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**WOMEN AND POVERTY IN THE ESCWA REGION:
ISSUES AND CONCERNS**



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INTRODUCTION

Poverty alleviation has for many decades been regarded as a critical challenge, and, as such, has been part of development paradigms aiming to improve social and economic conditions in Third World communities and societies.^{1/} While the influence of various paradigms has waxed and waned, the issue of poverty remained an integral part of development efforts, either as an explicit focus, or submerged within other concerns, such as, for example, 'addressing basic needs', or 'ensuring a minimally adequate standard of living'.

In any case, it has become increasingly clear that efforts expended on the reduction of poverty have not had the anticipated results. This realization was reinforced during the 1980s by the ripple effects of the economic recession in many regions of the world. In fact, while there has been some decline in the proportion of poor population groups in the Third World compared with previous decades, the absolute number of poor people in these regions is believed to have risen from 1,051 millions in 1985, to 1,113 millions by 1990 (World Bank, 1993: 5). A recent balance sheet of progress and deprivation in the field of human development estimates that nearly one-third of the populations in developing countries live in absolute poverty (UNDP, 1993: 12). Moreover, the prognosis of the future magnitude of poverty is relatively bleak, to the extent that the World Bank has up-dated its estimate of global poverty at the end of this century by one-third (Van der Hoeven & Anker, 1994: xviii).

The multi-faceted aspects of poverty, as well as the reasons for the relative increase in the absolute numbers of poor people, continue to be the subject of divergent discourses (cf. Esteva, 1992). These discourses are further complicated by the complexity of development strategies implemented in Third World economies (cf. Fields, 1994). However, there are a number of realities over which there appears to be at least some consensus, and which are relevant to the focal point of the present study. First, there is the fact that poor population groups in the Third World have been disproportionately burdened by the social and economic problems emanating from the debt crisis since the early 1980s, as well as by the social costs of structural adjustment programmes (SAP) being implemented in various countries to overcome this crisis.^{2/}

^{1/} For an overview of various development paradigms, see Jazairy et. al., 1992.

^{2/} Structural adjustment programmes (SAP) are macro- and micro-economic policies which mainly aim to correct market distortions, reduce government expenditure, encourage the private sector and liberalize trade. As the proliferation of studies on the subject indicates, the effects of SAP are the subject of much controversy (cf. Stewart, 1991).

Second, there is an increasing realization that sustainable human development is unachievable if the roots of poverty are not effectively addressed.^{3/} Neglecting these roots, in particular the link between their economic and social components, has adverse impacts on the effectiveness of poverty alleviation strategies. Intricately linked with sustainability is the question of grassroots participation, which implies not only the need to ensure the access of poor population groups to resources enabling them to live in dignity and relative security, but also ensuring their active role in overcoming conditions which perpetuate their poverty.^{4/}

The third point pertains to the general tendency among project planners to overlook the intra-household aspects of poverty. Specifically, there has been some neglect of the differential access of household members to resources, and the implications of such differentiation for the welfare of the household as well as for the long-term sustainability of development projects (cf. Young, 1992). To which one may add that factors which facilitate/impede such access may vary from one cultural/geographical area to another (cf. Thomas, 1991).

Fourth, there has also been some neglect of four different but inter-related levels, namely the family/household, the community, the national and the international levels respectively. In other words, poverty alleviation cannot take place in a vacuum, and pertinent measures need to heed the dynamics of linkages between all these levels (cf. Feldman, 1992).

Finally, there is the reality that, at least up to the recent past, the gender dimensions of poverty have remained inadequately addressed, even though the complex 'linkages between poverty and economic growth (or decline), food insecurity, environmental degradation, population expansion (and) gender inequality' are increasingly recognized (Easter, 1993a: 1). Needless to add, the gender dimensions of poverty are closely linked with/affected by the roots of poverty, the dynamics of household resource management, as well as the linkages between the macro- and the micro-levels.

I. WOMEN AND POVERTY: A PRIORITY CONCERN

The importance of the gender dimensions of poverty is by no means a novel issue. In fact, it can be traced throughout the changes in emphasis which women and development paradigms have undergone since the early 1970s. However, the root causes of poverty have generally been a more explicit focus of the gender and

^{3/} Sustainable development is defined as 'a process in which economic, fiscal, trade, energy, agricultural and industrial policies are all designed to bring about development that is economically, socially and ecologically sustainable' (UNDP, 1992: p. 17).

^{4/} This recognition underlines the terms of reference of UNDP's Poverty Alleviation and Grassroots Participation Programme (Bureau for Policy and Programme Evaluation), created in 1991 as part of the operationalization of key issues addressed in the UNDP Human Development Reports.

development paradigm, with its 'examination of why women systematically have been assigned to inferior and/or secondary roles' (Rathgeber, 1990: 494). By implication, this paradigm points to the need for structural changes to overcome the barriers impeding the improvement of women's social and economic status in society. However, similar to other paradigms aiming to integrate women in the development process, the focus on the structural factors which perpetuate gender inequality does not cancel the existence of different action agendas. This is a particular concern among Third World feminists. Though they may pursue the common aim of improving women's status and roles in society, they may set priorities which differ in subtle and less subtle ways from the agendas of First World women (cf. Johnson-Odim, 1991). There is the additional complicating factor of divergent views on the prioritization of the importance of gender, reflecting to some extent the economic versus the sociological perspective; i.e. does gender matter primarily because of economic efficiency? or because of social equity? (cf. Lockwood, 1992).

In any case, the link between poverty alleviation and gender, deemed to be a vital aspect of sustainable development (cf. Harcourt, 1994), has more or less inadvertently become an increasing focus of analysis due to growing concern over the social impact and costs of structural adjustment programmes (SAP). While the implications of SAP for women and poverty will be dealt with in a subsequent section of the present study, suffice it to point out here that the need to address the social effects of SAP related policies on female population groups is no longer a seriously disputed issue (cf. Cornia et. al., 1987; CS, 1989; UNICEF, 1990; UNDP, 1990). None the less, the truism that the anticipated effects of economic restructuring are difficult to ensure without taking the needs and priorities of women into account, is not always being translated into pertinent strategies. Thus, in spite of women's established 'ability to devise and implement survival strategies for their families, using their unpaid labour to absorb adverse effects of structural adjustment policies', all too often policy-makers and project implementers tend to use 'a language that appears to be gender neutral, but that masks an underlying male bias' (Elson, 1992: 33-34).

