. In addition, ESCWA has included in its work programmes for 2009, the 2010-2011 biennium, and the strategic framework for the 2012-2013 biennium, activities appropriate to the development of work aimed to address climate change in the Arab region, including the following:

1. *Within the framework of the 2009 work programme*

17. ESCWA participated actively in implementing the activities and attending the meetings that led to the formulation of the relevant Arab positions, as well as in preparing and implementing the activities and reports of the United Nations organizations in preparation for the Copenhagen Conference.

18. ESCWA prepared a series of reports and expert group meetings, including: (a) a report on the Promotion of Large-scale Renewable Energy Applications in the Arab Region; (b) a report on Transport for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region; (c) an Expert Group Meeting on Transport for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region, and its Relation to Climate Change Issues (Cairo, 29 September – 1 October 2009); (d) the Second Roundtable on the Ten-year Framework on Sustainable Consumption and Production (27-29 September 2009); (e) an Expert Group Meeting Towards Assessing the Vulnerability of Water Resources to Climate Change in the Arab Region (Beirut, 26-28 October 2009)

2. *Within the framework of the work programme for the 2010-2011 biennium*

19. ESCWA has included in its work programme for the 2010–2011 biennium a series of studies of and activities on adaptation to climate change and mitigation of its effects, including the following:

(a) Studies of and reports on the following topics: (1) extent of vulnerability of the water sector to climate change and the adaptation measures for increasing flexibility of ESCWA member countries in addressing climate change; (2) policies and measures in the field of energy to mitigate climate change in ESCWA member countries; (3) measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change on water resources in the ESCWA region; (4) policies and measures to promote the use of sustainable energy in the transport sector in the ESCWA region;

(b) Expert group meetings: (1) approaches to the promotion of reduction of emissions from the transport sector in the ESCWA region; (2) assessment of effects of climate change on water resources and adaptation measures in the ESCWA region; (3) development of a framework action plan for the Arab region for adaptation to the effects of climate change on the sector of water resources;

(c) Fact sheets and publications on the following topics: (1) patterns of sustainable production and consumption in the energy and water sectors in the ESCWA region; (2) sustainable management of land and sustainable rural development;

(d) An interregional project to create a pool of educational models of systems of renewable energies, aimed at building capacity in poverty alleviation and emissions reduction.

3. *Within the proposed strategic framework for the 2012-2013 biennium*

20. In addressing sustainable management of natural resources, the strategic framework stressed the importance of focusing nationally on incorporating climate change issues into sectoral strategies and programmes. The framework singled out one expected accomplishment to strengthening the capacity of Governments and other stakeholders from both the public and the private sectors for including policies to address climate change within sectoral policies and plans, mobilizing technical and financial support for the implementation of such policies and strengthening regional cooperation.



## II. FOOD SECURITY

### A. THE CONCEPT OF FOOD SECURITY

21. The accepted definition of food security underscores the fact that food security is a common challenge to the ESCWA region. The 1996 World Food Summit in Rome concluded that food security is achieved when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. The World Health Organization notes additionally that food security is built on three pillars:

- (a) Food availability: sufficient quantities of food available on a consistent basis;
- (b) Food access: having sufficient resources to obtain appropriate food for a nutritious diet;
- (c) Food use: appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care, as well as on adequate water and sanitation.

22. There is a difference between food insecurity and a food crisis. The ESCWA region knows both. A food crisis normally assumes the supply-side perspective. It is a deterioration of agricultural capacities, be it because of mismanagement, climate change, water scarcity, natural disasters or armed conflict. Food insecurity, on the other hand, assumes the position of the demand side. People may be food insecure in the absence of a food crisis, food secure despite a food crisis or food insecure because of a food crisis. Distinctions like these are necessary in order to articulate suitable policies and mitigation measures. For instance, the focus on the food crisis has created the seemingly common wisdom that climate change and biofuel are major drivers of food insecurity, which does not necessarily represent the complete situation. Both, of course, are serious problems. However, when it comes to food insecurity, population growth could prove to be a serious contributing factor that should merit closer examination. With population growth rates of roughly three percent, the population would double approximately every 23 years. Unless substantial investments are made into agricultural technology, seeds, storage capacities, and expansion of arable land, and unless macro-economic management is sound, pressure on food security is bound to increase tremendously.

