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**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA**  
Social Development, Population and  
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**REPORT TO THE COMMISSION ON SUPPORT TO  
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECTS FOR THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN**

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ESCWA activities for the advancement of women are formulated within the framework of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women<sup>1/</sup> and the ESCWA Strategy for the Advancement of Arab Women to the Year 2000.

These activities deal with different issues that are related to the needs of women, and can be categorized into three main groups:

1. Activities that deal with improving and enhancing women's participation in the economic process through training by providing new skills or sharpening existing skills both in the rural and urban context. The objective of these projects is to improve their living conditions so that they could be better contributors to society in general and to their families in particular. These activities are:

Organizing self-help groups for income-generation among poor women in Egypt (EGY/86/W01); Activating the popular participation of women at the grass-root level in Iraq (IRQ/87/W01); Diffusion of biogas technology in PDRY: development of women in Al-Habeel village (PDY/88/W01); and Income-generating food processing enterprises in Jordan (JOR/88/W01).

2. Activities that deal with the identification of women's needs through case-studies or project assessments; among these are the following activities: The role of rural women in economic development in the ESCWA region (RAB/80/W01); Women trainers for maintenance skills of electrical appliances (RAB/86/W03); Participation of women in food and textile industries: a case-study (Egypt, Jordan, Syrian Arab Republic, Democratic Yemen and Iraq) (RAB/88/W02).

3. Activities that provide information to women, Governments non-governmental organizations and other bodies that deal with women's issues.

These activities are: Directory of Arab Professional Women for Technical Co-operation Among Developing Countries (RAB/84/W01); ESCWA development initiatives (RAB/89/W01); Guide for Arab women on legislation related to personal status laws, family and employment laws and procedures (RAB/86/W06); Strengthening the statistical capacity for promoting the participation of women in development (RAB/88/W01); Impact of population policies on Arab women (RMI/88/PO6/32/05).

All the above activities are founded by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) except the last-mentioned project, Impact of Population Policies on Arab Women, which is funded by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Three of the above activities, projects RAB/88/W01, RAB/88/W02 and PDY/88/W01, are interdisciplinary and are being implemented with different divisions of ESCWA, namely Industry, Statistics and Natural Resources, Science and Technology, in fulfilment of different mandates calling for the integration of women's concerns into the work programmes of the regional commissions.

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<sup>1/</sup> Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), chap. I, sect. A.

Following are highlights of projects from the three above categories:

1. Activities on improving and enhancing women's participation in economic development

(a) Organizing self-help groups among poor women (EGY/86/W01)

The project, which is now completed, was directed at disadvantaged women in a low-income quarter of Cairo. The project demonstrated a methodology by which centrally planned services for women could be matched and complemented by non-governmental women's organizations programmes and by self-help groups at the grass-root level. It enhanced the capacity of women's organizations and informed them how self-help groups diversify their activities.

The project enabled women to meet their needs in particular and the needs of their community in general. It encouraged women to overcome their handicaps and exploit the employment opportunities that were available to them in their community and to identify economic skills that could be acquired for new areas of income-generation.

The project undertook different workshops in the areas of maintenance of electrical appliances, sewing and industrial knitting along with literacy classes. The training also covered basic electronics and television repairing. Some of the women who graduated from the basic electricity course have already started working and are gaining financial benefits.

This gave the women self-confidence and satisfaction as they are applying their knowledge in repairing things in their own homes and for their neighbours.

(b) Activating the popular participation of women at the grass-root level (IRQ/87/W01)

This project deals with training mobile rural teams in income-generating activities for rural women. This project is supplementary to a larger project for decreasing infant mortality in rural villages in Iraq, which is being implemented by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Iraqi Ministry of Health. The project, which began in January 1989, was funded by the Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND). UNIFEM provided additional funds for training in income-generating skills including the preparation of training materials and instruction manuals. The project includes selecting five villages where such intervention is being introduced and five villages without such intervention as a control group to assess the impact of the activities. The General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW) was selected to implement the project because of its widespread organizational structure both vertically and horizontally.

The project has already completed the following activities:

A general training programme has been prepared and applied for 140 rural area team members. A specialized programme for a selected group of team members has also been completed and implemented. In addition to preparing 14 specialized training programmes at the village level, the project also prepared 300 copies of training lectures for participants' use.