It is in recognition of increasingly irrefutable evidence that tackling poverty requires an engendered perspective that the issue of women and poverty is being accorded prominence in the agenda of donor agencies, as well as various international meetings and conferences. For example, OXFAM views its 'mandate to combat poverty, distress and suffering, and to educate the public about the root causes of these problems', as intricately linked with the need for increased efforts to ensure 'awareness of women's absolute and relative poverty and inequality all over the world'.^{2/}

^{2/} OXFAM is a major development agency based in England and active in many parts of the Third World including Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Occupied Territories and Yemen; see OXFAM, 1993: 1.

For its part, the Preparatory Committee for the 1995 World Summit for Social Development noted the inter-relationship between three core issues, namely the 'enhancement of social integration, particularly of the more disadvantaged and marginalized groups; alleviation and reduction of poverty; and expansion of productive employment', and the fact that the concerns and priorities of women need to be an integral part of these efforts (UNGA, 1993: 3).

Similarly, the efforts of the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (New York) in this field is reflected, for example, in a recent meeting on urban women's poverty. Among other relevant issues, the meeting focused on the relationship between poverty and the 'gendered ways in which (men and women) engage in reproductive, productive and organizational activities' (Beall, 1993: 3).

The link between women's poverty and natural resource management and population, and the implications of this link for sustainable development, has been the focus of a number of United Nations General Assembly Resolutions. These call on member governments to take active steps to ensure that this link receives wider recognition and is incorporated into pertinent development strategies and projects (quoted in Van den Oever, 1993: 123-127).

Moreover, during a recent meeting of the International Women's Health Coalition, participants issued the 'Women's Declaration on Population Policies' in preparation for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) (Cairo, September 1994), which also underlines the link between population dynamics and women's poverty (IWHC, 1993). Indeed, one of the main themes of the ICPD was the subject of poverty and its link with gender, population and development. The issue of poverty and its implications for women has also been highlighted in sessions organized by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW/UNESCO, 1994).

These recent conferences and meetings underline the fact that the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, which included a focus on women's poverty, have in this respect fallen short of their aims (UN, 1985: 66-70). In recognition of this reality in many parts of the world's regions, the subject of poverty was designated as one of the eight focal points to be addressed during the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing (UN/FWCW, 1993).^{6/}

^{6/} 1) Inequality in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels; 2) insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women; 3) lack of awareness of, and commitment to, internationally and nationally recognized women's rights; 4) poverty; 5) inequality in women's access to, and participation in, the definition of economic structures and policies and the productive process itself; 6) inequality in access to education, health, employment and other means to maximize awareness of women's rights and the use of their capacities; 7) violence against women; and 8) effects on women of continuing national and international armed and other kinds of conflict (UN/FWCW, 1993).

Notwithstanding the obvious inter-linkages between all the focal points, poverty and its manifestations can be said to be a contributory factor to the social and economic inequalities to which women worldwide are subjected. It is this reality that has led to the coining of the phrase 'the feminization of poverty', and the establishment of its link with 'the proletarianization of women (...), high unemployment rates, growth of the urban informal sector, and the proliferation of female-headed households' (Moghadam, 1993: 37-38).

To sum up, the case for taking the gender dimensions of poverty more seriously and explicitly into account may be argued on the basis of two inter-related factors: Firstly, there is increasing global evidence, as well as irrefutable signs in many parts of the Third World, that poverty has a gendered impact, and that women will tend to experience its effects differently; and secondly, women's economic contributions, in particular in times of crisis, are crucial to the survival and welfare of their families and communities (Buvinic & Lycette, 1988: 149).

II. DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY IN THE ESCWA REGION

A. General overview

If global estimates of poverty are disaggregated by geographical region, then it emerges that the Middle East and North Africa are among the areas where the number of poor people has perceptibly increased: from an estimated 60 million in 1985, to 73 million by 1990 (World Bank, 1993: 5). With regard to the Arab world, though there has been substantial progress in human development in terms of life expectancy, literacy rates, and child/maternal mortality, the fact remains that by the early 1990s, some 40 million people were estimated to be living below the poverty line, and around 60 million adults were believed to be illiterate (UNDP, 1991: 35). To put these figures in perspective, the total population of the Arab region was in 1991 estimated to have been 217.4 million (UNDP, 1993: 180-181). This implies that around 18.4% of the region's inhabitants were poor, and some 27.6% were illiterate.

However, these figures obviously mask inter- and intra-country disparities, as well as gender-based differences, a point which is particularly problematic with regard to the analysis of poverty in the ESCWA region.^{2/} In fact, the most recent UNDP human deprivation profile includes information on the total number of people living in absolute poverty during 1992 for only Egypt (12.6 million) and Jordan (700,000). Relating these figures to the estimated population in 1992 in the two countries implies that around 23% of the Egyptian and 16.3% of the Jordanian populations respectively lived in absolute poverty (UNDP, 1994: 134-135; 174-175). Information on other parts

^{2/} The ESCWA region includes Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestinian Occupied Territories, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

of the ESCWA region tends to be unsubstantiated estimates, such as, for example, that some 80% of the total Palestinian population in the Occupied Territories are believed to be poor (Giacaman & Johnson, quoted in Moghadam, 1993: 280).

Some published information is available with regard to poverty mapping of poor rural populations in Egypt, Jordan, Oman and Yemen, reflecting the interest of both donor agencies and policy-makers in this economic sector. Though it tends to be rather general, this poverty mapping does indicate some major features of the incidence of rural poverty in the above countries. Thus in rural Egypt, the poor mainly include small-holders, landless agricultural workers as well as female-headed households. While these poor population groups are found in all parts of the country, they predominate in rural Upper Egypt and the oasis of the western desert. In Jordan, the rural poor include the landless and pastoralists, and predominate in the semi-arid areas of the country. The rural poor in Oman include farmers cultivating marginal lands as well as pastoralists, and tend to be concentrated in the highlands and the oasis. As for northern Yemen, landless and nomadic households tend to be poor, while in southern Yemen, this category includes small-scale farmers as well as agro- and nomadic pastoralists. They tend to be concentrated in the Highlands, the Tihama and other semi-desert areas (Jazairy et. al., 1992: 102-104).

There is also published information on rural populations living below the poverty line in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Syria and Yemen, though these are computed percentages which do not reflect intra-country rural or gender-based disparities (see Table 1, Appendix).^{8/} More recent figures for these seven countries, i.e. for 1992, are only available in absolute numbers, which, however, tell us little in the absence of information on the total number of the rural populations in these countries during that year (UNDP, 1994: 134-135).