### B. THE CONTEXT OF THE ESCWA REGION

23. Prices of food grains in the international market declined substantially in the last quarter of 2008. However, they remain well above the pre-crisis levels of mid-2007. Although oil and fertilizer prices have also come down sharply in recent months, international markets remain highly volatile and any rise in input prices would have a direct impact on production costs. Furthermore, reduction in the prices of products may create disincentives for producers, and hence have an adverse affect on output in subsequent periods. Moreover, the difficult economic situation may lead to a future decline in investment in agriculture. Indeed, there is little support for agriculture in the Government-led stimulus packages being formulated and adopted by various countries.

24. At the global level, if fuel, commodities and food continue to get scarcer and prices continue to rise, speculation in international commodity markets could have an even more serious destabilizing effect in the future. Rising unemployment and falling incomes are putting pressure on lower middle classes and the poor, particularly in conflict-afflicted countries. Significantly, when the global economy recovers, food prices are expected to rise again, potentially exacerbating poverty, malnutrition, hunger and food insecurity, as well as undermining access to basic food staples by the most vulnerable groups.

25. In the ESCWA region, countries have been affected by the global food crisis due to their dependency on food imports, which represent 50 per cent to 100 per cent of their food needs. Net food imports account for 5-10 per cent of total imports, with wheat being the Middle East's most popular foodstuff. While Gulf

countries import 100 per cent of their staple foods, their economy is cushioned by oil-fuelled cash surpluses, as opposed to non-oil exporting countries in the region that are more fiscally challenged and face public contention and discontent as a result of higher prices. With rising unemployment and increasing poverty, the food crisis has accentuated food insecurity for significant segments of the population in a number of countries, resulting in riots and civil unrest in some instances.

26. Food accessibility is strongly influenced by Government economic policies and openness to world markets. Many countries in the region have long adopted interventionist policies. Subsidizing food commodities to make them more affordable to the public is one option, while lifting subsidies is another. Most Arab Governments have adopted food supply policies as part of a social contract based on state provision of essential needs, in exchange for the people's loyalty. However, since the 1980s, economic and market deregulation policies adopted by Governments have rendered domestic food prices vulnerable to fluctuations in international prices.

27. Given the apparent threat of food insecurity, access to food needs to be pursued, not in terms of absolute sovereignty in food production, an unrealistic goal, according to the Arab Human Development Report (AHDR), in light of regional water scarcities, but rather in terms of sufficiency of and access to essential commodities by all members of society. In this context, the low self-sufficiency rate in staple foods in the region is one of its most serious development gaps. Moreover, such gaps are likely to widen, given the social and economic fallout from the interplay of the food crisis, the fuel crisis and the financial crisis, particularly in countries suffering political tensions, conflict and occupation.

28. Given the eventuality of a new food crisis, high dependence of the region on food imports, regional land degradation, encroaching desertification and scarcity of water, and political instability and conflict, a national response led by the public sector needs to be articulated. Such a response needs to be framed within a regional context, whose main driving forces must be regional cooperation and integration, and improving access to global markets.

29. In order to attain such a goal, regional institutions will be necessary. Food security has already been identified as a policy priority by the League of Arab States, which called for creating an Arab Food Security Fund and increased cooperation at the level of policy. Moreover, organizations like the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development and the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas have already accumulated a substantial amount of local technical expertise that can be used to develop regional solutions. What is still missing is a regional cooperation platform for dialog, finance, legislative initiatives and implementation of regional programmes.

30. An important focus of regional institutions and programmes must be the formulation and promotion of a common regulatory framework that facilitates free movement of goods, services, capital and people. It will be, moreover, necessary to strengthen individual Governments, especially in crisis-afflicted countries, with budget support to enable them to put public investments into social mobility, thereby assisting in mitigating the impact of conflict on development. Public investments in promoting social mobility should occur in health, education, technological infrastructure and public administration efficiency. Transfer payments and subsidy systems are to be reduced, as they conserve social immobility rather than promote social mobility.

31. In light of future uncertainties regarding food security, a possible increase in vulnerability to exogenous shock, and eventually a decrease in export revenues from rent-extractive opportunities in it, the ESCWA region can play an important role in shaping new economic policy paradigms. The common wisdom of the 1980s and 1990s that more markets and less state policies would bring about sustainable development must be questioned and possibly replaced by a 'more markets need more state policies'.

