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REGIONAL AND GLOBAL PRIORITIES**FOLLOW-UP TO THE OUTCOMES OF THE UNITED NATIONS
CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (RIO+20)****Summary**

This report outlines a follow-up to the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) which took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012, to be discussed at the seventh meeting of the Technical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The outcomes of Rio+20 outlined in the document *The Future We Want* bears great significance emanating from a renewed global commitment to sustainable development, a reaffirmation of the Rio Principles contained in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development which was issued by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and decisions made by other global conferences, and a promise to achieve a sustainable future in the economic, social and environmental areas for present and future generations.

The report presents a summary of the main subjects of the outcome document which are of importance to the Arab region, the action taken and planned to implement the outcomes of the Conference, and the active participation of ESCWA and the Arab countries in this major event which was attended by more than 40,000 participants.

With the political and social changes sweeping several Arab countries, there is an opportunity for developing a new model of sustainable development in the region. The present report offers a number of suggestions on the way to translate the outcomes of Rio+20 into national and regional sustainable development programmes that meet the needs and priorities of the Arab region, in a framework of regional cooperation, in order to reach the future we all want.

CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1-5	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. PARTICIPATION OF ARAB COUNTRIES AND ESCWA IN RIO+20 CONFERENCE	6-12	4
A. Participation of Arab countries	7-10	4
B. ESCWA participation	11-12	4
II. RIO+20 OUTCOME DOCUMENT: THE FUTURE WE WANT	13-25	6
A. Last round of negotiations on the outcome document	14-17	6
B. Items of importance to the Arab region in the outcome document	18-25	7
III. ACTION TAKEN BY ESCWA TO INITIATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RIO+20 OUTCOMES	26	11
IV. PROPOSALS FOR THE EFFECTIVE FOLLOW-UP TO THE RIO+20 OUTCOMES IN THE ARAB REGION	27-30	12
<i>Annex:</i> The Arab Ministerial Declaration on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).....		15

Introduction

1. The secretariat prepared this report pursuant to ESCWA resolution 305 (XXVII) concerning sustainable development in the region and follow-up and implementation of the decisions of the Rio+20 Conference, which was adopted at its twenty-seventh session¹ and which requested the secretariat to: (a) prepare a report on the outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference that includes proposals regarding matters of concern to the region, and to assist member countries in building their capacity to address those outcomes; (b) continue to coordinate and cooperate with Arab Governments, United Nations organizations, and the League of Arab States and its specialized committees to take measures to achieve sustainable development, and in particular to provide support to the energy, water and environmental sectors on climate change issues and to promote regional institutional frameworks for sustainable development.

2. ESCWA, being the coordinator of the regional preparatory process for Rio+20, played a major role in the Arab regional preparations for the participation in the global event, in cooperation with its regional partners including most importantly the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environment Programme. In fact, ESCWA organized in the past two years, a series of consultative meetings, workshops and regional seminars aimed at supporting the Arab preparations at the national and regional levels with a view to developing a harmonized Arab position towards the issues addressed by Rio+20.² ESCWA has urged the Arab countries to actively participate in the negotiations on the draft outcome document on the basis of the harmonized Arab position set forth in the joint statement issued by the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for Rio+20 Conference (October 2011) and the Arab Ministerial Declaration on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development issued by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (April 2011) (the full text of the Declaration is presented in the annex). ESCWA also offered support and advice during the negotiations by providing updates on the negotiations to representatives of Arab countries with a view to ensuring a broad participation by the Arab group in those negotiations.

3. Rio+20 was held 20 years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development which took place in the same venue, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. However, the situation of the world affairs in 1992 was significantly different. The bipolar order had just fallen and the focus was on development issues which emphasized the participation and contribution of all stakeholders to finding solutions for the problems faced by the earth. The Rio 1992 produced ambitious commitments and decisions based on justice, rights and the protection of the environment for the benefit of all and future generations. Along Rio+20 the picture was that of a world overburdened with the consequences of consecutive global financial and economic crises, including food and energy crises, impacts of climate change, increasing poverty and unemployment rates, broken cultural backgrounds, wars and political changes. With all that, the capability of the world order to lead the search for solutions to the urgent and aggravated problems was questioned. Even confidence in such principles as sustainability and social equity was shaken, to the extent that extremist critics went as far as calling for a reconsideration of international agreements and decisions including the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development and Agenda 21 adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development issued by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, and others.

4. In parallel to that global picture, the Arab region was stormed by crucial changes. Many countries were affected with popular movements claiming political change, freedom, justice and dignity leading to changes in the governing regimes, as well as in policies and strategies. The turbulence reigning in some Arab countries affected the regional Arab preparations for Rio+20 and prevented wide participation, as decision makers gave less attention to the environment dimension of sustainable development putting it on

¹ ESCWA, Report on the twenty-seventh session, 7-10 May 2012, E/2012/41-E/ESCWA/27/9/Report, available from <http://documents.un.org>.