Furthermore, there is a limited number of in-depth studies on rural poverty alleviation, such as on Syria and Yemen (quoted in Cocks, 1992 and in FAO, 1988), and on Egypt (World Bank, 1991a). However, the data on the two afore mentioned countries are for the 1980s, which implies that they neither reflect the more recent ramifications of the economic recession, nor the direct/indirect impact of the 1991 Gulf crisis (cf. El-Solh, 1993). Equally important is the fact that these data do not indicate intra-country rural or gender-based disparities. This also applies to data on the percentage of rural households defined as 'functionally vulnerable',^{9/} available for

^{8/} It should be kept in mind that the term 'below the poverty line' remains subject to controversy, since it does not differentiate between the poor and the absolute poor (Jazairy et. al., 1992: 460).

^{9/} The term is defined as 'the sum of various groups who, for one reason or another, are economically insecure and thus particularly sensitive to the slightest change in external factors (Jazairy et. al., 1992: 468).

Jordan (22%), North Yemen (75%) and South Yemen (62%) (Jazairy et. al., 1992: 408-409). The past dependency of these countries on labour migration has in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf crisis undoubtedly led to a rise in the number of functionally vulnerable households (cf. ESCWA, 1992b).

One United Nations source provides data on social indicators which may serve as proxy poverty data, such as access to safe water, sanitation and health services (UNWWS, 1993: Table 6b). These latest available data, derived mainly from country statistical yearbooks, labour/housing/health surveys etc. are, however, mainly for the mid- to the late 1980s (see Table 2). Thus, here again it is difficult to discern recent effects of political upheavals and of the on-going economic crisis, or, indeed, to analytically separate between their respective impacts. Another United Nations source provides the latest estimates for the total number of people without access to safe water, to sanitation and to health services in 1992 for selected ESCWA countries (UNDP, 1994: 134-135). Relating these figures to the total population in the respective ESCWA country reveals that, relative to the mid- late 1980s, there have been some improvements in some countries, but negative trends in others (see Table 3).

Another complicating factor is that there does not appear to be any widespread consensus on the concept of poverty and its measurement in the ESCWA region, thus rendering it difficult to identify the determinants of inter-country variations. The importance of taking into account the country specificity of poverty definitions is poignantly reflected in data on access to safe water, for example. Thus, if we take country sources as guidelines, by the second half of the 1980s, in oil-rich Saudi Arabia only 56% of the total population had access to safe water, compared with 98% in capital-poor, low-income Egypt (see Table 2). Moreover, some 30% of the rural population in oil-rich Saudi Arabia are estimated to have had access to sanitation during this same period, which was more or less the case in resource-poor Jordan where 32% of the rural population had such access (see Table 4). Though it should be kept in mind that disaggregating these figures would undoubtedly reveal intra-country variations, the point is that social indicators cannot be taken at face value. Moreover, criteria for defining poverty and its manifestations in the ESCWA region need to be applied with some caution as the more recent estimates regarding these social indicators indicate (UNDP, 1994: 134-135).

Another example is the issue of malnutrition. Thus, in Egypt and Yemen, both of which rank low in the United Nations' human development index (UNDP, 1993: 141), and are counted among the group of low-income, food-deficit countries (Jazairy et. al., 1992: 380-381), the incidence of malnutrition may be taken as an indicator of poverty. However, malnutrition may also be present among some population groups in other ESCWA countries ranking higher on the human development index. This fact may be due to illiteracy, ill-advised food consumption habits and/ or misguided notions of child care, rather than inability to secure basic needs. On the other hand, even in the poorest country of the ESCWA region, notably Yemen, malnutrition may not

necessarily be due primarily to poverty (cf. Buringa, 1988). Rather, it appears to be also related to the widespread consumption of qat, which suppresses the appetite, with obvious consequences for health status.^{10/}

In any case, latest available estimates on, for example, the number of malnourished children under the age of five years during 1992 in the ESCWA region reveal the difficulty of evaluating this type of social indicator (see Table 5). In fact, the available data tell us little since they do not indicate the total number of malnourished children in this age-group against which to judge the magnitude or otherwise of malnutrition. Nor do they tell us anything about intra-country or gender-based disparities (UNDP, 1994: 134-135).

The literature search also reveals that published up-to-date poverty profiles appear to be relatively limited in the ESCWA region. Pertinent, though by no means comprehensive, information is available mainly on Egypt and Jordan, as well as some data on Oman and Yemen (HKJ, 1991; Jazairy et. al., 1992: 486; World Bank, 1993: 70). However, these poverty profiles generally indicate trends in the incidence of poverty, rather than providing hard facts on intra-country or gender-based variations. Published sample surveys and ethnographic studies carried out in some ESCWA countries may supplement such information, but their results cannot be easily generalized for other areas in the respective country.

B. Women's status and female poverty

There are a number of indicators on the status of women in the ESCWA region which provide some insight into the conditions under which they live, though in many cases they are for selected countries only. However, the link between these indicators and the incidence of female poverty is not straightforward. There is also the fact that, a few exceptions apart, none of the available data reflect the situation in the 1990s, i.e. the years for which there is evidence that the deepening economic recession and the ripple effects of the 1991 Gulf crisis in the ESCWA region have been harsh ones for poor and vulnerable population groups, and in particular for poor women.^{11/}

^{10/} Qat is a stimulant plant widely used in Yemen by all social classes as well as both sexes. Its widespread cultivation is believed to constitute a major impediment to agricultural development and, by implication, food security (cf. Weir, 1985).

^{11/} It should be added here that studies on the economic analysis of war and its effects are relatively limited not only in the ESCWA region, but in most other regions as well. See Stewart, 1993.

For example, ranking by an index which measures women's status^{12/} in selected ESCWA countries by the mid-1980s reveals that North Yemen's position is the third lowest among a total of 115 countries, a not unexpected result given its development needs (see Table 6). Similarly, the ranking of Jordan (68th from lowest) relative to that of Iraq (46th from lowest) is indicative of Jordanian women's relatively higher standard of living compared with women in Iraq. This correlates with data on, for example, the percentage of rural populations living below the poverty line in both countries, which, by 1988, was in Iraq almost double that in Jordan, i.e. 30% versus 17% (Jazairy et. al., 1992: 404). However, the above index does not include other important indicators of women's status such as access to/control over resources, or access to education, training and financial services, or the extent of female participation in decision-making. Nor does this index reflect intra-country variations, all of which have implications for the incidence of poverty among women.

Moreover, the link between the status of women, female labour force participation and unemployment rates in the ESCWA region is a complex one. Thus, the Arab region is believed to have the lowest female labour force participation rates compared with other geographical areas,^{13/} although more recent estimates on women in the labour force as a percentage of the total labour force during the period 1990-1992 indicate an upward trend for a number of ESCWA countries, notably Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait and Syria (see Table 7). However, these data do not reflect a number of realities.