Five hundred copies of a book in Arabic on Women's Guide in Home Management is in the final stages of printing for the use of the team members and women leaders in villages. The project is training 140 participants in income-saving and income generating skills.

(c) Diffusion of biogas technology in PDRY: development of Al-Habeel village (PDY/88/W01)

The main aim of the above project is to help the Government of Democratic Yemen to improve the quality of life of the rural population in general and women in particular. The project, which was initiated in January 1989, has made the village a pilot site for integrating the social and economic aspects of this new technology through the provision of extension education in poultry raising, agriculture, and food processing, health, literacy, home economics and child care.

Phase one of the project, which is now completed, included the building of 12 digesters and the initiation of an extension programme for women in the village. In addition to the digesters, some experimentation was done by building a very simple water treatment unit to utilize waste water to start a family garden. All systems are in operation and serve 19 families. This new technology made women's daily lives a lot easier.

The village women were involved in all the above activities. A team of local people were trained in the construction and maintenance of biogas systems. The project trained also the women in the operation of the biogas plants.

The construction and operation of the biogas plants were videotaped, and will serve as material for information to other countries inside and outside the ESCWA region.

The project upgraded the capabilities of the local engineers, technicians and skilled labour in handling the techniques of these plants. After the completion of the first phase of the project, the quality of life in the village improved.

Phase two of the project, which includes building 10 digesters with their attachments, will begin in January 1990. At least one unit will be built totally by engineers from Democratic Yemen with supervision by ESCWA consultants.

(d) Income-generating food-processing enterprise (JOR/88/W01)

ESCWA has previously undertaken a feasibility study to assess the viability of such a project. The study assessed the economic, social, cultural and technical factors affecting the production of pre-prepared food. It is upon the results of the study that this project was formulated and approved for funding by UNIFEM. The aim of the project is to establish a pre-prepared food micro-enterprise on a viable commercial basis, which can provide a steady stream of income for development activities for the General Federation of Jordanian Women. The project is in progress.

## 2. Identification of needs of women

### (a) Role of rural women in economic development in the ESCWA region (RAB/80/W01)

The project, which is now completed, has undertaken several case-studies on the role of rural women in economic development in the ESCWA region. An Expert Group Meeting which was a follow-up to the project and funded by UNIFEM was held in co-operation with the National Centre for Social and Criminology Research in Cairo from 22 to 25 October 1989. The Meeting was attended by 25 experts from eight ESCWA countries in addition to consultants from the Sudan and Tunisia.

Seven papers which covered the following topics were presented to the meeting:

- (1) The role of Arab women in rural economy: a regional perspective;
- (2) Participation of rural women in development: case-study of Egypt;
- (3) Participation of rural women in development: case-study of Jordan;
- (4) Participation of rural women in development: case-study of Iraq;
- (5) Conditions for the success of extension programmes: regional perspective;
- (6) Assessment of extension programmes for rural women: case-study of Egypt;
- (7) Conditions for success of extension programmes: case-study of Lebanon.

The Meeting had fruitful discussions leading to successful recommendations. The final report of the Meeting was printed and distributed to all participants, and to UNIFEM and other United Nations bodies. The proceedings of the Meeting are being edited (in Arabic) and are expected to be issued by the first quarter of 1990.

### (b) Women trainers for maintenance skills of electrical appliances (RAB/86/W03)

Manpower demand in the region is characterized by a high rate of unemployment among unskilled labour, while at the same time the supply of some countries of the region, namely the Gulf oil-producing countries depend almost completely on imported skilled labour, which they recruit from outside the region as well as from other Arab countries. The importation of skilled labour on a large-scale from countries outside the region, seems to result in diminishing returns in terms of transmitting knowledge and skill, owing to linguistic and cultural barriers as well as the turnkey approach to many projects. The movement of skilled labour within the region, though less difficult socially for the receiving countries, is creating social and economic problems for women who are left behind in the countries of origin. Furthermore, it is depriving labour-exporting countries of origin from

valuable skills required in their development efforts. This uncontrolled movement of skilled labour has added to the relative imbalance of resources of labour-importing and labour-exporting countries in the region.

