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**Economic and Social Commission
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**REPORT TO THE COMMISSION ON SUPPORT TO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
PROJECTS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ARAB WOMEN**

Introduction

1. Under the ESCWA Social Development Issues and Policies Division, the Women and Development Unit operates a programme specifically directed to the advancement of Arab women through empowerment, employment, and awareness. The programme is designed to provide a gender perspective on issues related to the full integration and greater participation of women in the development process within a holistic, systemic approach and with emphasis on the core themes of awareness-raising, poverty alleviation, eradication of legal illiteracy and promoting of community development. At the same time, the programme addresses the paradox of women's multiple roles—productive and reproductive—by proposing that working conditions be adapted to family needs. Within a thematic multidisciplinary approach, the Women and Development Unit gives impetus to (a) strengthening the statistical capacity of member States for gender-sensitive, gender-specific and gender-disaggregated data and indicators on women; (b) raising awareness of women's issues and concerns, including equal access to education, health, employment and decision-making, eradication of poverty and legal illiteracy, safeguarding the environment and managing natural resources; (c) promoting a participatory approach for involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the grass roots; and (d) providing technical assistance for capacity- and institution-building of NGOs and, eventually, a forum for their interaction and networking. To that end, the Women and Development Unit undertakes research activities and policy analysis, provides technical assistance and advisory services to member States and executes operational activities financed from extrabudgetary sources. Compared with previous bienniums, extrabudgetary funds dwindled considerably during the 1994-1995 biennium.

2. The technical assistance activities undertaken by the Women and Development Unit are identified and formulated in response to international and regional mandates. Particular attention is drawn to the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (1985), resolutions on preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995) and the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005 (Amman, November 1994). These are translated into development projects catering to the needs of Arab women which, until recently, were largely funded by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). In 1993, UNIFEM financed a two-year project on preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women. In 1994, the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) financed a two-year project on the participation of rural women in community development in the Syrian Arab Republic. At the same time, the United Nations Statistical Division and the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) co-financed projects in support of preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women in order to strengthen the statistical capacity of member States in gender statistics, monitoring developments and building a database

and disseminating information on Arab women. More recently, UNIFEM funding for technical assistance projects on women and development in the region was limited to the ceiling set for projects executed directly by the UNIFEM Western Asia Regional Office, established in Amman in 1994.

I. PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECTS

A. Empowerment of women: improvement of quality of life and participation

3. This includes activities that are aimed at empowering women, enhancing their social and economic roles and promoting their participation in the process of economic development. This may be achieved through training rural and urban women in new skills or sharpening and upgrading existing skills. The immediate objective of projects in this category is to improve the standard and quality of life of women, their living conditions and their participation to allow them to make a greater contribution to their families and to society at large. Only preliminary work has been initiated on the two-year project on "Participation of rural women in community development in the Syrian Arab Republic" financed by AGFUND. This project is a component of a more comprehensive, multidisciplinary project on "rural community development in Egypt and the Syrian Arab Republic" also financed by AGFUND. Once the preparatory phase is completed under the integrated project, execution of the project's component on women will commence.

B. Employment of women: assessment of the situation and needs of women

4. This includes activities that deal with the assessment of the situation and needs of women in the labour market by conducting field research and undertaking case-studies or carrying out project assessments. The UNIFEM-funded project on "Participation of women in industries" (RAB/88/WO2), implemented in collaboration with the then Industry Division in ESCWA, was completed in full. During the 1994-1995 biennium, the 11 case-studies^{1/} emanating from the project were used to prepare a regional perspective on the participation of women in industries. This regional perspective together with the executive summaries of the 11 studies were published under a single cover (in English and Arabic).

C. Raising awareness of women's issues and concerns

5. This covers activities to disseminate information to Governments of member States, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with women's issues and concerns and to the society at large. This is achieved through the collection, compilation, processing and dissemination of information, basic data and indicators on women to concerned end-users and to all strata of women. This category comprises projects financed by UNIFEM and UNSD/CAWTAR: (a) a regional guide for Arab women on employment laws and legislation; (b) ESCWA development initiatives; (c) monitoring developments and strengthening the statistical capacity for promoting the participation of women in development; and (d) preparatory activities for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

^{1/} These include five case-studies on the participation of women in food and textile industries in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and the southern part of Yemen; three on the participation of women in pharmaceutical industries in Egypt, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic; and three on the participation of women in electronics industries—prepared by the then Industry Division.