First, while it is true that low female labour participation rates are indicative of cultural constraints which contribute to the low value accorded to women's paid employment, it is also true that these constraints need to be viewed in conjunction with the implications of adverse economic conditions for access to employment opportunities. Second, and related to the first point, it is common knowledge that national statistics in the ESCWA region do not adequately reflect female labour force

^{12/}This index is a composite indicator which includes data on maternal mortality, female adult literacy, female primary and secondary school enrolment, female labour force participation and female/male wage ratios. See Jazairy et. al., 1992, p. 479/480 for the exact calculation of this index. However, concepts of culturally acceptable women's roles and status will tend to vary from one area in the ESCWA region to another (cf. Rassam, 1984).

^{13/}The aggregate for the Arab region is 15.1%, compared with 21.3% in South Asia, 26.2% in Latin America, 33.1% in Sub-Saharan Africa and 41.5% in Asia. Disaggregating the figure for the Arab region reveals that during the period 1985-1988, some 47% of Arab women are estimated to have been active in the services sector, 39% in agriculture and 14% in industry, which also indicates a low prevalence compared with most other developing regions (UNDP, 1991: 168).

participation rates. Nor do these data adequately capture the scope of women's economic activities.^{14/}

Third, the aggregate rate for the Arab region not only mis-represents inter-country disparities, but also fails to reflect changes in female employment trends over the past few decades in various ESCWA countries, notably Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. The factors explaining these trends are complex, reflecting the intricate relationship between, for example, state policies, stage of economic development (which has implications for the sectoral distribution of employment), regional/international economic trends, educational level and age group of the female labour force as well as gender bias. Moreover, aggregate data mask trends in unemployment, the expansion of the informal sector as well as rising numbers of female-headed households. They tell us nothing about intra-country disparities, and even less about the percentage of economically active women living below the poverty line (see Tables 7, 8 and 9).^{15/} There is also the fact that published up-to-date information on male/female income gaps, which may give some indication of women's poverty, is limited. However, except perhaps for some public sector employment, anecdotal evidence suggests that these gaps remain very much a reality in the ESCWA region. As in other Third World regions, many complex factors perpetuate this differentiation, including access to waged/salaried employment which is generally biased against women (cf. Grown and Sebstad, 1989; Ibrahim, 1989).

Data on female illiteracy rates, derived mainly from country statistical yearbooks, various surveys, etc. are available for the majority of ESCWA countries. These provide some insight into differentiations by age group and by urban/rural sectors, as well as comparisons with male illiteracy rates (see Table 10). Without exception, the latter are lower in all parts of the ESCWA region. However, comparisons between countries point to the fallacy of correlating high female illiteracy rates with the incidence of poverty without taking additional factors into account. For example, by the early 1970s, both Saudi Arabia and South Yemen had the comparatively highest female illiteracy rates in the ESCWA region, i.e. 86% and 91 % respectively for females above the age of 15 years, inspite of the vast difference in their respective per capita incomes (see Table 10). While the weight of tradition

^{14/} As Lourdes Beneria points out, underestimation of women's economic activities 'has been observed particularly in four general areas of activity: (a) subsistence production; (b) informal paid work; (c) domestic production and related tasks; (d) voluntary work' (1992: 1547). Among the ESCWA countries, Egypt appears to have achieved some progress in this regard (see Anker & Anker, 1988). The problem of unrepresentative and out-dated national statistics is of major concern to ESCWA (cf. ESCWA, n.d.; Mohsen, 1990).

^{15/} For a concise discussion of aspects of women's employment in a number of ESCWA countries, see Moghadam, 1993: 29-63.

provides some explanation, the South Yemeni data also reflect a high incidence of poverty in comparison with Saudi Arabia.^{16/}

More recent estimates of gaps between female and male literacy levels indicate improvements in all ESCWA countries for which such information is available (see Table 11). However, here again establishing a straightforward link between female literacy and poverty is problematic, a fact particularly reflected by data available on the percentage of female adults above the age of 15 years estimated to have been literate in 1992 (see Table 12). Thus, if the nine ESCWA countries for which data are available are ranked on the basis of female literacy rates, it emerges that capital-poor Yemen and Egypt rank in ninth and eight position respectively, while oil-rich Saudi Arabia ranks seventh. Moreover, Lebanon, which is in the process of overcoming the devastation of its recent civil war, has the highest female literacy rate, with resource-poor Jordan in second place.

There is also the fact that disaggregated data on female illiteracy rates by urban/rural residence are not only limited mainly to the non-oil ESCWA countries; in addition, they tell us little about intra-country disparities. For example, another source indicates that while 30% of females above the age of five years in Upper Egypt were in 1992 estimated to have no education, when this figure is disaggregated, it emerges that 63% of rural females in southern Egypt are illiterate. In addition, some 70% of ever-married women in rural Upper Egypt are estimated to have no formal education (cf. CAPMAS, 1992).

The same argument holds for the primary school drop-out rate (see Table 13) and female school enrolment rates at first, second and tertiary levels (see Table 14). Though these data indicate differences between the oil-rich and the capital-poor ESCWA countries, which, as indicated earlier, need to be interpreted with some caution, here again they provide no insight into intra-country and gender-based disparities. For example, in the case of primary school drop-outs, if disaggregated data were available, then they would more than likely reflect consistent disparities between boys and girls, though varying from one ESCWA country to the other. Moreover, since female school enrolment rates are relative to an indexed male average, they need to be viewed in conjunction with data on female illiteracy and school drop-out rates for a better understanding of the situation of girls and women in the respective ESCWA country. There is also the fact that though data on female school enrolment are comparatively recent, i.e. are mainly for the late 1980s/early 1990s (see also UNDP,

^{16/} Research on aspects of poverty in Saudi Arabia is limited, though some information may be gleaned from ethnographic studies (cf. Altorki and Cole, 1989). With regard to illiteracy rates in Saudi Arabia, this is not to imply that there has been no decrease since the 1970s. However, compared with many ESCWA countries, Saudi Arabia publishes relatively limited demographic data, which renders it difficult to pinpoint any trends (ESCWA, 1992a: 167).

1994: 144-145), it is unclear to what extent they capture the effects of recent political and economic upheavals in the ESCWA region.

Another indication of women's status is maternal mortality. However, here again the link with poverty is not straightforward. Thus, while the rate for Yemen (800/ 100,000 live births) corresponds with this country's relatively low rank on the human development index (UNDP, 1994: 132-133), the rate for oil-rich Saudi Arabia is higher than that for capital-poor Syria, i.e. 220 for the former versus 200 for the latter (see Table 15). That nationally aggregated data on health overlook important intra-country disparities is reflected in the result of a study in Egypt. Thus, a sample survey on maternal health care in early 1991 found that 46% of currently pregnant Egyptian women had ante-natal care. However, when disaggregated, it emerged that 65% of the urban women in the sample had had a check-up compared with only 38% of rural women (LAS/CAPMAS, 1991: 27). Further differentiation between rural Lower and rural Upper Egypt respectively would undoubtedly reveal relatively lower ante-natal care rates in the latter region.