Consequently, there is a pressing need to find new sources for the provision of labour skilled in the various technical occupations. A variety of training courses for skilled workers has been devised. Nevertheless, efforts to integrate women into the skilled labour market are still very dispersed and rare. There is an obvious need to expand and intensify efforts in this direction for the purpose of ensuring a more effective participation of women in solving this labour shortage.

The female population of the region is ready at this stage to play a part in the technical employment field. Both the number of women who are finishing their middle and secondary education and those seeking employment outside the home are increasing steadily. Women are looking for training in new and modern fields, in order to ensure an income to meet their economic needs.

As a result of the above, ESCWA formulated a project proposal to assess the potential of establishing a regional training programme for women. The project was submitted to the nineteenth session of the Consultative Committee of UNIFEM in March 1986. After reviewing the project document, the Consultative Committee provided funds for a pre-project case-study, using as a base the experience gained from an earlier project in Jordan, "Maintenance skills for electrical appliances". The main objective of this case-study is to enable women to have access to increasing opportunities for employment or in small-scale enterprises in non-traditional occupations appropriate for the requirements of the countries of Western Asia.

The project will provide training to women with middle and low level education at the local level. The women to be trained at the local level will be seeking employment in the skilled labour market, or will be housewives and schoolteachers who want to learn about the electrical equipment they use regularly.

(c) Participation of women in food and textile industries (RAB/88/W02)

In the ESCWA region, the manufacturing sector is gaining importance in development strategies. Because of this, the ESCWA Social Development, Population and Human Settlements Division, in co-operation with the ESCWA Industry Division has initiated the above project as an interdisciplinary activity. The main objective of the project, which is in its final stages, was to study the role and scope of women's participation in two industries, namely, the food and textile industries. Five national case-studies have been undertaken (Jordan, Egypt, Democratic Yemen, Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq). The case-studies assessed the existing opportunities for women's promotion, the problems they face as workers and their social role as mothers, and the training opportunities available to them.

The results of the five national case-studies will be amalgamated into a regional case-study. This output will constitute an important basis for making policy decisions for improving and enhancing the participation of women in the industrial sector of the region. This will lead to training programmes so as to improve women's productivity. This activity will lead to a technical assistance project for women in the above industries.

3. Collection of data and dissemination of information on and for women

(a) Directory of Arab professional women for technical co-operation among developing countries (RAB/84/W01)

The objective of the project is to identify women experts who are capable of undertaking assignments and projects in their own countries and other Arab countries, as well as other developing countries.

The major output of this project is a Directory of Arab Professional Women that would be produced in two languages, Arabic and English, in order to meet regional and international needs. It will be continuously updated, with information being circulated in printouts as well as on diskettes to requesting bodies. The updating of the Directory has been included in the ESCWA regular programme on women in development so as to ensure its regular and continuous updating. The Arabic version of the Directory is being printed, and contains 1680 entries of professional Arab women. The English version will be printed by June 1990.

(b) Guide for Arab women on legislation related to personal status laws, family and employment laws and procedures (RAB/86/W06)

A regional guide on Arab labour was prepared under this project, with some co-operation from the Arab Labour Organization. Simultaneously, two national guides on personal status and family laws and labour laws in Iraq were prepared in co-operation with the General Federation of Iraqi Women. The guides were completed in 1987. An extension of the project, which is funded by UNIFEM, will simplify the guides and will print them in large quantities for distribution. A consultant specialized in adult education and with a legal background is rewriting the manuals in simplified Arabic, so that they will serve the target group.

(c) Strengthening the statistical capacity for promoting the participation of women in development (RAB/88/W01)

In fulfilment of General Assembly resolution 40/105 of 13 December 1985 on incorporation of the interests of women in the work programmes of the regional commissions, ESCWA introduced several interrelated activities to strengthen indicators and statistics on the situation of women in the ESCWA region. These activities, which were implemented under the above project, consisted of three main objectives. The first objective dealt with the assessment of existing indicators and evaluation of proposed ones in a meeting of statisticians, social scientists and government officials. The second objective dealt with the development of a data base on the female labour force. The third objective dealt with providing technical assistance to the Central Statistical Organization of Democratic Yemen.

The first objective, which is now completed, consisted of convening a Working Group on Developing Indicators and Improving Statistics on the Situation of Women.



