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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION**

**PROGRESS MADE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993**

Report on

support for technical assistance
projects for the development of women



INTRODUCTION

1. The activities undertaken by the Women and Development Unit of the ESCWA Social Development Division are identified and formulated in response to international and regional mandates, in particular the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Strategy for the Development of Arab Women in Western Asia to the Year 2000. These are translated into development projects, largely funded by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) which was created in 1978 during the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (1976-1985). The technical and field projects fall into three main areas:

(a) Empowerment of women: This area includes activities which aim at empowering women through the adoption of strategic planning, enhancing their social and economic role 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 ones. More specifically, the immediate objective of projects under this category is to improve the standard of living and status of women to enable them to make an even greater contribution to their families and society at large. Two projects under this category were reported completed during the biennium 1990-1991:^{1/} "Diffusion of biogas technology in southern Yemen: development of women in Al-Habeel village" (PDY/88/W01), and "Income-generating food-processing enterprises" (JOR/88/W01);

(b) Employment of women: This includes activities that deal with the assessment of the situation and the needs of women in the labour market through the conducting of field research and the undertaking of case-studies or carrying out of project assessments. A major project was fully implemented during the biennium 1992-1993 on "Participation of women in industries" (RAB/88/W02). The first phase of this project was reported completed during the biennium 1990-1991: it covered the participation of women in food and textile industries (five case-studies). The second phase was completed during the biennium 1992-1993: it covered the participation of women in pharmaceutical industries (three case-studies) in addition to providing a regional perspective on the food, textile, pharmaceutical, and electronics industries;

(c) Creation of awareness and eradication of legal illiteracy in women: This category covers activities to disseminate information to women, Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with women's issues and concerns. It includes three projects: (a) "ESCWA development initiatives" (RAB/89/W02); (b) "Regional guide for Arab women on employment laws and legislation" (RAB/86/W06); and (c) "Strengthening the statistical capacity for promoting the participation of women in development" (RAB/88/W01). The second and third projects were completed during the biennium 1992-1993 and the first project will be completed during 1994.

^{1/} See E/ESCWA/16/3(Part I)/Add.6.

A. Progress achieved in implementation of technical assistance projects

1. Empowerment of women: activities to enhance women's economic and social roles and encourage their participation in the process of economic development

(a) Diffusion of biogas technology in southern Yemen: development of rural women in Al-Habeel village (PDY/88/W01)

2. This field project was reported completed during the biennium 1990-1991.^{1/} It was implemented in collaboration with the Natural Resources Division and the Technical Cooperation Section (Regional Adviser on Energy) in ESCWA. As a product of the field activities, six case-studies were prepared including pre-feasibility studies and assessments before and after the introduction of biogas technology in Al-Habeel in Yemen with a final report and a tripartite review of the whole project (E/ESCWA/SD/1992/8) marking its completion.

(b) Income-generating food-processing enterprises (JOR/88/W01)

3. The project aims to establish and operate a commercially viable micro-enterprise to generate income for the General Federation of Jordanian Women (GFJW), thus enabling it to finance development projects to empower urban and rural poor women. The project achieved its anticipated goals, and established a productive unit for pre-prepared meals. The unit is selling its products of pre-prepared food to several supermarkets in Amman, and the suburbs. It is also providing catering services to institutions and individuals for special occasions. This project was reported as completed during the 1990-1991 biennium.^{1/} However, owing to some operational difficulties, UNIFEM decided to provide additional funds for 1992 to offset the general difficult economic conditions in Jordan and enable the unit to become self-supporting by end-1992. The assessment and final report on the project marked its successful completion during the biennium 1992-1993.

2. Employment of women: assessment of situation and needs of women

Participation of women in industries (RAB/88/W02)

4. This project was implemented in collaboration with the Industry Division in ESCWA and was completed in full during the current biennium. The project was conceived in response to several international and regional mandates. At the international level, the 1975 Lima Declaration and Plan of Action on Industrial Development and Cooperation underlines the importance of fully integrating women in social and economic activities, especially in industry. The International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade stresses the importance of ensuring effective and productive participation of women, as equal partners with men, in all fields of development in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the Strategy. This initiative was reaffirmed by the Fourth General Conference of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), which requested the Director-General of UNIDO to take into consideration the integration of women

at the national, regional and global levels in formulating the UNIDO programme of work and priorities and technical projects, and in undertaking studies on industrial development. In the same spirit, the General Assembly, in its resolution 40/105 of 13 December 1985 on the incorporation of the interests of women in the work programme of the regional commissions, invited "the executive secretaries of the five regional commissions to propose ... measures ... to incorporate women's concerns in their overall work programmes."