There is some consensus in the pertinent literature that there are two particular indicators which may provide insight into women's poverty, namely changes in the proportion of female-headed households, and of women active in the informal sector. However, as will be discussed in a later context, the use of these indicators is not unproblematic, not least because it remains unclear whether ESCWA countries subscribe to similar definitions. In any case, while there is some data available on female-headed households in selected ESCWA countries, they pertain to the rural sector, and there are no comparable published data for urban areas (see Table 16). Moreover, as indicated for previous indicators, here too it remains unclear to what extent the effects of the economic recession and/or of economic restructuring are reflected.

Neither are there comprehensive data on women active in the informal sector in the ESCWA region. While available information on the proportion of women who are working on their own account may be taken as an indication of female informal sector activity, the probability of under-estimation is relatively high given the difficulty of collecting information on such activities for inclusion in the national statistics. This is apart from the fact that own account workers cannot automatically be assumed to be poor. Neither do data on unpaid female family workers necessarily reflect household poverty; rather, they may primarily be an indication of traditionalism (see Table 17).

None the less, it should be added that in spite of data constraints, the link between female-headed households and the informal sector, and the fact that this link is primarily established through the incidence of poverty, tends to be confirmed by small-scale surveys in, and ethnographic studies on, various communities in the ESCWA region. Thus, where published information on informal sector activities include the issue of gender, then it is likely that there will be mention of female-

headed households. And vice versa, discussion of the economic activities of female-headed households will tend to include some mention of the informal sector.

To sum up, there is a relative paucity of up-to-date information on the economic situation of women in the ESCWA region, and an even greater dearth not only of data on the incidence of poverty in general, but also on its gender dimensions in particular. In fact, the apparent neglect of the link between poverty and gender may be gleaned from a report on a recent seminar on human development in the Arab region. It includes some criticism of attitudes towards the issue of women and development, linking some of the ineffective results of efforts in this field with indicators pointing to women's relatively high share of poverty, illiteracy and school drop-out rates (UNDP/ATF, 1993: 3).^{17/} However, this review does not deal with the issue in detail or by individual country in the ESCWA region.

While there are various evaluations by donor agencies which touch upon the issue of women and poverty, they generally provide information on a project or community basis which cannot be easily generalized for the respective country. A cursory glance at the results/recommendations emanating from meetings which would appear to have some relevance to women and poverty confirms more or less the marginalization of this subject. For example, though most of the papers presented during an expert group meeting in 1993 on unemployment in the ESCWA region deal with the issue of female unemployment, there is little explicit reference to the link between the latter and the gender dimensions of poverty. In fact, where the issue of poverty is dealt with, then this tends to be in more general terms (ESCWA, 1993a).

Such a limitation perpetuates a trend apparent during the 1980s. For example, the report by an expert group meeting on agrarian systems and rural poverty alleviation in selected ESCWA countries in the mid-1980s neglects to give the gender dimensions of poverty their due importance in the presentation of pertinent policies (ESCWA, 1985b). This is surprising given the fact that the subject of rural women's role in development has for some time been one of the major foci of United Nations agencies active in this sector (cf. El-Ghonemy, 1984). Similarly, in a summary review of the implementation of structural adjustment strategies in Egypt and Jordan, no reference is made to gender in the discussion of the social impact of these strategies (El-Naggar, 1987: 1-23).

^{17/} To which one may add that of the 12 ESCWA countries (excluding the Palestinian Occupied Territories), only Egypt and Iraq have ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; Jordan has signed but not ratified the Convention; while Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen have neither signed nor acceded to the Convention (UN, 1991: Annex II).

Another pertinent example is a study of the incidence of poverty in Jordan. While it points to the neglect of previous research to incorporate the multi-faceted aspects of poverty among Jordanian population groups, it nevertheless focuses on the household as an analytical unit, thus overlooking the impact of various variables, in particular that of gender, on household strategies (Al-Soqur et. al., 1990). Nor is the issue of gender touched upon in a study of housing conditions of the urban poor in countries in the Middle East and North Africa, including Egypt and Jordan. In fact, the analysis confines itself to a gender neutral language, even though social aspects of housing policies are variously touched upon (Keles and Kano, 1987).

III. FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY IN THE ESCWA REGION

It is clear that the conceptual and data constraints impeding the analysis of the incidence of poverty in the ESCWA countries during the 1980s, continue to beset this region during the decade of the 1990s (Richards & Waterbury, 1990: 277-288). In particular, the dearth of disaggregated data on the status of women, and the difficulty of analyzing the link between pertinent social indicators and the incidence of poverty, has implications for gaining insights into the feminization of poverty. Taking this reality into consideration, much of the following discussion will necessarily be based on anecdotal evidence and on available published surveys and case studies in various ESCWA countries. While obviously unsatisfactory, such information should nevertheless provide us with relevant insights into key issues related to women and poverty in the region.

A. Manifestations and causes of women's impoverishment

1. Integrating women in development: a continuing problem

A useful point of departure to a better understanding of the many aspects enmeshed in the gender dimensions of poverty is the issue of women's economic activities and the development process. While the importance of these activities has become a more or less accepted truism in the Third World, the fact remains that not all countries in the ESCWA region accentuate it as an integral part of their development plans (cf. ESCWA, n.d.; 1985a). However, even where women's positive contribution to the development process enjoys official support, efforts are often eroded through the conflicting pressures to which women are subjected. A pertinent example is the contradiction between, on the one hand, the female role model inherent in development paradigms, and, on the other hand, legal and other constraints which run counter to this model, and which thwart the implementation of pertinent strategies (cf. Moghadam, 1990).

Moreover, even where women's contribution to the development process is explicitly recognized, as indicated previously, the magnitude and diversity of their economic activities continue to be inadequately reflected in the national statistics of

ESCWA countries. The problem is further compounded by increasing evidence that, far from women's position being necessarily improved as part of the so-called fruits of development, in fact women's 'assymetric' participation in this process has meant that they may bear an undue share of the costs, while more often than not sharing unequally in the benefits (Shiva, 1993: 49). There is also increasing evidence that women are exposed to various economic forms of vulnerability due to their gender-related status, as well as to the occupational segregation which perpetuates the under-valuation of their economic contribution (Standing, 1989).