1. Regional guide for Arab women on employment laws and legislation (RAB/86/WO6)

6. Under this project and in cooperation with the Arab Labour Organization, a regional guide on employment laws and legislation for women in selected Arab countries was prepared during the 1988-1989 biennium. The disruption of work of the Commission as a result of the Gulf War (1990-1991) delayed the publication of the regional guide and prompted its revision for updating and editing during the 1992-1993 biennium. It was finalized and published during the 1994-1995 biennium. The regional guide provides information on international conventions and agreements and their counterparts at the regional and national levels, as well as the national laws and legislation of selected Arab countries. It is a comparative study of legislation in selected Arab countries to promote an exchange of views and to encourage positive change and adjustments. Specifically, the guide introduces women in the Arab world and the public at large to legal practices in various Arab countries, especially those pertaining to women. By clarifying the rights and responsibilities of women as individuals and as family members in the job market and in public life, the regional guide creates awareness regarding the differential impact of these practices on the status of women in society and helps to reduce legal illiteracy among women so as to enhance their participation in the development process.

2. ESCWA development initiatives (RAB/89/WO2)

7. This project has three objectives, two of which were completed during the 1992-1993 biennium^{2/} and the third was completed during the 1994-1995 biennium. This is the provision of financial support for administrative services, including translation from Arabic into English, preparation of summaries and executive summaries in Arabic and English, editing, typing, and printing of several technical reports substantively completed during previous bienniums emanating from completed UNIFEM or CAWTAR funded projects. The following documents were published during the 1994-1995 biennium under the series Studies on Women and Development:

- (a) Role of kindergarten teacher in socialization of children: case-studies of Bahrain and Kuwait (No. 20);
- (b) Arab Women in the Manufacturing Industries (No. 19) E/A;
- (c) Regional guide for women on employment laws and legislation (No. 23);
- (d) Review and assessment of the progress achieved for the advancement of Arab women in the light of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies (No. 24).

8. The findings of the "Survey on the situation and needs of women in the southern part of Yemen" emanating from a UNIFEM-financed project completed during the 1988-1989 biennium were updated after the unification of the former Yemen Arab Republic and the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in May 1990. However, as a result of the disruption of the work and activities of the Commission during the Gulf War until August 1991, finalization of the survey was delayed. Further delays in processing and

^{2/} The two completed objectives are the provision of technical assistance and support to the Amman Business and Professional Women's Club and ESCWA participation in the "Information on Women" meeting.

editing the survey were encountered during the 1992-1993 biennium, prompting the decision to terminate it owing to obsolescence and gaps in data and information.

3. Monitoring developments and strengthening the statistical capacity for promoting the participation of women in development (UNSD/CAWTAR)

9. In the light of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and resolutions on preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and in collaboration with UNDP, United Nations Statistical Division and CAWTAR, ESCWA continued its interdisciplinary activities to strengthen indicators and statistics on Arab women. The need to generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for monitoring, evaluation and planning was articulated in the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005. The immediate objective of this ongoing project is to compile, analyse and present on a regular basis data disaggregated by age, gender and socio-economic and other relevant indicators, and to develop region-specific indicators. The long-term objective is to support the development of national capacity to build and maintain statistical and information databases on the social, economic, demographic and political situation of women and men in the Arab countries. The project is designed to overcome the basic deficiencies in the field of gender statistics information since surveys carried out with insufficient disaggregation of data by gender remain a major impediment to decision makers. This will be accomplished by providing technical assistance so as to raise awareness of the interlinkages between the availability and timeliness of gender statistics and the achievement of sustainable development as well as to strengthen national capacity in order to bridge existing statistical and information gaps. Therefore, high on the agenda of the ESCWA secretariat is a continuing programme for improving and developing quantitative and qualitative statistics and indicators on gender issues that are compatible with current socio-economic changes. It is anticipated that this project will provide policy makers, NGOs and researchers concerned with the advancement of women with the necessary statistical information on the situation of women and men in all strata of society.