5. At the regional level, the Regional Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development in Western Asia and the Strategy for the Development of Arab Women in Western Asia to the Year 2000 provide the mandate for such technical assistance activities. These regional strategies emphasize the necessity of efficient utilization of all human resources, including women, and their full mobilization into the development process as half of the available human capital with unexploited potential and productive capabilities. Taking into consideration the cultural context of Arab society in the countries of Western Asia, these regional instruments provide guidelines for member States to rethink and reformulate their national policies so as to encourage the full participation of women in the labour market. These instruments call upon member States in the ESCWA region to adopt policies providing equal opportunities for women in education, training and employment as well as advancement and placement at decision-making levels to ensure and encourage their full participation in business and the professions. More important, these instruments impress upon member States the need to employ innovative techniques in order to incorporate indicators on the status of women as variables and inputs into their development models.

6. This project was implemented in two phases: phase one produced five case-studies on the situation of working women in the food and textile industries in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the southern part of Yemen which were reported as completed during the biennium 1990-1991. Phase two produced three case-studies on the situation of women in pharmaceutical industries in Egypt, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. This phase was completed during the biennium 1992-1993.

7. The long-term objectives of the project will contribute to the development of food, textile and pharmaceutical industries through upgrading the skills of workers and developing the proper production conditions, as well as promoting the effective and full participation of women in the productive sector. The immediate objectives are to assess the participation of women in the food, textile and pharmaceutical industries in order to identify areas where women have made a significant contribution and areas where their contribution is below average and requires action. In addition, the project aims to assess the skills and training requirements of women in the industrial sector.

8. The eight case-studies assessed the working conditions of women in industry, with specific attention given to women's needs, opportunities for training and promotion, and the benefits and problems faced by mothers working outside the home. An attempt was made to identify areas where below-average participation of women in the manufacturing sector might be increased. Employment structures in these industries were evaluated, positions occupied by women were noted, and policies and practices that promoted or hindered the

full participation of women were identified. These findings are instrumental in formulating the requisite policies, guidelines and recommendations to overcome the obstacles to future action. The recommendations will assist policy makers, concerned government authorities, and NGOs as well as prospective funding agencies to devise ways and means of improving the standards of living of these target groups. The recommendations will also assist in identifying areas where the provision of technical assistance may have an impact in improving the participation and hence the status of women working in the industrial sector.

9. The eight case-studies, five on the participation of women in food and textiles and three on pharmaceuticals, in addition to three studies on electronics industries prepared by the Industry Division in ESCWA, provided the basic input for the preparation of the Regional Perspective on the Participation of Women in Industry in Countries of Western Asia. The Regional Perspective and executive summaries of the 11 case-studies on the participation of women in the industrial sector are being finalized and will be printed during 1994 in a single volume under the above-mentioned project entitled "ESCWA development initiatives" (RAB/89/WO2).

3. Creation of awareness and eradication of legal illiteracy in women

10. This goal is achieved through the collection and dissemination of information, basic data and indicators on women to member States, NGOs and concerned end-users including all groups of women.

ESCWA development initiatives (RAB/89/WO2)

11. This project has three objectives. The first objective is provision of technical assistance to and support of the Documentation Centre on Arab Women under the auspices of the Amman Business and Professional Women's Club. The third objective is ESCWA participation in the Information on Women Meeting. These two objectives were reported as completed in previous reports to the Commission (E/ESCWA/SD/89/11 and E/ESCWA/16/3(Part I)/Add.6).

12. The second objective of the project 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 the bienniums 1990-1991 and 1992-1993 under ESCWA/UNIFEM support activities. This objective was partially implemented during the biennium 1992-1993. It will be implemented in full during 1994

13. The following documents were printed during the biennium 1992-1993:

(a) Profile of Arab Professional Women included in the Directory (E/ESCWA/SD/1992/3) (in Arabic), No. 17, under the series Studies on Arab Women and Development;

(b) Arab Women and Work: Current Situation and Development Needs (E/ESCWA/SD/1992/9) (in Arabic), No. 18, under the series Studies on Arab Women and Development;

(c) Impact of Social and Economic Changes on the Arab Family: An Exploratory Study (E/ESCWA/SD/1992/4) (in Arabic and English).