This assymetry has many roots and causes, the detailed discussion of which is beyond the scope of the present study. However, of relevance here is the fact that this assymetry is also as much a result of the many constraints affecting women's gender role, as it is due to the type of development projects targeting women. With regard to the first mentioned fact, reflected in the cultural, socio-economic and legal discrimination against women in the ESCWA region, the problematic is further compounded by the confusion between women's gender role, which is culturally and socially defined and may vary from one era/area/social class to another, and women's sex role, which is a biological given.^{18/}

In parts of the ESCWA region, women's sex role, with its connotation of social reproduction and responsibility for the domestic sphere, tends to be viewed as their primary function in life, and is further justified by the belief that male and female gender roles are complementary. The on-going discourse on this subject remains inconclusive. It may nevertheless be argued that, in the absence of legal equality with men, and due to traditional customs which reinforce gender inequality, complementarity of roles will actually tend to perpetuate women's subordination in society. This is not to negate that variables such as class, education and type of paid employment have implications for women's status and autonomy (Moghadam, 1993: 63-65). Rather, it is to point out that ideology and socio-economic reality may often be in conflict.

Discourses on this subject in the ESCWA region tend to be further complicated by inconclusive debates on cultural and religious authenticity, of which the contemporary Islamic revivalism is a vocal example. Though this revivalism is rooted in a complexity of political, economic and cultural factors (Moghadam, 1994a: 8; cf. Ahmed 1992; Stowasser 1987), there is more or less a consensus among its adherents regarding the overriding importance of women's reproductive, i.e. sex role, and the

^{18/} To which one may add that there is no term for gender role in the Arabic language, a fact which has played no small part in perpetuating the confusion between this term and sex role. For a discussion of divergent views of women's gender role in Muslim societies/communities, see El-Solh and Mabro, 1994a.

minimization of the importance of their economic activities outside the domestic sphere (cf. Hawley, 1994; Hijab, 1988).

With regard to development efforts targeting women, recent research has been increasingly confirming the male bias of economic policies (cf. Elson, 1991a). Thus, in analysing the impact of development efforts, Mayra Buvinic attributes 'the misbehaviour of women's projects' to the adoption of interventions which inadvertently undermine the achievement of production aims, i.e. the very factor which increases women's opportunities ensuring them a more equal share in the fruits of development (1986: 653). There is evidence of this in parts of the ESCWA region. For example, an annotated review of women and development projects and studies during the decade of the 1970s and 1980s in North Yemen provides interesting glimpses of instances when efforts and changes in the name of development have not had the desired positive effects (Buringa, 1988). Similarly, a review of rural women's projects implemented by UNICEF in Egypt indicates that not only do projects more often than not miss their intended target groups, namely poor women unable to afford the collateral often demanded as a condition of inclusion in income-generating activities. In addition, project designs often undermine women's control, thus perpetuating their continuing economic dependence and vulnerability (El-Baz, 1992).

In the case of Syria, the evaluation of a project in a relatively under-developed area points to a number of impediments to women's participation in decision-making, including the indecisiveness of, and lack of coordination between, government agencies directly or indirectly responsible for women and development (Bauer, 1990). An overview of social and economic development in the Palestinian Occupied Territories also points to the complex constraints which hinder Palestinian women's integration in the development process (Salman, 1993). Finally, an evaluation of projects for pastoralist women in Oman in 1984 clearly indicates how development can actually marginalize women instead of integrating them in the process it is attempting to promote (Chatty, 1984).

This is not to negate some of the positive efforts expended in parts of the ESCWA region in the field of women's development. Rather, it is to reiterate that while it is recognized that 'women's specific components and projects are still useful in terms of reaching a greater number of disadvantaged women', there is evidence that the 'women only' approach tends to have the inadvertent effect of marginalizing women's economic and social concerns (Jazairy et. al., 1992: 299). For example, a rural project in Yemen provides an interesting example of how a comprehensive approach to the needs and priorities of poor rural women, which also takes changing economic realities into account, can help alleviate the burdens they shoulder due to traditional perceptions of their gender role (Power, 1992: 25). There is also the example of a water and sanitation project in Egypt, which focused on setting into motion the process of empowering women as well as their communities, while at the same time ensuring the cooperation of all actors and agencies involved in the project

(El-Katsha and Watts, 1993). However, the literature search reveals that such projects are not widespread in the ESCWA region, and that much more effort is needed in this regard (cf. ESCWA, 1992c).

While the above observations obviously only skim the surface of a complex subject, they nevertheless provide glimpses of some of the problematics confronting women in many parts of the ESCWA region. The intractability of many of these problems has been further intensified by ramifications of the on-going economic crisis and of the 1991 Gulf war, to which one may add the effects of social transformations taking place in the ESCWA region. There is increasing evidence that these developments have had, and continue to have, adverse implications particularly for vulnerable and poor female population groups.

For analytical purposes, a distinction will be made between urban and rural women, though many aspects of the above mentioned crises will tend to pertain to both.

2. Aspects of women's poverty in urban areas

Reductions in public expenditure related to the restructuring of the economy have led to decreasing public investments in the social services sector, to user charges for previously free educational and health services, to the reduction and/or cancellation of subsidies on essential non-luxury goods, and to the increasing difficulty of securing employment in the formal sector.

Evidence in both Egypt and Jordan suggests that these developments have particularly adverse implications for women in low-income urban households (cf. HKJ, 1991; World Bank, 1991a). Public expenditure cuts will tend to have the effect of increasing the burdens related to women's reproductive role, compelling poor women to allocate more time to providing domestic services in order to further stretch their household's disposable income. At the same time, they will need to work longer hours outside the home to secure sufficient cash income to help cover their families' basic needs. There is evidence that on average, poor women worldwide are working many more hours just to maintain a minimum livelihood (UN, 1991: 82), a development which is also apparent in parts of the ESCWA region. An increase in women's unpaid domestic work, as well as in work outside the home, has implications for children's health and well-being, as well as that of the elderly, given that their physical care is primarily the responsibility of women (cf. ESCWA, 1993b).

Equally perturbing is the fact that women's additional burdens in times of economic crisis will tend to be particularly at the expense of girls. In fact, female school attendance appears to be one of the early victims of poverty. Girls may be forced to drop out of school and carry out unpaid domestic work to enable their mothers to devote more hours to earning a living. Female school drop-out rates are

generally correlated with early marriage, with obvious implications for fertility levels, as well as for infant and maternal mortality rates. In very poor households, under-age girls as well as boys are often forced to accept poorly paid work outside the home in order to help their families survive. Where high adult unemployment is linked with economic distress, then child labour becomes part of the household's survival strategy, and, indeed, may be the only available option (cf. Rodgers and Standing, 1981).