10. Under this project, the three concerned areas within ESCWA (the Statistics Division, the then Industry Division and the Women and Development Unit of the Social Development Issues and Policies Division) collaborated to provide technical assistance in order to monitor developments in the situation of Arab women and to strengthen the statistical capacity of member States in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women. Two statistical documents emanating from this project have been published: (a) Arab Women in ESCWA Member States: Statistics, Indicators and Trends and (b) Arab Women: Statistical Database. With co-funding from CAWTAR, ESCWA expanded the scope of the "Review and assessment of the progress achieved for the advancement of Arab women in the light of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies" to cover all 22 Arab countries. This constitutes a significant contribution towards strengthening the statistics on women and men and building a gender-disaggregated database for monitoring the advancement of Arab women.

4. Strengthening the institutional capacity of national machineries for women

11. Upon the request of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor in the Sultanate of Oman, ESCWA provided advisory services to develop and strengthen programmes for women and children. In particular, technical assistance focused on (a) assessing the Directorate for Women and Children's Affairs and recommending plans and programmes to enhance its performance, and (b) studying the laws and regulations of the Directorate and identifying ways to benefit from them.

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5. ESCWA preparatory activities for the Fourth World Conference on Women,
Beijing, September 1995 (KM/GLO/93/WO2)

12. The purpose of this project was to provide technical assistance to member States in order to strengthen the planning, programming and statistical capabilities of the relevant ministries, women's organizations and NGOs. In this context, the Women and Development Unit provided technical assistance to ESCWA member States in (a) setting up joint national preparatory committees (JNPCs) for the Fourth World Conference on Women, (b) preparing national reports on the situation of women by providing the general guidelines adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women and an outline for the report, (c) facilitating national workshops for the purpose of reviewing national plans of action, and (d) coordinating preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women at the regional level and formulating a regional plan of action for the advancement of women based on the national plans of action. With UNIFEM funding, ESCWA commenced its phased preparatory activities in November 1993, leading to the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting in November 1994:

(a) Phase one

13. A team from the Women and Development Unit visited Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen during November and December 1993 to provide technical assistance. Similar technical assistance was provided to Jordan, Iraq and the occupied territories^{3/} in Amman, the temporary headquarters of ESCWA. The purpose of these technical assistance missions was to encourage member States to form JNPCs with balanced representation from concerned governmental and non-governmental organizations (ministries of social affairs, labour, education, health, justice and legal affairs, planning and statistics) and information and from active quality-minded NGOs concerned with women's issues as well as researchers and academicians. Once formed, these JNPCs were entrusted with preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women, mainly preparing the national reports on the situation of women in the light of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, including the collection of gender-disaggregated data and pre-identified indicators on women and the formulation of national plans of action based on the findings of the report for submission to the Fourth World Conference on Women. For this purpose, the ESCWA team supplied the JNPCs with guidelines and an outline for preparation of the national reports comprising indicators adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women, along with excerpts from the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies translated into Arabic for their perusal. A participatory approach to the preparation of national reports and the formulation of national plans of action was advocated.

14. Few ESCWA member countries have permanent national machineries which specifically address women's affairs and monitor their development. Those countries which have accorded special attention to women's concerns by setting up such machinery did so after the mid-1980s or during the early 1990s and have established this machinery on a permanent basis either as autonomous bodies or housed within the Ministry of Social Affairs. In Bahrain, Oman and Yemen, a department for women's affairs and/or the

^{3/} In view of the particular situation of the Palestinian people, the non-existence, until recently, of government organizations and the strong presence of the General Union of Palestinian Women in Amman, all documentation and technical assistance was provided to them in Amman. Moreover, ESCWA provided financial assistance from the Trust Fund for Palestine to the General Union of Palestinian Women and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics to undertake the preparation of the national report on the situation of Palestinian women and the national plan of action for Beijing.

family and child is housed within the respective ministries of social affairs. The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) in Egypt and the Jordanian National Committee for Women (JNCW) in Jordan are autonomous bodies which report directly to the Council of Ministers. The existence of such permanent national machineries, especially in Egypt and Jordan, facilitated the formation of temporary (ad hoc) national committees to prepare for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