14. Six documents, reported as completed during previous bienniums, from the project on the "Diffusion of biogas technology and development of rural women in southern Yemen: development of rural women in Al-Habeel village" (PDY/88/W01 and RAB/86/005) were edited, with executive summaries prepared, and were printed in Arabic and English under a single cover (E/ESCWA/SD/1993/1 and E/ESCWA/NR/1993/11) during the biennium 1992-1993. This document incorporates executive summaries of the following six reports:

- (a) Introduction of biogas technology to Democratic Yemen;
- (b) Introduction of biogas technology to rural and remote areas of Democratic Yemen (financed from Netherlands funds-in-trust RAB/86/005);
- (c) Diffusion of biogas technology in (the former) Democratic Yemen: a pre-project survey of Al-Habeel village;
- (d) Situation of rural women in Yemen: a survey of the impact of the introduction of biogas technology;
- (e) Final technical report of technical aspects of the diffusion of biogas technology in Democratic Yemen: development of women in Mansourat Al-Habeel village;
- (f) Report of the Tripartite Review: diffusion of biogas technology in southern Yemen; development of technology in the southern part of Yemen; and development of women in Mansourat Al-Habeel village.

15. The following documents (in Arabic) were edited during the current biennium and will be printed during 1994:

- (a) Survey of the situation and needs of women in the southern part of Yemen;
- (b) Role of Arab rural women in the rural economy: regional overview;
- (c) Prerequisites for the success of the socio-economic project for rural women in the Arab world;
- (d) Socialization of children in the Gulf countries.

In addition, executive summaries (in English and Arabic) for the above documents were prepared for printing during 1994.

16. Similarly, 11 documents produced and completed during the bienniums 1990-1991 and 1992-1993 under the project "Participation of women in industries" (RAB/88/W02) reported above under subsection 2, were edited and executive summaries (in English and Arabic) were prepared during the biennium 1992-1993. These will be printed in Arabic during 1994 under a single cover and will provide a regional perspective on participation of women in industry in countries of Western Asia.

17. In addition, the following reports, issued in Arabic, are being translated into English for printing during 1994:

(a) Final Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Rural Women: Production and Services (E/ESCWA/SD/89/WG.2/9);

(b) Final Report of the Expert Group Meeting on the Impact of Population Policies on Arab Women (E/ESCWA/SD/89/WG.3/12/Rev.1);

(c) Final Report of the Working Group on Developing Indicators and Improving Statistics on the Status of Women (E/ESCWA/SD/89/WG.4/15).

(b) Regional Guide for Arab Women on Employment Laws and Legislation (RAB/86/WO6)

18. Under this project and in cooperation with the Arab Labour Organization, a regional guide on employment and labour laws for women in selected Arab countries was prepared during the 1990-1991 biennium and updated during the 1992-1993 biennium. It is being completed and will be printed during 1994.

19. This regional guide serves to create awareness and eradicate legal "illiteracy" by clarifying the rights and responsibilities of women as individuals, as family members, in the job market and in public life. It 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. 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. It creates awareness regarding the differential impact of these practices in the status of women in the society, and helps to eradicate legal illiteracy among women to enhance their participation in the development process.

(c) Strengthening the statistical capacity for promoting the participation of women in development (RAB/88/WO1)

20. In the light of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and General Assembly resolution 40/105, ESCWA initiated interdisciplinary activities to strengthen indicators and statistics on Arab women. The importance of data collection and standardization of statistics in manpower planning and forecasting and in overall development planning was articulated in the Regional Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development in Western Asia, the Regional Programme of Action for Western Asia for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, 1981-1985, and the Strategy for the Development of Arab Women to the Year 2000.

21. The overall objective of this project is to develop appropriate indicators and create a capacity to build and maintain a statistical database on the situation of women. It was formulated to overcome deficiencies in data and indicators on women and attempt to bridge existing statistical gaps. The project has three objectives; the second and third objectives were reported completed during the biennium 1990-1991 (E/ESCWA/16/3(Part I)/Add.6).