Streamlining the public sector in terms of reduced employment opportunities and redundancies also has implications for urban women of low skill levels employed in this sector, and this at a time when their families may be particularly dependent on their pay-packets. Equal opportunity legislation, a feature of public sector employment in a number of ESCWA countries, may have little practical application in times of economic recession within a socio-cultural environment characterized by gender inequity; i.e., which expects men to be the financial supporters of their families, and which pressures women into vacating jobs in favour of unemployed males, justified by stressing their 'natural' roles as wives and mothers.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the economic crisis and the restructuring of the economy has particularly adverse effects on female-headed households.^{19/} A recent study of a poor urban quarter in Cairo discovered that some 29% of the sampled households were headed by women, compared with an estimated national average of 18%. The majority of these women were illiterate, and either widowed or divorced. They tended to have half the disposable income of poor male-headed households, lived in poorer housing units and owned very few consumer durables (Fergany et. al., 1994). The authors rightly caution that this pilot study cannot be generalized without further surveys, and is primarily useful as an indication of key issues related to women and poverty in urban Egypt, particularly the type of economic impediments and cultural constraints which poor female-headed households face. However, its results do confirm the trend observable in many other regions, namely that there is a link between urban poverty and an increase in the incidence of female-headed households (cf. UN, 1991: 17-18).

It is instructive to relate this study to a survey of poor women carried out in another Arab country, namely urban Tunisia (Ben Hamida and Cheikh, 1993). Interestingly, this case study not only points to the resourcefulness of women living in dire poverty, but also reveals that poor women generally tend to manage better than men living under similar circumstances. The researchers attribute this unexpected finding to the type of strategies which poor women heading their households are ready

^{19/}The definition of female-headed households in the Arab cultural context remains problematic, since headship is usually associated with the male gender role. One way of circumventing this is by defining headship in terms of who provides the sole or main income for the family, which is the definition adhered to in the present study (cf. OXFAM and Ford Foundation, 1988).

to resort to in order to overcome their poverty. But there is seemingly also the fact that these women view any change in their circumstances as an improvement in their relatively low social status as females without male support in Tunisian society, thus pointing to the flexibility of female gender roles in response to changing economic conditions.

By contrast, the female-headed households in the above discussed Egyptian case-study (Fergany et. al., 1994) generally appear to avoid taking undue risks, in part due to the absence of adequate social and economic safety nets. And yet, another study of urban poverty in Egypt found that far from being fatalistic, women tend to devise a variety of strategies to ensure their families' survival in times of economic distress (Hoodfar, 1990). This points to the reality that there is a broad range of resources on which households may depend for their survival, and which need to be taken account of when devising poverty alleviation strategies. It also confirms the above observation that generalizations from results of pilot studies should be treated with much caution.

Published research on the informal sector in the ESCWA region points to the complexity of this term, and the difficulty of capturing its multi-faceted aspects in a compact definition which takes inter- as well as intra-country variations into account. While lack of formal registration is generally perceived to be a valid criteria, there may be wide discrepancies with regard to such factors as the number of employees and type/scope of activities, so that the line between formal and informal sector activities are hard to draw (cf. Hopkins, 1991a; Rizk, 1991).

Furthermore, the early definitions of the informal sector in the 1970s have largely tended to overlook the particular concern of women, a fact largely attributed to the invisibility of women's work in this sector. In any case, cross-national comparisons indicate that the economic activities of poor women will tend not only to be concentrated in the informal sector, but that they will tend to be specific tasks linked to the sexual division of labour in a given society (Heyzer, 1981; cf. Scott, 1991). Moreover, women's employment in the informal sector reflects their vulnerability due to their subordination in society, which, in the absence of formal employment opportunities, compels them to turn to mainly labour-intensive self-employment in order to ensure their families' survival (cf. Mitter, 1994). There is also the fact that streamlining the economy as part of structural adjustment programmes may have some unfavourable implications for poor, unskilled self-employed women. As increasing numbers of the unemployed turn to the informal sector in search of a livelihood, such women find themselves faced with increasing competition, and are likely to be subject to further impoverishment.

The invisibility of women's informal sector activities, that is, invisible to the stranger's eye, is aptly reflected in research on an oasis community in Oman (Eickelman, 1984). The study revealed that some women may supplement the household income through cash-earning activities which they can carry out inside the

home, such as dress-making. Others may sell items unavailable in the local market, which male kin have bought for them elsewhere, at a small profit. Either way, women do not venture into public space to sell their wares, but either sell directly to other women, or via intermediaries. Thus, while poverty may encourage women to resort to self-employment, not only do the tasks they choose reflect the gender division of labour. In addition, self-employment is managed in such a way so as to ensure that the appearance of seclusion traditionally demanded of women in this particular Omani social setting is more or less strictly observed.

A study carried out in Lebanon provides an instructive example of the way the informal sector will tend to be a major source of livelihood for women in low-income households (ESCWA, 1989). The results of a sample of 200 low-income urban and rural households in the Beqa' Valley confirm the link between the type of informal activities carried out by women, and traditional perceptions of their gender role in Lebanese society. With regard to the urban women in the sample, their activities range from dress-making, knitting and embroidery to domestic service, petty trade and sale of cooked food. Significantly, work which could be carried out within the household had a higher cluster of women compared with activities which entailed working outside the home (Ibid.: 55). This correlates with these women's view that one of the major problems they face is balancing their household and child care responsibilities with the demands of their income-generating activities. The case study also confirms the type of constraints which women active in the informal sector face, including access to credit and marketing outlets, inadequate protection of labour legislation, and lack of training opportunities to improve their skills.

The fact that the informal sector may also be characterized by social stratification emerges from the summary of a study of informal economic activities in urban Jordan (Doan, 1992). The survey points to a link between workers' skill level and the degree of autonomy and job security they may enjoy, with the unskilled and those unable to secure steady employment being ranked at the bottom end of this stratification ladder. There is also the reality that informal sector employment tends to be one of the few options open to poor households in a labour market affected by the economic recession, and given the dwindling opportunities for labour migration to the oil-rich countries in the ESCWA region. Particularly for undeducated and unskilled poor urban women in Jordan, informal economic activities may be the only means of survival. However, the type of informal work to which they have access will generally perpetuate their economic vulnerability. Moreover, such work will not enhance their social status within traditional communities where female employment in low-skill jobs

is viewed in terms of economic necessity rather than a means to economic independence and empowerment.^{20/}

To sum up at this point, the above cited examples point to the particular vulnerability of female-headed households during times of economic crisis, including the link between poverty and informal sector activities. Above all, they reflect the precariousness of these activities due to gender-specific socio-economic and cultural constraints, as well as the general economic climate which victimizes women in ways which will tend to differ from that generally experienced by men. However, there are also variations in this type of household which need to be taken into account, two of which will be singled out here. Thus, the vulnerability of female-headed households is also linked with whether women assume the role of household head only temporarily (e.g. due to the migration of the male household head), or permanently (e.g. due to divorce, widowhood or desertion, perhaps as a result of war and armed conflict).