² For information on the preparations of the Arab region for Rio+20, refer to ESCWA, *Policy issues in the ESCWA region: ongoing preparations for Rio+20 in the Arab region*, E/ESCWA/27/4(Part II). This and all documents related to the Conference and its preparatory process, including a short video on food security produced for the event, are available from <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1570E>.

the back burner under more pressing critical circumstances. Those concerns caused by global and regional crises were undoubtedly reflected in the outcome document of the Conference *The Future We Want*.

5. This report presents a summary of the main subjects of the outcome document which are of importance to the Arab region, the participation of ESCWA and the Arab countries in the Conference and the action taken and planned to implement the outcomes of the Conference. It emphasizes the need to link the items of the outcome document with sustainable development priorities in the Arab region and to support member countries in developing sustainable development policies and programmes to implement those outcomes. Furthermore, the report offers suggestions on post-Rio actions that can be taken by ESCWA and member countries to ensure effective follow-up to the Conference outcomes.

I. PARTICIPATION OF ARAB COUNTRIES AND ESCWA IN RIO+20 CONFERENCE

6. The Conference was attended by more than 40,000 participants, including more than 100 heads of State or Government, from 193 countries and regional and international organizations. More than 700 voluntary commitments were made and more than US\$500 billion were pledged.

A. PARTICIPATION OF ARAB COUNTRIES

7. The participation of Arab countries in Rio+20 was affected by the developments taking place in the region and the prevailing state of insecurity. While Arab delegations were large and consisted of experts in various fields, political representation was less than hoped for, despite promises from many countries that they will be represented at the highest political level. In the final days prior to the Conference, those promises vanished and none of the Arab countries was represented by a head of a State. A limited number of countries were represented at the level of vice-president, or head of parliament, or the prime minister. The majority were represented by ministers, mainly foreign affairs, environment or planning ministers.

8. The Arab countries and the League of Arab States participated in the main sessions of the Conference and in several side activities and exhibitions. The Arab countries also organized many activities, including five regional activities and six national events held by Bahrain, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates; and exhibitions by Bahrain, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. In addition, the Arab group convened daily meetings to discuss the daily proceedings and developments of the Conference.

9. The Sudan, represented by the Vice-President, was the Arab coordinator of the Conference pursuant to a decision by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment in April 2012. Algeria, being the Chair of the Group of 77 and China, played a central role in conveying the opinions of the Arab group.

10. A committee comprising Algeria, Egypt and Palestine negotiated with Brazil, the host country, on behalf of the Arab group for the participation of Palestine as a State in the negotiations on the outcome document which was opposed by the United States of America and Canada. As a result of those efforts, Brazil decided to remove the names of participating States from all the meeting rooms, and thus Palestine participated as a State in the last round of negotiations on the Conference outcome document, and as an observer in the Conference pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/197 of 22 December 2011 (annex II of the resolution, para. 4).

B. ESCWA PARTICIPATION

11. ESCWA played a central role in many events organized during the Conference, through programmes and activities aimed at strengthening cooperation between member countries. ESCWA acted as the unofficial secretariat of the Arab delegations, providing them with information, schedule of side Arab activities, and updates on several other events.

12. ESCWA also organized a number of side events, in cooperation with its regional and international partners, including the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Programme and other United Nations departments, agencies and regional committees, the German Agency for International Cooperation, the Arab Forum for Environment and Development and the Arab Network for Environment and Development. The table below presents highlights on the following events organized on the side of the Conference:

- (a) Food Security and Safety for Development in a Changing Arab World;
- (b) Advancing Sustainable Development in Post-Conflict Countries;
- (c) Green Growth and Sustainable Development: Regional Perspectives;
- (d) United Nations System: Together for the Future We Want.

Activity/date	Organizers	Participants	Main subjects	Main results and recommendations
Food Security and Safety for Development in a Changing Arab World (19 June 2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ESCWA - League of Arab States - German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) - United Nations Environment Programme - Arab Forum for Environment and Development - Arab Network for Environment and Development 	55 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food security challenges in the Arab region and ways to address them; - Relevant issues such as poverty and malnutrition and their impact on women and children, especially in remote rural areas; - Screening of a short documentary "Food Security in a Changing Arab World: A Youth Perspective". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasizing support to farmers; - Adopting agricultural development strategies that emphasize the development of agricultural markets and trade; - Developing and strengthening regional cooperation; - Ensuring civil society participation; - Providing safety networks for the poor; - Establishing a permanent forum for food security and safety in the Arab countries to support their efforts in that regard.
Advancing Sustainable Development in Post-Conflict Countries (20 June 2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs - ESCWA - United Nations Development Programme - Government of Lebanon - Government of Liberia 	50 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenges facing conflict-affected countries and those in transition to democracy, in particular with regard to integrating sustainable development basic principles in national plans; - Presenting national plans developed in Lebanon and Liberia through a partnership between the Government, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, with support from the United Nations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stressing the link between sustainable development and peacebuilding and the need of post-conflict countries to build confidence between citizens and the State with a view to negotiating a new social contract and formulating a common national vision; - Strengthening societal participation in developing more effective and inclusive sustainable development strategies.