The meeting of the Group, which was organized by the ESCWA Social Development, Population and Human Settlements Division, and the ESCWA Statistics Division, was held in co-operation with the National Centre for Social and Criminology Research in Cairo from 15 to 19 October 1989. Twenty-three experts from eight ESCWA countries plus an expert from the United Nations Statistical Office who also represented UNIFEM and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) participated in the meeting.

The nine papers presented at the meeting covered the following regional issues and national case studies.

- Improving the concepts and methods used in preparation of data and indicators related to women in the ESCWA region;
- Improving the statistics on women used in household surveys in the ESCWA region;
- Proposed social and economic indicators that reflect the conditions of women in the ESCWA region;
- Assessment of statistics and indicators on women in selected ESCWA countries: case-studies of Bahrain;
- Case-study of Egypt;
- Case-study of Iraq;
- Case-study of PDRY;
- Case-studies of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The final report was issued in Arabic and distributed to participants, UNIFEM, United Nations Statistical Office, INSTRAW and other United Nations organizations. The report will be translated into English and will be distributed to concerned United Nations organizations.

The proceedings of the meeting are being edited and are expected to be issued by March 1990.

The second objective, which is implemented with the labour section of the Population Programme, involves the compiling of a data base on women's participation in the labour force. The data have already been compiled and computerized. The final report will be printed in March 1990.

The third objective which is supplementary assistance to ongoing project PDY/84/W01, is in the process of being implemented. A sampling expert assisted the Democratic Yemen Central Statistics Organization in the finalization of tables and analysis of data and ended her mission on 31 November 1989, leaving behind 100 final tables ready for analysis. A social science consultant is to be fielded in February 1990 for final analysis. (UNIFEM provided funds for the above consultants under project RAB/88/W01). The data analysis will begin end of February 1990 and will end May 1990. The final report should be in print by October 1990.

(d) ESCWA development initiative (RAB/89/W01)

Since 1978 UNIFEM has collaborated with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on more than 30 projects. Many of these projects sought to establish a data base on women and development in the region, or to design and test models to support women of the region in their development activities.

A recent review indicates some of the outputs of the UNIFEM-ESCWA project collaborations, including:

1. Case-studies on economic activities of rural women in Iraq, Jordan and Egypt.

2. Case-studies and/or models for enabling women to undertake viable handicraft enterprises; to enter non-traditional occupations such as electrical repairs and maintenance; or training of trainers for early childhood education in the region.

3. Publication of a study on the social and economic situation of women in Bahrain.

This data base is continuing to grow with UNIFEM support to ESCWA-executed projects and several ongoing projects, including projects which:

1. Strengthen the statistical capacity of Governments to promote the participation of women in development through integration of indicators into national statistical systems.

2. Develop data on current participation of women in the food and textile industries.

3. Develop data base on women in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.

While the results of these UNIFEM-funded ESCWA projects are reported on through workshops and publications, the full value of this information base on women will not be realized until it is made widely accessible to potential users. On the one hand the documentation prepared has been produced only in Arabic and is not widely accessible to UNIFEM or to some other donors in the Region. On the other hand, dissemination within the region is so far limited to those attending specific workshops or receiving reports. At the same time, related developments have been taking place at an institutional level. Women's organizations at the national and regional level, assisted in some cases by UNIFEM-funded ESCWA training activities, have been growing in capacity, and seek to play roles as depositors and disseminators of information, and as users of information for planning and advocacy purposes. Among them the Amman Business and professional Women's Club, for example, has requested UNIFEM support to establish a women's information, documentation and studies centre. In their request they noted that though the quality of statistical data and information on women has recently improved, the data and information are scattered in various publications and studies which are not readily available to government agencies, policy makers, researchers and women's organizations.

They need to be compiled and checked to ascertain accuracy and consistency. Such data may cover women in education, occupation, labour participation by sector and employer, demographic indicators, and many other areas.

The updating of statistical information on women is also required to monitor social and economic changes and their impact on women. Specific field studies have to be undertaken aimed at certain segments of the society in certain locations. In spite of their significance, these field quantitative studies on conditions of women are rarely carried out.

