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**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION
FOR WESTERN ASIA**

**Consultations on the Restructuring
of ESCWA Programmes**

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IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
FOR WESTERN ASIA

NOTES BY THE EXPERTS

ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES FOR ESCWA

Essam El Hinnawi

National Research Center
Cairo, Egypt

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Introduction

Over the last two decades, the aims of development have been redefined, to make quality of life, rather than a limitless pursuit of material possessions, the main criterion of success. It became clear that economic and social factors were often the root cause of environmental degradation, and that developing countries must develop their own self-reliant approach to development, rather than following in the footsteps of the industrialized countries. It became also clear that this generation must look ahead and not so pre-empt the planet's limited resources or pollute its life support systems that it jeopardized the wellbeing - even existence - of future generations.

All these and other principles have been highlighted in different reports adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, in particular in the **Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development ("Our Common Future")**, published in 1987; in the **Report on Environmental Perspectives to the Year 2000 and Beyond**, published in 1987; and in the **Earth Summit Declaration (Rio Declaration and AGENDA-21)**, adopted in 1992. These facts are also reflected in the **Arab Declaration and Programme of Sustainable Developed** adopted in 1991.

Now, there is general agreement that approached to development should stress paths to "sustainable development", although its definition and parameters may differ from one region to another and from country to country. Sustainable development is not a ready made policy menu. It is a demanding series of concrete, costed and draconian reforms which confront failed economic policies and instigate new structural adjustment programmes. These reforms work to alleviate poverty, meet basic human needs and put to rest economic conditions that promote environmental destruction.

The Role of ESCWA

As a regional organization, ESCWA has limited resources. Its role is, therefore, mainly catalytic and co-ordinating. The fact that ESCWA is located in a heterogenous region (countries with wide socio-economic levels) that has remained unstable for many years has complicated its role and affected its programming activities. This situation has also affected the inflow of resources from other United Nations bodies and from potential sources of funding. Now, that peace and more stability are in the making, new venues are in the open for ESCWA.

It is, therefore, important to redefine the role of ESCWA to meet present and future challenges. In my view, the following should be the role of ESCWA:

- (1) To monitor, assess, and report regularly on the state of human development, natural resources and environment in the region.
- (2) To keep under review various emerging issues, to alert governments in the region to take necessary preventive actions (Prevention is better than cure).

(3) To make available guidance for the management of natural resources, and guidelines for sustainable development and environmental protection.

(4) To promote public awareness, through education and mass media, of regional socio-economic and environmental problems.

In discharging its responsibilities, ESCWA should establish well-defined links with other regional bodies, through joint-programming or effective co-ordination mechanisms.

Priorities to be Addressed

In the light of the socio-economic conditions, and the state of natural resources and environment in the ESCWA region, the links between the different areas that determine the overall quality of life can be represented by the following triangle.

NATURAL RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT

QUALITY OF LIFE

Social Development

Economic Development

The following are priority areas to be addressed under each of these three clusters:

1. Natural Resources and Environment

- Land use
- Water Resources & Water use
- Energy
- Environment

2. Social Development

- Population
- Labour (including migration)
- Human settlements
- Human Health

3. Economic Development

- Agriculture and Food production
- Industrial development
- Tourism
- Trade

Across-the-board areas

The following areas cut across all the main three clusters mentioned above:

- Science & Technology
- Statistics & Information
- Public Awareness
- Education & training
- Legislations and regulations.

The specific subjects to be addressed under each of these priority areas should be established, in a review process, every two years, because subject areas are always dynamic and evolving according to the changing global and regional situations.