Activity/date	Organizers	Participants	Main subjects	Main results and recommendations
Green Growth and Sustainable Development: Regional Perspectives 21 June 2012) (coordinated by the Regional Commissions New York Office)	The five United Nations regional commissions: ESCWA, Economic Commission for Africa, Economic Commission for Europe, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	100 participants, including such high-level speakers as heads of State or Government of Lebanon, Costa Rica, Indonesia and Moldova. It was moderated by ESCWA Executive-Secretary	- Challenges of effective integration of the three pillars of sustainable development from a regional perspective; - The possible role of green economy in addressing major challenges in the Arab region: youth employment and poverty eradication.	Calling for action, while ensuring that any transition to a green economy would contribute to achieving sustained economic growth, social integration and decent employment for all, giving priority to the youth.
United Nations System: Together for the Future We Want (22 June 2012)	Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB)	Presided by the Secretary-General, and attended by heads of United Nations organizations; ESCWA was represented by the Executive-Secretary	The role of the United Nations in supporting States and peoples to achieve sustainable development; review of efforts made by United Nations organizations to stress the importance of the three pillars of sustainable development.	ESCWA made suggestions regarding the youth movements calling for change in the Arab region, indicating a societal transition to democracy and the importance of empowering Arab youth.

II. RIO+20 OUTCOME DOCUMENT: THE FUTURE WE WANT

13. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development was held pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 64/236 of 24 December 2009 and 66/197 of 22 December 2011. Its objective was to renew political commitment in sustainable development, assess progress made in achieving it, identify obstacles hindering the implementation of outcomes of major summits on sustainable development and discuss the appropriate ways to address new and emerging challenges. The main themes of the Conference were: the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and institutional framework for sustainable development. The Rio+20 outcome document entitled *The Future We Want* defined a framework for action and follow-up and means of implementation including access to financing, technology and capacity-building. The document also stressed the need to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) based on Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and consistent with international law, ensuring that SDGs do not divert focus or effort from the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

A. LAST ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS ON THE OUTCOME DOCUMENT

14. Negotiations on the Zero Draft which took place in the United Nations headquarters in New York, lasted several months. However they did not progress as expected due to States conflicting interests and scarce financial resources available to support sustainable development in a global crises setting.

15. ESCWA was present with member countries in the negotiation process, particularly during the last round that took place in Rio de Janeiro, providing direct technical support to the Arab delegations. The effective participation of Arab countries and the continuous follow-up to the negotiations by some of them

had a positive impact, especially concerning the development of the harmonized Arab position as set out in the Arab Ministerial Declaration on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (annex) and adherence to it.

16. The international negotiations on the Zero Draft did not produce agreement until high-level political representatives of States and groups of States met prior to the Conference in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro and agreed on a version of the outcome document presented by the host country (which is a main number of G77+China that includes the Arab countries).

17. Despite wide criticism by civil society organizations to the Conference outcome as set out in *The Future We Want*, the Conference was a success of international multilateralism as it gathered a significant number of sustainable development stakeholders from all parts of the world. The civil society organizations found fault with the Conference in not formulating new bounding goals or initiatives, in particular specific sustainable development goals and financing means. However, Rio+20 was credited with bringing sustainable development issues back to global debates and concerns, amidst regional and global intense tensions. The agreement on a few steps to launch the process of identifying global goals for future sustainable development should be seen as success. It should be noted that the announced objectives of the Conference did not include launching bounding initiatives but rather reviewing the outcomes of major summits on sustainable development.

B. ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO THE ARAB REGION IN THE OUTCOME DOCUMENT

18. In the Rio+20 outcome document *The Future We Want*, the world heads of State and Government renewed their commitment to sustainable development and reaffirmed the principles of this and other previous global conferences. They promised a sustainable environmental social and economic development for present and future generations and for the earth. The English version of the outcome document is 53 pages and the Arabic version is 70 pages. Its major titles and items are highlighted in box 1. Following are the main items of importance to the Arab region.

Renewing political commitment

19. Renewing political commitment was a major outcome of Rio+20. Despite pressure from some countries to not include this item again in the document, all the world Governments eventually renewed their commitment to all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, mainly the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. This item stressed the responsibility of developed countries for assisting developing countries, including Arab countries, in achieving sustainable development. This political commitment was expressed in several other items of the document, which reflects its importance.

20. In that context and with regard to the right of people under occupation, as is the case of Palestine, to self-determination, the outcome document reiterated commitment to “take effective measures and actions, in conformity with international law, to remove the obstacles to the full realization of the right of self-determination of peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation, which continue to adversely affect their economic and social development as well as their environment, are incompatible with dignity and worth of the human person and must be combated and eliminated” (para. 27).

Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication

21. The concept of green economy stimulated several debates at the Arab and global levels during the negotiation process. The outcome document explained it in 19 paragraphs. Green economy policies were considered as one of the important tools available for achieving sustainable development and eradicating poverty. It will be important to take into account the opportunities and challenges, as well as the costs and benefits, of green economy policies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. Green economy should contribute to achieving sustained economic growth, enhancing social inclusion and

creating opportunities for employment and decent work for all, in particular poor women and youth. Green economy policies should respect each country's national sovereignty over their natural resources. The document emphasized the importance of technology transfer to developing countries and providing those who choose to implement green economy policies with technical and technological assistance and called for effectively avoiding unwarranted conditionalities on official development assistance and finance.

22. All stakeholders, including the United Nations regional commissions and other agencies and bodies were called upon to support developing countries, upon their request, to achieve sustainable development including by adopting green economy policies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

Institutional framework for sustainable development

23. The outcome document underscored the importance of a strengthened institutional framework for sustainable development at the national and regional levels which integrates the three economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced manner, responds to current and future challenges and bridges gaps in the implementation of the sustainable development agenda. The States of the world committed to the following:

(a) Strengthening the role of the United Nations Environment Programme in setting the global environmental agenda, promoting the implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development, securing the adequate financial resources needed and establishing universal membership in the Governing Council of the Programme;

(b) Strengthening the Economic and Social Council and recognizing its key role in achieving a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development;

(c) Establishing a high-level political forum which shall follow up on the implementation of sustainable development and subsequently replace the Commission on Sustainable Development. Its structure should be determined through an intergovernmental and open, transparent and inclusive negotiation process.

Framework for action and follow-up

24. This item of the outcome document consists of two parts: thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues; and sustainable development goals.

(a) *Thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues*: they include 26 areas, of which the following are of importance to the Arab region:

(i) *Food security*: reaffirming commitments regarding the right of everyone to have access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food, emphasizing the need to revitalize the agricultural and rural development sectors, resolving to increase sustainable agricultural production and productivity globally, addressing the root causes of excessive food price volatility, increasing opportunities for agricultural producers to have access to appropriate and affordable technologies, including for efficient irrigation, reuse of treated wastewater and water harvesting and storage, and significantly reducing post-harvest and other food losses and waste throughout the food supply chain;

(ii) *Water and sanitation*: recognizing that water is at the core of sustainable development, committing to the progressive realization of access to safe and affordable drinking water and basic sanitation for all, significantly improving the implementation of integrated water resource management at all levels, underlining the need to adopt measures to address the impact of floods, droughts and water scarcity, reducing water pollution and increasing water quality, improving wastewater treatment and water efficiency and reducing water losses;

- (iii) *Energy*: emphasizing the need to address the challenge of access to sustainable modern energy services for all, using an appropriate energy mix to meet developmental needs of each country, achieving greater reliance on advanced energy technologies, including cleaner fossil fuel technologies, recognizing the need for energy efficiency measures in urban planning, buildings and transportation and in the production of goods and services, promoting incentives in favour of, and removing disincentives to, energy efficiency and the diversification of the energy mix;
- (iv) *Sustainable consumption and production*: reaffirming the commitments to phase out harmful and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption and undermine sustainable development, and inviting all other countries to consider rationalizing inefficient fossil fuel subsidies by removing market distortions;
- (v) *Sustainable tourism, transport and cities*: enhancing support for sustainable tourism activities and relevant capacity-building in developing countries, ensuring road safety, developing sustainable energy efficient transport systems, notably public mass transportation systems, improving transportation systems in rural areas, promoting an integrated approach to planning and building sustainable cities especially through affordable and sustainable transport and energy, and providing safe and clean drinking water and sanitation;
- (vi) *Regional efforts*: taking coordinated regional actions to promote sustainable development; the regional dimension and the role of United Nations regional commissions and regional efforts for promoting sustainable development were emphasized throughout the document, particularly in paragraphs 68, 100, 185 and 251;
- (vii) *Climate change*: reaffirming that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time, expressing profound alarm that emissions of greenhouse gases continue to rise globally, recognizing that developing countries are more vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change and are already experiencing increased impacts, emphasizing the urgent need to launch the Green Climate Fund and call for its prompt operationalization so as to have an early and adequate replenishment process, urging parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and parties to the Kyoto Protocol thereto to fully implement their commitments, as well as decisions adopted under those agreements.

(b) *Sustainable development goals*: the outcome document suggested developing a proposal to identify global sustainable development goals in the coming two years, by forming an open working group comprising thirty representatives who shall prepare the proposal and submit it to the General Assembly at its sixty-eight session in 2013 for consideration. The outcome document did not identify the areas of the sustainable development goals, however it underscored that they should be action oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries; they should be based on the outcomes of previous global summits and coherent with and integrated into the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015. The document recognized the role of the United Nations regional commissions in providing support to the countries in that regard.

Means of implementation

25. The outcome document reiterated that each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development and that developing countries need additional resources for sustainable development. The means of implementation include:

- (a) *Finance*: urging those developed countries that have not yet done so to make efforts towards the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance to developing countries, including the specific target of 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance to the least developed countries, in accordance with their commitments; forming an

intergovernmental committee within the General Assembly comprising thirty experts representing regional groups, to develop an effective sustainable development financing strategy concluding its work by 2014;

(b) *Technology and capacity-building*: emphasizing the importance of technology transfer to developing countries and increasing access of those countries to environmentally sound technologies, developing a facilitation mechanism that promotes the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies, and submit the proposed mechanism to the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session in 2012, strengthening technical and scientific cooperation among all countries, and promoting public-private partnerships for the development of resource-efficient economies.

