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FOLLOW-UP ACTION AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL ON UNITED NATIONS  
WORLD CONFERENCES AND ECWA REGIONAL MEETINGS

Expert Group Meeting on Management, Conservation and Development  
of Agricultural Resources in the ECWA Region

(Damascus, 9-15 May 1981)

Note by the Executive Secretary

1. In pursuance of the implementation of its 1980-1981 work programme in the area of food and agriculture and in follow-up to resolution 71(VI) "Combating Desertification in the ECWA Region", the secretariat convened an Expert Meeting on Management, Conservation and Development of Agricultural Resources in the ECWA Region in Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, from 9 to 15 May 1981. The meeting, co-sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Arab Centre for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), was hosted by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform. It was attended by experts from Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and the Yemen Arab Republic and representatives of FAO, UNESCO, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), ACSAD, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). In addition, the meeting was attended by a number of international experts serving as consultants to the secretariat.
2. The expert meeting was convened by the secretariat to clarify the processes and causes of desertification in the region, to examine the most effective responses in terms of research, training, legislation and project identification and define, in association with other agencies, ECWA's scope for practical assistance to the region. The expert meeting was expected to formulate and adopt a set of action-oriented recommendations for consideration by the secretariat. These were to provide clear guidelines on the future course of action at various levels, the areas of priority and ECWA's increased involvement in issues of combating desertification and agricultural resource management and development.
3. The documentation for the meeting included a number of reports on general issues and problems mainly prepared by the ECWA secretariat; six country papers on the management, conservation and development of agricultural resources in Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates; three reports on methodologies for five case studies of resource conservation and management programmes being implemented by various international and regional organizations, eight reports related to techniques for the conservation and management of resources in arid and semi-arid areas; and seven reports on the socio-economic dimension of resources conservation and desertification.

4. The discussions on the various topics before the meeting resulted in a set of recommendations to the secretariat, governments and other international organizations on agricultural resource surveys and zonation; resource use policies; legislation; institution strengthening; education, research and training, communication, documentation and information support and international and regional co-operation.

Follow-up to the meeting by the secretariat

5. For the purpose of instituting an effective follow-up to the many recommendations of the expert meeting, the secretariat has delineated a set of twelve actions constituting a framework for the assessment and formulation of an integrated national and regional programme(s) of agricultural resource management against desertification. These twelve actions relate to:

- (a) Survey and assessment of the agricultural resource situation and delineation of agro-ecological zones;
- (b) Identification problems;
- (c) Stock-taking of existing programmes and projects;
- (d) Assessment of existing institutions, whether these are adequate to deal with the problems;
- (e) Formulation or adjustment of policies;
- (f) Formulation or adjustment of supporting legislation;
- (g) Setting-up and/or strengthening of institutional arrangements;
- (h) Setting-up and/or strengthening of supporting educational, research and training programmes;
- (i) Formulation or adjustment of plans, programmes and projects, eliminating any overlap/duplication;
- (j) Formulation of implementation strategies including local participation and strengthening of administrative procedures;
- (k) Setting-up of monitoring, evaluation and feedback systems;
- (l) Strengthening of regional and international co-operation including communication and development support.

6. In pursuing its work in the area of agricultural resource conservation and management including antidesertification activities during the biennium 1982-1983, the secretariat will incorporate in its activities action pertaining to those recommendations within its purview. The expert meeting recommended, inter alia, that the secretariat promote the exchange of information and documentation between the countries of the Region through the establishment of a regional desertification, communication and development support centre. Pursuing the consideration of this recommendation, the secretariat is undertaking as a first step, an assessment of the concrete needs of the ECWA countries in the area of agricultural resource conservation and desertification control based on an inventory of national activities. In follow-up to some of the other ECWA related recommendations of the expert meeting, the secretariat is initiating a number of activities during 1982-1983 such as preparation of technical reports on (i) risk management in arid zone agriculture, (ii) range management strategies for the ECWA region and (iii) economic analysis of conservation and desertification control; holding of regional workshops on (i) multiple resource use management systems and (ii) land-use planning; and an expert-group meeting on desert afforestation.

7. The secretariat further pursued the recommendations of the meeting through the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Desertification and participated in its fifth session for the purpose of co-ordinating and streamlining its activities with those of other United Nations organizations.

8. In view of the financial implications of many of the recommendations and the limited resources available under the regular budget, the secretariat is endeavouring to mobilise extrabudgetary resources to strengthen its programme in this field.

9. The secretariat has taken the necessary steps towards the publication of the report of the meeting which includes a summary of both the papers and discussions. In addition, a selection of the documents presented at the expert meeting will be published in the form of a book.