### C. CONFLICT, INSTABILITY AND FOOD SECURITY/INSECURITY

32. The ESCWA region may be divided into low, medium, and high food insecure countries. In the four conflict-afflicted countries of Iraq, Palestine, the Sudan and Yemen, high food insecurity, generally the result of conflict and little-diversified economic productive capacities, is evidenced by high rates of infant mortality and undernourishment, as well as general rates of undernourishment (where data are available). Countries like Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria could be classified as medium food insecure, mostly because the risk of (permanent) conflict is much lower and the economic activity is much less distorted. These countries have nevertheless pockets of food insecurity. They are particularly vulnerable to exogenous shocks such as droughts or rising food prices. Lastly, the Gulf economies of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates generally enjoy high food security, as a result of considerable wealth. However, in the presence of food price shocks, food insecurity may emerge in these countries among guest workers.

33. Consequently, in the ESCWA region, instability remains one of the most acute contributing factors to food insecurity, affecting issues of access as well as availability and utilization. The Arab Human Development Report of 2009<sup>2</sup> shows that while poverty and malnutrition often co-exist in Arab countries, poverty is not necessarily associated with undernourishment when the consumption pattern of the poor tends towards inexpensive but nutrient-rich foods, and when such foods are readily accessible under targeted Government programmes. Conversely, when conditions of conflict disrupt food supplies, as in Iraq, Palestine, Somalia and the Sudan, a high degree of malnutrition and food insecurity follows.

34. In addition, while natural disasters and economic shocks play a role in both transitory and chronic food insecurity, prolonged conflict has a debilitating effect not only on food availability, access, and utilization, but also undermines policy interventions aimed at tackling food insecurity.

35. Recognizing the need for Governments and organizations to tackle the effects of the food crisis and address food insecurity, ESCWA suggests beginning by focusing on the five crisis-affected countries of the region, in order to concentrate research on ramifications of the food crisis and food insecurity and develop medium-term capacity-building modules for Governments. This work will also lay the ground for further regional work on food security and possible complementarity at sub-regional or regional levels, which ESCWA will pursue in the long term.

### D. ESCWA PROPOSED PLAN OF ACTION

#### 1. *The way forward*

36. Development of a peaceful and equitable socioeconomic environment that can bolster food security in the ESCWA region will strongly depend on regional impulses. A greater economic division of labour is particularly important in this regard. Relative to other developing regions, the ESCWA region lags behind in terms of productive economic integration. It is important to know that this development is more the result of many years of inward orientation and the absence of a strong regional political will than economic geography.

37. Instead of economic convergence, the ESCWA region experiences economic divergence, indicating that regional capital is not employed where it should have the highest marginal product. Without convergence-stimulating investments in the region, the economies of the ESCWA region will not diversify enough to accommodate rural-urban migration that will result of a deterioration of agricultural livelihoods following climate change or increased water scarcity. Within that context, the World Bank launched in 2008 the Arab World Initiative, aimed at promoting greater regional and international integration. At the January

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<sup>2</sup> UNDP, Bureau for Arab States, League of Arab States, Development and Social Policies Department, *Development Challenges for the Arab Region: Food Security and Agriculture*, Volume 2, December 2008, p. 34.

19, 2009 Arab Economic Summit in Kuwait, the World Bank announced targeted investments in agriculture production and supply chain logistics projects, which may offer promising opportunities for South-South cooperation.

## 2. ESCWA proposed activities

38. Focusing on the ESCWA region, and in particular the five crisis-affected countries (Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, the Sudan and Yemen), ESCWA will, in consultation with the relevant United Nations entities through the United Nations Regional Coordination Mechanism and the Regional Directors Team, undertake the four main activities outlined below, which will also depend on close consultations with ESCWA member states, as well as with relevant Arab organizations

### (a) *Conduct a situation analysis and needs assessment of ESCWA member states*<sup>3</sup>

39. The situation analysis would ascertain the assets and deficiencies of ESCWA member countries, whether low, medium or high food insecure, with reference to food security. This will involve the following:

- (i) An analysis of the views of each member state with regards to attainment of food security, including a detailed exposition of relevant national assets and deficiencies (i.e., availability of relevant infrastructure and technology; labour vs. capital intensive states; abundance vs. lack of natural resources such as water, fertile land, etc.);<sup>4</sup>
- (ii) An examination of food production and consumption trends, as well as patterns of foreign trade in basic food items;
- (iii) Assessment of price inflation rates of food items and use of subsidies on such items;
- (iv) A projection of demographic and other vital national trends that impact food consumption rates, including ramifications of food insecurity at the national level, (i.e., attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in particular, in addition to the two-way relationship between instability/occupation and food insecurity);
- (v) A detailed exposition of the most pertinent inter-linkages at the regional and global levels (cost of fuel, mismanagement of natural resources, desertification, land degradation, water scarcity, global financial crisis, occupation, protracted conflict and political tensions, etc.).