Box 1. The Future We Want

Main issues and relevant sub-items of the outcome document

I. Our common vision

II. Renewing political commitment

A. Reaffirming the Rio Principles and past action plans

B. Advancing integration implementation and coherence: assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development and addressing new and emerging challenges

C. Engaging major groups and other stakeholders

III. Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication

IV. Institutional framework for sustainable development

A. Strengthening the three dimensions of sustainable development

B. Strengthening intergovernmental arrangements for sustainable development

- General Assembly
- Economic and Social Council
- High-level political forum

C. Environmental pillar in the context of sustainable development

D. International financial institutions and United Nations operational activities

E. Regional, national, subnational and local levels

V. Framework for action and follow-up

A. Thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues

- Poverty eradication
- Food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture
- Water and sanitation
- Energy
- Sustainable tourism
- Sustainable transport
- Sustainable cities and human settlements
- Health and population
- Promoting full and productive employment, decent work for all and social protection
- Oceans and seas

Box 1 (continued)

Small island developing States
 Least developed countries
 Landlocked developing countries
 Africa
 Regional efforts
 Disaster risk reduction
 Climate change
 Forests
 Biodiversity
 Desertification, land degradation and drought
 Mountains
 Chemicals and waste
 Sustainable consumption and production
 Mining
 Education
 Gender equality and women's empowerment

B. Sustainable development goals**VI. Means of implementation****A. Finance****B. Technology****C. Capacity-building****D. Trade****E. Registry of commitments**

III. ACTION TAKEN BY ESCWA TO INITIATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RIO+20 OUTCOMES

26. Subsequent to Rio+20, ESCWA undertook a number of actions to initiate the implementation of the outcomes of the Conference. It set out a plan to start a consultative process with regional and national partners with a view to drawing a road map for post-Rio+20. Following are the activities organized or planned for implementation in cooperation with regional partners in response to the Conference outcomes:

(a) ESCWA organized an intergovernmental consultative meeting for its Committee on Energy and Committee on Water Resources on the Water and Energy Nexus in the ESCWA Region, which was held at the United Nations House in Beirut, on 27 and 28 June 2012. Participants included representatives of intergovernmental committees concerned with water and energy from ESCWA member countries. The objective of the meeting was to brainstorm on issues related to water and energy interlinkages, identify priorities to be considered by Governments and discuss possible institutional mechanisms for the coordination of water and energy policies;

(b) In cooperation with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ESCWA held a regional workshop on Lessons and Challenges for the Implementation of International Sustainable Development guidelines in conflict-afflicted countries, in Beirut, on 11 and 12 July 2012;

(c) In the context of initiating regional coordination on the follow-up to Rio+20, ESCWA made a presentation on the Rio+20 outcomes before the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region, at its meeting in Cairo, from 30 September to 3 October 2012;

(d) A debate on the anticipated sustainable development goals (SDGs) will engage a high-level group of participants in the meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism that will be convened by ESCWA in Beirut, in December 2012;

(e) ESCWA will participate in the meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment which will be held in Baghdad, on 24 December 2012, to discuss post-Rio+20 issues with the Arab countries;

(f) ESCWA is conducting a regional study on the green economy which will survey and evaluate policies for the development of green production sectors to identify the needs and opportunities for developing them through leading programmes. The findings of the study will be presented at a regional workshop in the beginning of 2013;

(g) Another study is also underway on monitoring the transition to a green economy in the Arab countries from the perspective of small and medium-sized enterprises;

(h) ESCWA is providing support to member countries through the establishment of green help desks at the regional and local levels, including in Egypt, Oman and Lebanon;

(i) ESCWA is planning to convene the Regional Implementation Meeting (RIM) for a wide group of stakeholders including Governments in the countries of the region in April 2013, to discuss the post-Rio+20 prospects, develop relevant plans and prepare for the twentieth session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD 20) to be held in New York in May 2013;

(j) ESCWA will participate in the eleventh Sectoral Cooperation Meeting between the United Nations and the League of Arab States on the follow-up to the outcomes of Rio+20 to be held in 2013.

IV. PROPOSALS FOR THE EFFECTIVE FOLLOW-UP TO THE RIO+20 OUTCOMES IN THE ARAB REGION

27. The Rio+20 Conference succeeded in revitalizing the global momentum for achieving sustainable development. In that spirit, the region should not consider the Conference as the end of the regional consultative process on sustainable development, but rather the beginning of a new phase in which regional cooperation between the countries of the Arab region and ESCWA gains new momentum for achieving the future we all want. In that context, efforts should draw on successful experiences and look for effective means to strengthen regional cooperation, particularly in translating the global plan for sustainable development into a well defined regional road map that fulfills the needs and priorities of the Arab region and that is based on updated regional initiatives such as the Arab Initiative for Sustainable Development.