15. In the remaining ESCWA member countries where such machinery does not exist, similar temporary JNPCs were formed pursuant to the visits undertaken by the team from the Women and Development Unit and the technical assistance provided under phase one of the project. These visits were preceded by notes verbales encouraging member States to form the preparatory committees and to involve NGOs in the process. The formation of these JNPCs marked the initiation of the preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference on Women and set a time-frame for the preparation of national reports and national plans of action. These JNPCs were set up to undertake the specific task of preparing for the Fourth World Conference on Women. It is up to member States to make these committees more permanent bodies after Beijing, otherwise they will automatically disintegrate. The following JNPCs were set up to prepare for the Fourth World Conference on Women:

(a) In Jordan, an 11-member JNPC was set up in May 1993 as a sub-committee of the Jordanian National Committee for Women, an autonomous body chaired by HRH Princess Basma Bint Talal. The Deputy Minister of Education was designated to head the sub-committee with representatives from the ministries of social affairs and labour, education, public health, agriculture, foreign affairs, information and justice as well as the Central Bureau of Statistics, academics from the University of Jordan, and representatives of NGOs, including the President of the Federation of Jordanian Women;

(b) In Egypt, a 19-member JNPC was set up in December 1993, headed by the First Lady of Egypt, with the President of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood as its coordinator;

(c) In Kuwait, a 13-member JNPC was set up in December 1993 within the Ministry of Planning and headed by the Under-Secretary-General of the Ministry;

(d) In the Syrian Arab Republic, a seven-member JNPC was set up in December 1993 with representatives from the State Planning Authority, the ministries of social affairs and labour, public health, economics and finance, information and agriculture, and the Central Bureau of Statistics. The Minister of Higher Education was designated to head the JNPC, while the President of the Federation of Syrian Women is to be its deputy head;

(e) In Iraq, a seven-member JNPC was set up in March 1994 headed by the President of the General Federation of Iraqi Women;

(f) In Bahrain, an 18-member JNPC was set up in April 1994 within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour with representatives from the ministries of education, public health, foreign affairs, information, justice and Islamic affairs, the Central Bureau of Statistics, academics from the University of Bahrain, and five representatives of concerned NGOs. The Director of the Social Affairs Department was appointed to head the JNPC, while the Chief of the Women and Family Affairs Section coordinated its activities;

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(g) In the occupied territories, a 29-member JNPC was formed in April 1994 with the Minister of Social Affairs as its head, supported by two advisers and a liaison officer with the United Nations in New York. The JNPC is composed of representatives of all disciplines concerned with women's affairs, experts, academicians and researchers, and an equal number of representatives from the General Union of Palestinian Women from the occupied territories and from outside it (Cairo, Tunis, Amman and Beirut);

(h) In Qatar, the concerns of women received serious attention, as reflected by the formation of an eight-member working group (JNPC) in April 1994 and the commitment to participate in the Fourth World Conference on Women. The JNPC was set up within the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and with representatives from the Supreme Planning Council and the ministries of information and culture, health, justice and education, in addition to an academic from the University of Qatar. It was headed by the Chief of the Department of Social Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour with a coordinator from the same ministry and a super-coordinator from the Supreme Planning Council. The Women's Branch of the Qatar Red Crescent, the only NGO concerned with women's affairs, was represented through the Ministry of Social Affairs;

(i) In Oman, a 12-member JNPC was set up in May 1994 within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor and with representatives from concerned ministries. The Special Adviser to the Minister of Social Affairs was appointed to head the JNPC and the Chief of the Women and Children's Department was chosen as its coordinator. Since the Ministry of Social Affairs oversees all activities of NGOs, the head of the NGOs department in the Ministry of Social Affairs was also the NGO representative in the JNPC;

(j) In the United Arab Emirates, a 14-member JNPC was set up in May 1994 with representatives from various ministries as well as researchers and academicians. The First Lady of the United Arab Emirates, Chairperson of the United Arab Emirates Women's Union, heads the JNPC. The President of the United Arab Emirates Women's Union is the deputy head of the JNPC;