### (b) *Formulate a working paper addressing the challenges and opportunities of attaining food security*

40. Based on the findings of the situation analysis, ESCWA would undertake drafting a working paper that would:

- (i) Forecast food vulnerabilities in the ESCWA region, in terms of greater food import bills and social safety net needs;
- (ii) Review existing programmes, including capacity-building modules tackling food security;
- (iii) Ascertain the required capacity to address effectively repercussions of food crisis/food insecurity, with a particular emphasis on the public sector;

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<sup>3</sup> Benefit food security monitoring system developed by FAO in conflict-affected countries such as the OPT.

<sup>4</sup> ESCWA will conduct a consultative process with each member state.

- (iv) Study potential interventions by the public sector that would mitigate the impact of food crisis/food insecurity, including enhancing the potential of regional investments into vertical social mobility through industrial development and trade promotion vis-a-vis food security;
- (v) Ascertain the most feasible and transferable international/regional success stories and explore regional cooperation mechanisms to address more effectively food crisis and food insecurity;
- (vi) Formulate food security policy recommendations to be discussed by various ESCWA member states, especially with respect to pro-poor and pro-environmental sustainability macroeconomic policies, finance, burden sharing, and socio-economic returns to the region as a whole;
- (vii) Propose a permanent dialogue mechanism with existing regional organizations to identify opportunities for joint programmes.

(c) *Regional Conference on Food Security*

41. Findings of the situation analysis and the working paper will be presented in their draft format so as to develop the most suitable strategies for enhancing regional cooperation on food security, and conduct a review within the framework of building on the comparative advantages of ESCWA member states. The most suitable capacity-building modules geared towards strengthening the public sector will also be reviewed at the conference. The agenda, work programme and desired outcomes of the regional conference will be determined according to the findings of the aforementioned activities.

(d) *Formulate and implement capacity-building module(s) targeting relevant civil servants*

42. The capacity-building modules aim to strengthen the ability of middle managers within the public sector to address the challenges associated with food crisis/food insecurity. The module, which will be interactive, will visit policy options, and consolidate the understanding of civil servants. Most importantly, it will enhance their ability to create at the national level a dynamic to manage natural resources better, formulate policy and create coordination mechanisms that would address the ramifications of food crisis/food insecurity. Areas to be considered include the following:

- (i) Advanced techniques and practice tailored to the needs and resources of the five countries, including introduction of low-cost technologies;
- (ii) Human resources management;
- (iii) Strategic planning and training aimed at increasing productivity, institution empowerment and other necessary themes, etc...;
- (iv) Agricultural policies/programmes based on the outcome of the situation analysis and working paper;
- (v) Capacity of the public sector to formulate and implement policies geared toward enhancing the ability of people to access/purchase food needs.

### **III. EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

#### **A. STATUS OF WOMEN IN ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES**

43. Over the past two decades, Arab states have made significant achievements in the empowerment of women in various fields, particularly in legislation, education and health. Most ESCWA member states have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. They also

regularly pursue the implementation of the resolutions of relevant international conferences, including the Millennium Development Goals, and constantly strive to consider various legislations with a view to harmonizing them with international obligations and conventions.

44. Notwithstanding the high level of illiteracy in some ESCWA member countries, illiteracy rates among adults, females in particular, were reduced. The region has also been able to bridge significantly the gap between females and males, particularly in enrolment rates in primary education. Thus the percentage of females enrolled in primary education exceeds 90 per cent, and approximately the same percentage applies to secondary education.

45. Though enrolment of females in university education has risen slightly, it is still low compared to enrolment of males. Available studies indicate that the rates of female enrolment in the academic disciplines associated with their social role, such as education and humanities, are still high, in comparison with the non-traditional disciplines associated with the labour market. This constitutes an impediment to active economic participation of women, as will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

46. Available information on achievements of Arab countries in providing access to health services, especially for children under five and mothers, indicates that they have been able to achieve breakthroughs and significant results that would improve socio-economic conditions in general. Studies indicate that over the past two decades, the rate of under five child mortality has declined to below one third of what it used to be.

47. However, studies show that the progress made in the economic participation of Arab women<sup>5</sup> is not consistent with the achievements in the above areas. Despite a steady increase of participation of women in economic activity, it is still low compared with the rest of the world. Up until 2007, participation of Arab women in the economy in the ESCWA region was less than 25 per cent, which impacts negatively the high rates of economic dependency. It is worth noting that differences among nations remain significant, varying from as low as 10.3 per cent in Palestine to as high as 49 per cent in Kuwait.