28. Achieving sustainable development in the Arab region requires an active Arab participation in the negotiations leading to the identification of sustainable development goals (SDGs), and the development of national and regional institutional frameworks for sustainable development capable of designing development strategies and policies that ensure the State's commitment to efficiency and equitability in the management of natural resources.

29. In that regard, ESCWA is committed to continuing the provision of support services to member countries in their efforts to translate the Rio+20 outcomes into sustained and applicable sustainable policies and programmes, through coordination and cooperation with the League of Arab States and its specialized committees, the Arab Governments and the United Nations organizations, and to reinvigorate national and regional institutions concerned with sustainable development, in particular within the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE).

30. ESCWA presents the following post-Rio+20 proposals to member countries for an effective follow-up to its outcomes:

(a) Convening a regional consultative meeting for member countries in the next few months to discuss the updating of the Arab Initiative for Sustainable Development. This issue was raised in the meeting called for by the Arab group during Rio+20. It should be noted that any updating of the initiative should comprise a clear time schedule and framework of responsibilities as well as the financing requirements. It should also identify the means of implementation including relevant institutional frameworks, technical and technological requirements and capacity-building;

(b) Reconsidering the national and regional institutional frameworks for sustainable development, in order to include in their functions the translation of Rio+20 outcomes into effective programmes. This could be done by establishing national committees for sustainable development in charge of designing strategies and policies taking into account the three social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, to ensure an economic growth that guarantees social protection and decent employment for youth while preserving the environment and natural resources; and for that purpose, promoting regional integration and cooperation between countries in designing policies and implementing sustainable development programmes, through a regional institutional framework for sustainable development in coordination with the proposed national committees for sustainable development.

(c) Dealing with the transition to green economy in the framework of the Arab Ministerial Declaration on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) which stressed the importance for any such transition to take off from national and regional priorities, with green economy strategies and policies capable of addressing existing challenges in the countries of the region, including poverty eradication and employment creation, particularly for the youth and poor in rural areas. It is important to develop mechanisms for monitoring the transition to green economy to enable countries to pursue their development programmes and keep abreast of successful experience models in the region and the world. ESCWA is presently developing preliminary monitoring indicators and conducting a regional survey to identify the existing institutions and policies that can support the transition;

(d) Ensuring active participation of member countries in the negotiations on developing SDGs and contributing to the identification of the goals relevant areas during the next two years, in order to ensure their consistency with the needs and priorities of the region. Benefit should be drawn from the experience of the countries of the region in implementing programmes and policies relating to the Millennium Development Goals. The Arab sustainable development indicators package should be prepared using the indices that have been developed for this purpose, with a view to integrating them in national development plans in the Arab countries;

(e) Addressing the challenges of the energy, water, food and environment sectors, including climate change issues, by taking into account the strong linkage between those issues and formulating a comprehensive and coherent vision including coordinated and integrated policies that enable efficient and effective performance (boxes 2 and 3 show the nexus between the various issues and the importance of a comprehensive and coherent way to deal with them). Consideration should be given to the call in the outcome document for reaffirming the commitments to phase out harmful and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption, and therefore consider activating the social protection schemes in the Arab countries to ensure that the poor are not affected by the removal of energy subsidies;

(f) Continuing the active Arab participation in the international initiatives on sustainable development, most importantly the eighteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 18) to be held in Doha, from 26 November to 7 December 2012. The wide and active participation of Arab countries in the COP 18 shall contribute to bringing the priorities of the Arab region into the global agenda.

Box 2. Food security and water security nexus

The Arab region suffers from water scarcity, as renewable water per capita does not exceed 600 cubic meters per year, and the agricultural sector consumption reaches 70 per cent of the water stock, even touching 90 per cent in some countries. Most of the countries also face food security challenges, the most serious of them being urban expansion, climate change, dwindling cultivable land and a great reliance on food imports whereas more than 50 per cent of food products are imported, while the region is experiencing rapid population growth accompanied with increasing demand for water and food.

The water-food nexus is thus clear in a region characterized by water scarcity and low food production. Therefore, food security depends on water security. Achieving water and food security requires effective policies for the management of water, land and agricultural production. Otherwise the scarcity will become a source of tension threatening stability and social security in the region.

Accordingly, it is necessary to analyse the existing challenges in the areas of water and food security in the region with a view to addressing them and finding innovative solutions that increase the efficiency of agricultural production, with emphasis on crops that consume less water and promote good practice in the use and management of water resources, including non-traditional water sources.

Box 3. Water-energy nexus

The Arab region, in which many countries are rich in fossil fuel and renewable energy resources, faces climate change challenges that threaten energy security. Those challenges are further aggravated by water scarcity in addition to issues relating to people's access to energy and water. This water-energy nexus requires that water and energy issues not be addressed separately when formulating water, energy and environment strategies.