(k) In Yemen, an 18-member ad hoc working group to prepare the national report on women for the Fourth World Conference on Women was set up in May 1994 within the Ministry of Insurance, Social Affairs and Labour and with representatives from the State Planning Authority, the ministries of social affairs and labour, education, public health, economics and finance, information, agriculture, the Central Bureau of Statistics and academics and representatives from the NGOs concerned with women. The Deputy Minister of Information was appointed Chairperson of the Working Group, and the Director of the Department of Women and Children within the Ministry of Insurance, Social Affairs and Labour was designated as its coordinator;

(l) In Lebanon, a 17-member JNPC was formed in June 1994, headed by the First Lady of Lebanon with the Second Lady of Lebanon as the deputy head, with representatives of all concerned ministries as well as experts, researchers and academicians and equal representation from the Lebanese Council for Women and other NGOs.

(b) Phase two

16. During the period from May to October 1994 and in collaboration with the JNPCs, ESCWA organized and moderated nine national workshops to assist in the formulation of national plans of action for the advancement of women in the following ESCWA members: Oman (7-9 May 1994); Qatar (10-12 May

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1994); the United Arab Emirates (14-15 May 1994); Bahrain (4-7 June 1994); Jordan (6-7 July 1994); the Syrian Arab Republic (9-11 July 1994); Yemen (27-28 August 1994); the occupied territories (26-29 September 1994); and Lebanon (4-5 October 1994).

17. Members of the JNPCs, women in development officers in the United Nations and its specialized agencies, experts and researchers involved in the preparation of the national reports on women, bilateral donors and the media were invited to participate in these national workshops. On average, 30 to 40 individuals took part in these national workshops.

18. The purpose of these national workshops was to review the national plans of action in the light of the findings of the national reports on the situation of women prepared by the JNPCs for submission as the official document to the Fourth World Conference on Women. The national reports were prepared to assess the situation of women in the light of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. To the extent possible, the workshops served to ensure that the national reports were in line with the outline proposed by the Commission on the Status of Women and provided by the ESCWA team. In particular, the national reports were reviewed against the outline for coverage of the 10 areas of critical concern for women^{4/} and for inclusion of the specified indicators on women for comparison among countries and as benchmarks over time. The workshops were instrumental in identifying the main country-specific concerns and bottlenecks facing the advancement of women and in compiling a list of priorities for future action. The workshops also ensured that the national plans of action translated these bottlenecks into doable, realistic and operationalizable plans of action with due regard to cultural specificities and religious philosophies. To this end, simulation exercises were conducted during the three-day workshops. Drafting committees were formed in the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen, the occupied territories and Lebanon to make the necessary revisions in the national reports and finalize the national plans of action.

(c) Phase three

19. Pursuant to these national workshops, the JNPCs revised their national reports and formulated national plans of action and submitted the final reports to ESCWA. The national workshops also provided direct feedback for the preparation at the regional level of the two main working documents for the regional preparatory meeting for the Fourth World Conference on Women. Using the national reports and plans of action as inputs, ESCWA—assisted by an external consultant—prepared (a) the "Review and assessment of the progress achieved for the advancement of Arab women in the light of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies" and (b) the "Draft regional plan of action for the advancement of Arab women to the year 2005". The revised versions were also transmitted to the secretariat of the Fourth World Conference on Women for use as input to the global picture of the review and appraisal of the situation of women and to the draft global platform for action.

^{4/} During the national workshops, the JNPCs were informed of the addition of two new critical areas of concern by the Commission on the Status of Women in March 1994: managing natural resources and safeguarding the environment, and using mass media effectively for the advancement of women. The initial eight areas covered were alleviating poverty for women; eradicating legal illiteracy; ensuring equal access to education; health and employment; sharing in power structures and decision-making; overcoming armed conflicts; eliminating violence against women; and institutionalizing national machinery for women.