48. Moreover, unemployment among females in the Arab region is higher than among males. According to available statistics for 2008, the unemployment rate for females in the Arab region is 13.3 per cent, compared with 8.2 per cent among males in the Middle East as a whole and 15.9 per cent among females and 8.1 per cent among males in North Africa.

49. Available information on details of economic participation of women shows that there are gaps in wages. Legislations that govern the private and the public sectors stipulate equality in wages. Yet, the percentage of women in low-salary categories is high, while their percentage in high-salary categories is low. Moreover, the economic participation of Women is concentrated in the Government sector and in areas related to traditional societal roles.

50. The low economic participation of women is consistent with their low participation in decision making and political participation in general. The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2007 report shows that seats held by women in national parliaments throughout the Arab region constitute only 8.7 per cent of the total, which is low even in comparison with developing countries in general, where the ratio is 15.3 per cent.

51. Furthermore, available information on participation of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, indicates that despite most ESCWA member countries having set national strategies for empowerment of women, they have not set national plans for involving women in conflict resolution or peacebuilding, which affects mechanisms of participation and protection for women.

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<sup>5</sup> The available information on Women's economic participation is based on ESCWA, *Women's control over Economic Resources and Access to Financial Resources – Women and Development series* (Number 36).

52. As for domestic violence, several member countries began to develop institutional mechanisms to protect women and children from domestic violence. These include the establishment of institutions and courts to deal with family issues and others to promote family harmony, in addition to refuges for battered women.

53. Thus, Arab countries in general and member countries in particular have made great strides in empowering women. However, further concerted efforts and joint actions are needed to achieve equity in access to resources and empowerment of women, giving them the opportunity to be more effective in Arab societies.

#### B. MEASURES AND ACTIONS TAKEN BY MEMBER COUNTRIES TO EMPOWER WOMEN

54. Arab countries are still making efforts to accelerate the empowerment of women at the national, regional and international levels. One of the main themes in this framework is the development of legislations; specifically related to combat violence, amendment of nationality laws, and ensuring the participation of women in political life through a quota system or by direct appointment.

55. Recently, three Arab countries joined the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which indicates a serious commitment by the political level in Arab countries towards betterment and empowerment of women. In addition, in a number of countries, there were efforts by national committees to withdraw reservations against the Convention, in particular to Article 9 Item 2.

56. A number of member countries have been working on providing gender-disaggregated data, in addition to developing indicators for measuring violence against women, and several have developed programmes for combating trafficking in women.

57. However, most of the initiatives launched by the political echelons, especially amending legislations, clash soon after with the stereotypical image of women and with social determinants. Hence, more efforts are needed to educate the community and develop the media. In addition, there is poor commitment towards the empowerment of women in other institutions generally, which reflects negatively on all the measures taken.

58. Most Arab countries have established national mechanisms for the empowerment of women, either independent ministries or committees. These mechanisms have worked with Government institutions and non-governmental organizations to develop legislations, institutions and national strategies to intensify efforts and direct them towards the advancement of women. Notwithstanding the political support enjoyed by these mechanisms, they still face challenges and obstacles, the most significant of which are poor coordination with local partners and shortage of available human and financial resources.

#### C. ROLE OF ESCWA IN ASSISTING MEMBER COUNTRIES IN EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

59. ESCWA works in partnership with international organizations in the Arab countries to provide technical support and assistance to member countries. Hence, ESCWA undertakes, within available possibilities, organising specialized training courses for member countries on various topics, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, mechanisms for gender mainstreaming in institutions, development of gender-responsive budgets, institutional capacity-building in raising awareness, and building an institutional cadre qualified to work with the national mechanisms.

60. Moreover, ESCWA seeks to provide up-to-date studies and policies that contribute to the achievement of international goals related to empowerment of women. It regularly offers a series of in-depth studies; as it presented most recently several studies looking into mechanisms for promoting participation of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

61. Furthermore, ESCWA works on strengthening mechanisms of joint work between various national institutions and governmental and community organizations. Thus, in cooperation with national committees, ESCWA seeks to contribute to the development of various interdependent networks for joint action in empowerment of women.

62. In addition, ESCWA works through regional advisors to provide support to institutions and national committees in response to their needs and upon their request.

63. However, notwithstanding the role played by ESCWA to date in supporting member countries in empowerment of women, the promotion of partnership with member states and building more cooperation mechanisms are part and parcel of ESCWA remit, which it always seeks to achieve through providing qualified human expertise to work with member countries.

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