On an interregional level, several of the regional commissions are developing information systems which seek to package existing information on a form targeted to the needs of users, and to fill gaps in the existing information base. The Women's Information Network for Asia and the Pacific (WINAP) and the evolving efforts to establish a data bank for women and development in Africa are two examples. While ESCWA is already implementing some aspects of a Western Asia information system, such as preparation of the above-mentioned Directory of Arab Women Professionals for Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries (RAB/84/W01), ESCWA would like to expand its efforts in this area.

The objective of this project is to build among institutions of the regions and for ESCWA and UNIFEM a capacity to access and use the data base and the project experience on women which is developing in the region for the following goals:

1. To launch a prototype women's information and documentation centre with the capacity to provide education and advocacy on a sustainable basis.
2. To facilitate communication and programme development through summarization and translation of case-studies and basic documents produced by UNIFEM-supported ESCWA projects.
3. To strengthen the ESCWA capacity to meet information needs.

This project was initiated in December 1989, and is under way.

(e) The impact of population policies on Arab women (RMI/88/P06/32/05)

This project, financed by UNFPA, was implemented in co-operation with the General Arab Women's Federation. It consisted of a seminar on population policies in the region within the contemporary economic and social context. Fifteen experts, forming a multidisciplinary approach, assessed the present demographic situation in the region in the light of the prevailing socio-economic conditions. They identified the relevant population policies and delineated their impact on Arab women and their reproductive and productive roles. Special attention was given to the role of women's non-governmental organizations in general and the General Arab Women's Federation in particular in the area of population activities. Twenty-six experts from six ESCWA countries attended the seminar. Nine papers covering the following two areas were presented at the seminar:

(i) First area: Social and economic dimensions of fertility policies

- Fertility policies and their effects on the population structure and role of Arab women within it: a regional perspective;
- Effect of pronatal policies on Arab women: case-studies of Iraq and Palestine;
- Effect of population control policies on Arab women: case-studies of Egypt and Tunisia.

(ii) Second area: Social and economic dimensions of migration policies

- Effect of international and return migration on Arab women: regional perspective.
- Effect of international and return migration on Arab women: case-studies of Jordan and Egypt;
- Effect of migration resulting from wars on Arab women: case-study of Lebanon.

The final report of the seminar was printed and distributed to all participants, UNFPA and other United Nations agencies. The proceedings of the seminar are being edited and expected to be in print by the first quarter of 1990.

4. Overall impact of the technical assistance projects on the development of women

The overall impact of the above projects is linked to the three categories in which they are grouped. Those implemented on the country level will assist in the developing of economic skills of women in selected sectors. The projects will also assist in identifying the requirements for increasing the participation of women in the economy, both in the formal and informal sector, through public and private sectors or public and non-governmental organizations and bodies. The projects will also draw the attention of the planners, women's organizations and national, regional and international bodies to the information available on Arab women and the tasks that must be undertaken to complete the missing information.

On the personal level, the beneficiaries of these projects will develop self-confidence once they implement self-help activities collectively and once they learn of ways to identify available employment opportunities or income-generation activities. The projects are also expected to improve both the physical and the mental health of working women by relieving them of some of their time- and energy-consuming responsibilities.

The projects will also introduce women to new and appropriate agricultural and urban-related technologies which in turn will widen their scope of practical knowledge and introduce them to the importance of technology in modern life.

The indirect impact of the projects will also develop the participatory action of women involved in their implementation, through women's involvement in community activities undertaken by local co-operatives and other grass-root institutions available in the communities.

5. Obstacles encountered in executing the above projects

Some obstacles were encountered while formulating and/or implementing the above projects, as follows:

(a) The main obstacle remains the limited information on available qualified expertise. This difficulty often causes delay in the implementation of the work plan as set out in the project document of each project. This specific problem should be largely overcome since the Arabic version of the ESCWA Director of Arab Professional Women is completed.

(b) The second major obstacle encountered is the time required for nomination of national expertise by their Governments, which greatly varies and hence causes delays beyond those expected by the plan of work of each project.

(c) National projects meet some obstacles due to official unforeseen procedures that could not be envisaged in the original formulation of the project plan.

(d) Finally, obstacles are encountered in the smooth flow of communication, between the consultant and the governmental or non-governmental implementing agency and ESCWA as executing agency. The country offices of UNDP play an important role in bridging this communication gap.

As a whole, the obstacles encountered in executing the projects are not major. Most of them are being overcome with more realistic planning and with the build-up of background and field experience.