20. In culmination of the preparatory activities at the regional level, the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Fourth World Conference on Women: Peace for the Advancement of Arab Women was held in Amman from 6 to 10 November 1994. Under the patronage of HRH Princess Basma Bint Talal, the Meeting was hosted by the Jordanian National Committee for Women, organized by ESCWA in cooperation with the League of Arab States and co-sponsored by the United Nations Trust Fund for the Fourth World Conference on Women and CAWTAR. Eleven ESCWA members participated in the meeting, namely Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, the occupied territories, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, in addition to Algeria, Djibouti, Mauritania, Morocco, the Sudan and Tunisia. Belgium, China (host country of the Fourth World Conference on Women), France, the United States of America, and the Holy See (a Permanent Observer at the United Nations) participated as observers. Representatives of multilateral and bilateral donors, United Nations and specialized agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, UNHCR, UNRWA, WHO, UNU/WIDER, UNFPA, INSTRAW, UNIFEM, UNHCR, ILO, UNESCO, UNIDO, UNSD, the World Bank, FAO, WFP, HABITAT and UNEP), Arab and international funds, representatives of national, regional and international NGOs, and experts in their personal capacity were present. A total of 420 participants attended the Meeting, which was the largest ever organized by ESCWA and which received wide media coverage and reviews.

21. The preparatory meeting was held in two segments: the Expert Group Meeting on the Regional Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women from 6 to 8 November 1994 and the High-level Segment of the Arab regional preparatory meeting for the Fourth World Conference on Women from 9 to 10 November 1994. The first segment formulated and finalized the draft regional plan of action based on the national reports, incorporating the recommendations of the Arab NGOs' Plan of Action and of the Youth Consultations. The High-level Segment of the Meeting adopted the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005. The Arab Plan of Action identified nine priority areas for Arab women: safeguarding the right of Arab women to participate in power structures and decision-making mechanisms; alleviation of poverty for Arab women; ensuring Arab women equal access to all levels of education; ensuring Arab women equal access to health services; promoting Arab women's economic self-reliance and capacities to enter the labour market; overcoming the effects of war, occupation and armed conflict on Arab women; elimination of violence against women; participation of women in managing natural resources and safeguarding the environment; and using the communications media effectively to effect changes in roles in society and promote equality between men and women. Through the Commission on Arab Women of the League of Arab States, the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs met under the umbrella of the League of Arab States and adopted the Arab Plan of Action and urged member States to use it in preparing their national strategies and plans of action for the advancement of women.

(d) Phase four

22. As a wrap-up to all the preparatory activities for the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Regional Workshop on Lobbying and Leadership Skills and Coordination among Arab Official Delegations to the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beirut from 6 to 8 July 1995. Under the patronage of the First Lady of Lebanon, the regional workshop was hosted by the Government of Lebanon, organized by ESCWA in collaboration with the UNIFEM Western Asia Regional Office and the Lebanese JNPC, and co-sponsored by the UNDP Bureau for Arab States and the UNFPA Division for Arab States and Europe. The Workshop was held under the umbrella of the League of Arab States.

23. The main objective of the meeting was to sharpen lobbying skills and to facilitate coordination among the Arab official delegations to the Fourth World Conference on Women using the draft platform for action as the main working document for conducting practical exercises. The concept of gender and the role of the media in raising awareness of women's issues and concerns, background information on the Fourth World Conference on Women and the divisive issues in the draft global Platform for Action were thoroughly examined during the meeting. Participating in the meeting were Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, Yemen, the occupied territories, Jordan, Egypt, the Sudan, Algeria, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Tunisia and Djibouti. The meeting produced the Beirut Declaration for the Advancement of Arab Women and a guideline on the position of the participants regarding the divisive issues in the draft Platform for Action of concern to Arab women and Arab society. The guideline was used by the Arab delegations to the Fourth World Conference on Women during the daily Arab coordination meetings and the negotiations on the platform for action in Beijing.

II. ASSESSMENT OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECTS

24. The technical assistance provided by the Women and Development Unit generally aims to enable women, enhance their advancement potential, improve the quality of their life and raise their contribution to society at large. These objectives are directly linked to the three major categories of employment, empowerment and awareness under which the technical assistance projects executed by ESCWA have generally fallen. The recently executed projects aim to create awareness of women's issues and concerns among planners, women's organizations and national, regional and international bodies. They focus on disseminating information to bridge existing information and data gaps, eradicate legal illiteracy and widen women's horizons. These projects also advocate a participatory approach by encouraging the involvement of NGOs in the process and women at the grass-roots level in community development; and promote the requisite mechanisms thereof.