Annex

**The Arab Ministerial Declaration on the United Nations Conference
on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)
(League of Arab States, Cairo, 19 April 2012)**

We, the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment,

Recognizing the need to update the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region at the national and regional levels, as a tool to improve the life of Arab citizens and their standard of living, to enhance work and training opportunities for Arab youth, who constitute the pillar and future of the Arab world, and to develop national and regional institutional frameworks that enhance regional cooperation to achieve sustainable development,

Recognizing the interest of our peoples and States, the importance of innovation, education and the reinforcement of knowledge management as pillars for building the future, the need to improve the management of our institutions and the integration of our efforts, and to adopt multilateral partnerships leading to sustainable development under a global economic system accessible to all and based on justice and equality,

Recalling the Millennium Development Goals (2000), the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region (2004), the Arab Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change (2007), the Kuwait Declaration on Elevating the Standard of Living of Arab Citizens (2009), and the Eye on Earth Summit Declaration on the exchange of environmental information (2011),

Recalling the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development adopted at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Agenda 21 for the Conservation and Management of Resources for Development, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Kyoto Protocol and the commitments they include, Marrakech Agreement 2001, International Conference on Financing for Development (Monterrey Consensus) 2001, outcomes of the International Summit for Sustainable Development 2002, and Doha Declaration on Financing for Development 2004,

Referring to all the regional preparatory meetings, including the outcomes of the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) (League of Arab State Headquarters, 16-17 October 2011),

Affirming the importance of drafting a practical future vision to achieve sustainable development in the Arab region that is implementable and subject to monitoring, follow up and evaluation, and is based on specific indicators for the coming twenty years (2012-2032),

Stressing the need to re-establish balance between the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) in order to eradicate poverty and hunger, reduce diseases, promote education, training and health care, raise awareness, cultivate the culture of professional safety, increase investments to create more job opportunities for youth and enhance social integration to include all societal groups, empower Arab women to undertake an effective role in all aspects of political, economic and social life to build the Arab society, and facilitate the participation of all Arab citizens in decision-making processes,

Noting that the impacts of natural disasters require integrated efforts to reduce the risks and respond to emergencies to avoid human, economic, social and environmental losses, which requires Arab and international cooperation to achieve sustainable development,

Underlining that the Rio+20 Conference is centred on sustainable development in terms of the economic, social and environmental pillars, and that a specific and clear definition of a green economy has not been established, which limits its relevance in achieving sustainable development;

Reaffirming the importance of strengthening partnerships between developed and developing countries based on better cohesion and harmony between monetary, financial and commercial systems, increasing international cooperation to alleviate foreign debt burdens on developing countries, and enhancing regional developmental and complementary frameworks including the Greater Arab Free Trade Area,

Warning of the implications of the establishment of a unified global development model, in light of the different development levels including among the Arab States, as this will affect economic growth, social development and the preservation of environment, and consequently the achievement of sustainable development,

Aware of the need to enhance the institutional framework for environment and sustainable development at the national, regional and international levels and establish a mechanism for evaluating, monitoring, following up and implementing what has been agreed upon in previous international conferences and what will be agreed upon in the future,

Taking into account the significant progress achieved by Arab countries in sustainable development areas in particular the Millennium Development Goals, especially those related to education, health and the environment,

Noting the current persisting challenges, in particular to eradicate poverty, create jobs, achieve the ambitions of youth, the right to development, social cohesion, the rights of women, the right to obtain information, to liberalize trade to guarantee a fair share for developing countries, to transfer and localize technology, finance mechanisms, and build capacity in the different fields of sustainable development,

Reaffirming the principles of justice, equity, participation, transparency, accountability and the involvement of all,

We declare our determination to strive to achieve the following:

- (1) Reaffirm our political commitment to achieve sustainable development in the Arab region and make all necessary efforts based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities;
- (2) Reaffirm the importance of the Rio principles in achieving sustainable development, refuse any attempt to compromise or renegotiate these principles, and insist that any future agreements on sustainable development be based on those principles;
- (3) Continue to implement sustainable development strategies, plans and programmes at the national and regional levels in particular the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region, to build on the progress made in its implementation, face current challenges, fill the gaps and update the Initiative when needed, in the light of emerging and new challenges that the Arab region may face, including climate change and its risks, the global financial crisis and its impacts and the repercussions of political developments in the Arab region;
- (4) Emphasize the need to evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of major global conferences on sustainable development notably the Rio Conference (1992) and Johannesburg Conference (2002), to identify the challenges and the implementation gaps and set plans and

programmes to face emerging and new challenges, provide necessary financing, transfer technologies and build the needed capacities for implementation at the national, regional and international levels;