22. The first project objective was completed during the biennium 1992-1993. The Working Group on Developing Indicators and Improving Statistics on the Status of Women was organized in collaboration with the ESCWA Statistics Division, and the National Centre for Social and Criminological Research at Cairo in October 1989. The final report including the recommendations of this meeting (E/ESCWA/SD/89/WG.4/15) (in Arabic) was submitted to and adopted by the Fourth Meeting of Heads of Central Statistical Organizations in the ESCWA Region, held at Amman from 26 to 28 October 1993. It was recommended that the secretariat of ESCWA strive to develop a unified concept for indicators used in measuring the contribution of women in economic and social development. It was also recommended that member States prepare adequately for and participate actively in the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held at Beijing in September 1995, and in all the preparatory meetings to be convened by ESCWA, including the Expert Group Meeting on the Regional Plan of Action for Arab Women in Western Asia, to be held from 4 to 8 September 1994, and the Intergovernmental Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held from 6 to 10 November 1994 and hosted by the Jordanian National Committee for Women in Amman. The adoption of these recommendations is not just a political commitment; it also represents a significant step forward in improving the methods of compiling and standardizing statistics and identifying reliable indicators on the situation of women in the region.

23. The second objective is the establishment of a database on women in the labour force, which was reported completed during the 1990-1991 biennium (E/ESCWA/SD/16/3(Part I)/Add.6). This was used to produce the study on Arab women and work which was reported printed (see paragraph 13 (b) above). The third objective is to provide support to the UNIFEM/ESCWA project on "Participation of women in economic development" (PDY/84/W01). This was implemented in two stages. The first stage was to assist the Central Statistical Organization in the former Democratic Yemen in the compilation, processing, and standardization of data and indicators on women. The second stage was to prepare the survey on women in the southern part of Yemen which was edited and will be printed during 1994 as reported above (see paragraph 15).

4. Preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, Beijing, September 1995 (KW/GLO/93/W02)

24. In accordance with Commission on the Status of Women resolution 37/7 of March 1993 on preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, ESCWA is mandated to provide technical assistance to its member States by (a) assisting in the formation of national committees in countries where such national machineries do not exist; (b) providing information on the outline and content of the country papers; and (c) assisting in the finalization of the National Platforms for Action. Within this framework, this project was conceived.

25. The project will be implemented in two phases. In the first phase, technical assistance to member States will be provided to establish joint national committees by applying the principles of the participatory approach and by involving NGOs in the preparations. The implementation of this first

phase of the project was initiated during the last quarter of 1993. This entailed undertaking missions to Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Egypt, Yemen, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. Missions are planned during early 1994 to Iraq and the West Bank. Technical assistance is also being provided to Jordan. The second phase of the project entails the convening of national workshops in the member States visited during the first phase of the project. These workshops will be held during May 1994 to review with the members of the joint national committees the national plans of action prepared in the light of national reports to the Conference, ESCWA will act as a facilitator in these workshops.

26. A detailed report on this activity is also reported to the Commission at its seventeenth session under agenda item 6(c) on follow-up action at the regional level on United Nations world conferences and ESCWA regional meetings.

B. Impact of technical assistance projects on the advancement of Arab women

27. The impact of the technical assistance projects is directly linked to the three major categories under which the projects fall: empowerment, employment, and awareness. For instance, some projects were formulated to empower women with skills in specific sectors. Others assist in increasing employment opportunities and identifying requisites for the full participation of women in the development process, in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy, and in collaboration with the public and private sectors at the grass-roots level and NGOs. These projects create awareness among planners, women's organizations, national, regional and international bodies and focus on dissemination of information to eradicate legal illiteracy and bridge existing information and data gaps.

28. At the individual level, the projects aim to empower women and inculcate in them the self-confidence to generate income for themselves and their families. These projects enhance the physical and mental well-being of their beneficiaries by relieving them of time- and energy-consuming tasks. The projects also introduce women to new and appropriate agricultural and urban-related technologies. This in turn widens their horizons and technical know-how and introduces them to modern technology and its utilization. The projects affect women indirectly by developing participatory mechanisms through involvement in community activities at grass-roots level.