25. Within the framework of the preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference on Women, the project succeeded in raising awareness of women's issues and concerns, encouraging greater involvement of NGOs using a participatory approach for partnership with government bodies, and facilitating coordination among member States for the advancement of women. The media played a catalytic role in raising public awareness. Press conferences were called to launch the national reports on the situation of women and the national plans of action to show commitment to the advancement of women. The wide media coverage of preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women, including the national workshops and the regional preparatory meetings, was instrumental.

26. The preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference on Women was also instrumental in bringing together the United Nations agencies and confirming an integrated role for the United Nations system in preparation for the Conference and in coordinating their support and assistance (financial and technical) to member States. With UNDP acting as coordinator for the United Nations system at the national level, information on international support for the advancement of women was collectively provided as input to the national reports. At the regional level, ESCWA, acting as regional coordinator, created in May 1994 an informal inter-agency task force on women composed of women in development officers of United Nations agencies based in Amman. Its first task was to streamline and coordinate activities in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women in order to avoid duplication. Towards this end, several meetings were held to exchange information and explore cooperation possibilities. As a result, UNESCO,

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UNIDO and FAO contributed three background documents on women in education, women in industry and women in agriculture, respectively, to the Regional Preparatory Meeting, which was held in Amman in November 1994. Another positive outcome of this coordination process is reflected in the collaboration between ESCWA and the UNIFEM Western Asia Regional Office in co-organizing the Regional Workshop in Beirut in July 1995.

27. The implementation of the project was not achieved without difficulties:

(a) While for the first phase of the project it was possible for the ESCWA team to plan and undertake travel to contiguous countries in one or two rounds, for the second phase the logistics were more complex since setting the dates of the workshops was largely subject to confirmation by Governments;

(b) Despite the fact that tentative dates to convene the national workshops had been set earlier, these dates were not adhered to and had to be postponed several times until the national reports were ready for discussion;

(c) Delays in preparing national reports were generally attributed to delays in setting up the JNPCs, whose main function was the preparation of the national reports and plans of action;

(d) Financial constraints constituted a serious bottleneck for preparation of the national reports of several member States and/or convening national workshops in others. Of course, these constraints were paramount in convening the national workshops, where members of JNPCs needed to travel from distant cities to—and have accommodation in—the venue of the workshop;

(e) Political constraints were also behind the delays in convening the national workshops. A case in point is the workshop for the occupied territories where the venue oscillated between Gaza, Jerusalem and Amman. Several JNPC members from the occupied West Bank and from abroad (Cairo, Tunis, Amman and Beirut) experienced difficulties in obtaining entry visas or circulation permits in Jerusalem. UNDP Jerusalem was able to secure entry visas for several JNPC members living outside the occupied territories and circulation permits in Jerusalem for others;

(f) Some ESCWA member countries cancelled their workshops altogether, although JNPCs were set up and national reports were ready.

28. On a more positive note, pursuing the participatory approach by encouraging the involvement of NGOs in the preparatory phases for the Fourth World Conference on Women, the UNIFEM-funded project succeeded in achieving the objectives for which it was conceived:

(a) Joint national preparatory committees were set up by member States with encouragement and assistance from ESCWA, though a few were more delayed than others;

(b) National reports on the situation of women in the light of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies were prepared by the JNPCs for submission to ESCWA and eventually the Fourth World Conference on Women;

(c) National workshops were organized to formulate national plans of action in the light of the findings of the national reports;

(d) Membership of NGOs in the official JNPCs ensured, within reason, that their views and recommendations would be reflected in the official national reports and national plans of action;

(e) The Arab regional plan of action was formulated reflecting the cross-cutting issues and concerns of Arab women and their priorities while retaining national specificities;

(f) The wrap-up regional workshop in Beirut provided a precious opportunity for Arab official delegations to sharpen their lobbying skills and pave the ground for the closer interaction that took place during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. This was a catalytic factor in facilitating Arab coordination during the Conference, especially in reaching a common position regarding the contentious issues in the Platform for Action adopted in Beijing in September 1995;

(g) The wide media coverage accorded to the phased preparatory process of the Fourth World Conference on Women raised awareness of women's issues and concerns by identifying priorities and setting time-bound and quantifiable targets for overcoming them in the short and medium term.