- (5) Request developed countries to fulfill their commitments and obligations included in the outcomes of United Nations summits and conferences, including Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, Monterrey Consensus, and the ensuing rights of developing countries. We stress that one of the main factors hindering the achievement of sustainable development in developing countries since the Rio Conference of 1992 is the failure of developed countries to meet the commitments included in the decisions of previous summits and conferences, and we reaffirm that no additional commitments or burdens should be borne by developing countries;
- (6) Reaffirm the need to implement the United Nations General Assembly resolution issued in 1970 calling for the allocation of 0.7 per cent of the national income of developed countries to official development assistance;
- (7) Reaffirm the need for developed countries to fulfill the commitment to support developing countries to achieve sustainable development by providing adequate funds to support the transfer and localization of appropriate technology and enable developing countries to develop their own technologies and build capacities in line with their national priorities;
- (8) Request that the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference, if sustainable development goals are set, to adopt similar implementation mechanisms and standards to those adopted for the Millennium Development Goals, and to define timeframes for implementation ensuring adherence to the Rio principles, notably the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities;
- (9) Focus on a comprehensive and integrated vision of sustainable development along its three dimensions and enhance the existing international institutional framework to fill existing gaps and achieve balance, and encourage the establishment of national councils for sustainable development with a clear mandate and structure to enhance their capacity to implement sustainable development strategies, plans and programmes and support the efforts of the League of Arab States to develop an effective regional mechanism aimed to achieve sustainable development in the region;
- (10) Reaffirm our belief that any update to the institutional framework for sustainable development should address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and should not entail additional burdens or impose obstacles or technical and trade barriers on developing countries;
- (11) Reaffirm the importance of establishing an effective partnership with the private sector, civil society organizations, community-based institutions, youth, women, people with disabilities, elderly and children in order to achieve sustainable development;
- (12) Urge the international community to work on achieving equality and justice in development between developing and developed countries, achieve equity between generations and establish appropriate monitoring mechanisms at the national and international levels;
- (13) Reaffirm also that green economy, as an international concept, should be defined and developed at the national level in line with national sustainable development objectives and priorities, and should be considered a tool to achieve sustainable development rather than an alternative concept, and the need to evaluate the opportunities and challenges linked to this concept and the means required for its implementation, in particular in terms of providing necessary funding and support to developing countries;
- (14) Respect the sovereignty of States and peoples over their natural resources and reaffirm the need to avoid additional barriers or commitments that could hamper exports or productive activities to achieve sustainable development, and stress the importance of removing trade barriers in developed countries to facilitate the flow of goods and services in developing countries according to the Doha Round of trade negotiations;

- (15) Avoid the use of the concept of green economy as a unified model applicable to all, as a pretext to create trade barriers and environmental standards that are difficult to implement, as a basis or precondition for States to obtain financial support and aid, as a means to restrict the right of developing countries to utilize their natural resources according to their developmental priorities or as a tool to exempt developed countries from honouring their commitments towards developing countries;
- (16) Reaffirm the principle of gradual transition to a green economy as defined and developed at the national level in line with national sustainable development objectives and priorities, according to the socioeconomic specificities of each country, and adopt the appropriate policies in this regard;
- (17) Support the efforts aimed at achieving peace and security in the Arab region, including efforts to end occupation, renounce threat of aggression and interference in internal affairs of States guided by legitimate international decisions on a fair basis to enhance sustainable development, protect the environment and natural resources of people under occupation and aggression according to principle 23 of the Rio Declaration, and rebuild the socioeconomic infrastructure destroyed by occupation;
- (18) Reaffirm the necessity of enhancing and strengthening Arab regional integration to achieve sustainable development;
- (19) Support and establish sustainable development data and information networks to support the process of decision-making, and the establishment of a regional information system to support Arab initiatives in this field and promulgate their use in decision-making;
- (20) Focus on the social dimension to achieve social justice, create new job opportunities in different public and private sectors to counteract the so-called “brain drain”, particularly impacting youth in view of the social and political transformations in the region, which constitute an opportunity to reconsider development priorities;
- (21) Reaffirm the historical responsibility of developed countries as to climate change and the need for them to fulfil their commitments towards developing countries to adapt to climate change and the adverse effects stemming from the adaptation measures and the implications on the social and economic sectors, in addition to food security, water security, increasing drought and desertification, biodiversity and land degradation, natural disasters and extreme events (sand storms, heat waves and floods), diseases, epidemics and so on;
- (22) Express deep concern for the implications of the global economic and financial crisis on developing countries and the impasse in the ongoing negotiations of the Doha Round and call for the agreement on a fair international trade system to assist developing countries in obtaining sufficient resources to finance their efforts to achieve sustainable development and reach a solution for the problem of foreign debts including for countries emerging from conflicts;
- (23) Reaffirm the right of Arab countries to diversify energy sources including new and renewable energy and nuclear energy for peaceful uses to achieve sustainable development in the Arab region and commend the achievements that have been made so far;
- (24) Reaffirm the importance of providing more basic services and infrastructure such as water, sanitation, health and education in view of the recent rise in population and unprecedented rate of urbanization, which requires additional efforts and financial resources to achieve development goals, taking the fair distribution of resources and services into account;
- (25) Emphasize the need to include sustainable development concepts in scholastic curricula and extracurricular activities to raise the awareness of the rising generation of the importance of the preservation and sustainable use of natural resources;
- (26) Stress the importance of protecting public health and improving it within the process of sustainable development.