A case study in an urban squatter settlement in Amman, Jordan during the mid-1980s found that in good times, i.e. during the economic boom years of the 1970s and increased remittances from labour migration, women who did not have to contribute financially to the household would tend to withdraw from the labour market, unless they were employed in the public sector which provided them with the incentives of pensions and medical insurance. By contrast, women in low-income households generally did not have such a choice. They were mainly involved in menial low paid and thus low status jobs, such as domestic service or food-peddling, which provided little security. Significantly, the majority of these women were divorced, widowed or separated (Shami and Tamimian, 1990).

The lean years of the 1980s and early 1990s have hit such households particularly badly. In fact, Jordan is an example of the extent to which vulnerable and impoverished women have been adversely affected by the complex inter-action between the ramifications of the economic recession, the effects of economic restructuring and the impact of the 1991 Gulf War. By the early 1990s, increasing numbers of poor women were paying the price of these combined effects through higher mortality and morbidity. Malnourishment among pregnant and lactating low-income mothers has had serious implications for infant/ child health and mortality. In addition to increasing poor women's burden of juggling the responsibilities of their reproductive and productive roles, they and their families have found themselves caught up in the vicious circle of declining real incomes, rising prices, decreasing government subsidies on essential goods and services, and unemployment. An equally

^{20/} Empowerment is another term which has crept into the development jargon, but for which there is no equivalent in the Arabic language. Since its literal translation is all too often misunderstood by traditionalist elements, who tend to perceive changes in women's role and status in terms of the disenfranchising of men, empowerment tends to be translated into Arabic as enablement (tamkeen).

perturbing sign of the feminization of poverty is the increase in the number of female beggars, indicative of the extent to which the traditional safety-net of kinship support has been eroded among low-income strata in Jordanian society (cf. UNICEF, 1991).

Iraq presents an example of the effects which armed conflicts and war can have for women in general, and poor vulnerable women in particular. Thus, various studies of Iraqi women in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf war indicate that a high proportion of them have slid into poverty, a situation which has since deteriorated even further. Rising levels of debt, poor health, mental stress, rising maternal and infant mortality rates, prostitution, child labour as well as petty crime are but some of the indications of abject poverty (Bhatia, 1991). The price which women have been paying is particularly high, reflected in 'stress from overwork, deprivation, fear, family tensions, feelings of helplessness, and tending to sick and dying children', added to which are 'miscarriages, pre-mature births, breast-feeding failures, depression and insomnia' (Cainkar, 1993).

In Lebanon, women have suffered from the violence and stress of the years of civil war, and the economic havoc it has wrought. A study of war-related mental and physical illnesses indicated that Lebanese women were disproportionately affected. Though class origin and the stability of the kinship support network were mediating factors, the fact remains that women were generally more susceptible to depression and other symptoms of ill-health (cf. Zurayk et. al., 1991). This has particular implications for women in low-income households unable to afford the luxury of medical care, and on whose shoulders the physical welfare of their families primarily rests.

Economic indicators during the 1980s point to a decline in economic growth in Lebanon, to high inflation rates, the fall of real tax revenues, and a rising public debt to finance spiralling deficits (Saidi, 1986: 2-3; 13). The precarious social and economic situation of vulnerable and poor population groups, who neither have the skills nor the means to migrate (a historical safety valve in Lebanon), is further affected by the insecure political climate and the slow process of economic reconstruction (ESCWA, 1991). Needless to add, girls and women in low-income families have paid much of the price in terms of lost educational and employment opportunities, a fact reflected in the above mentioned study of Lebanese women active in the informal sector (ESCWA, 1989). Though information on the number of female-headed households in Lebanon is scanty, one may catch glimpses of them in some published research. This more or less confirms anecdotal evidence that they are by no means a phenomenon, be it due to male labour migration, or to the impact of the civil war (cf. Bryce and Armenian, 1986).

3. Aspects of rural women's poverty

Even where women's important contribution to agricultural development is highlighted in ESCWA countries, there has nevertheless tended to be a lag between

such recognition and the implementation of pertinent strategies. Rural women in many areas of the ESCWA region are continuing to pay a price for the earlier neglect of policy-makers and programme planners to take gender aspects of agricultural development adequately into consideration. Be it in terms of the health and welfare of family members, of the household's food security with its implications for the development of the agricultural sector in particular, and of the national economy in general, or in terms of the environment, rural women's contribution has all too often been overlooked, or assumed to be addressed in gender neutral policies. There is evidence that even when strategies explicitly target women in the rural sector, they often fail to be properly implemented.^{21/}

In fact, research on the link between women's role in agriculture and such variables as household composition, access to productive resources, farming and land tenure systems, type of crops, extent of involvement in livestock production, or age and educational level, is for ESCWA countries relatively limited compared with other Third World regions (cf. DeLancey and Elwy, 1989). None the less, the available information points to the continuing constraints which rural women face in many parts of the ESCWA region: for example, women's heavy burdens due to their reproductive role and to their often unpaid labour-intensive productive activities; unequal access to land, water sources and markets; traditional customs which prevent their participation in decision-making pertaining to crop/livestock production; the gender division of agricultural labour which fosters their economic vulnerability; and unequal access to extension services, technology, training and credit which have implications for rural women's productivity.

There is also the crucial fact mentioned elsewhere that comprehensive data on the scope of rural women's economic activities is relatively limited in the ESCWA region. In addition, available data may vary widely and is in some cases contradictory. For example, whereas the 1986 census in Egypt puts the percentage of females aged over 15 years among the economically active population in the rural sector at 5.5%, the 1989 Labour Force Survey sets this at 41.3% for the ages 12-64 years (UNWWS, 1993: Table 8d). For its part, the Farm Management Survey found that women in rural Egypt carried out around 40% of livestock work (quoted in Richards, 1991: 68). Moreover, the results of surveys and ethnographic research serve to further collaborate the scope and diversity of rural women's productive activities (cf. Morsy, 1990). These discrepancies are all the more puzzling if one takes into consideration the upward trends in Egyptian male labour migration during the past two decades, which has led

^{21/} This was confirmed, for example, by a gender analysis of UNDP agricultural projects in a number of Middle East and North African countries. Even where women were the primary target beneficiaries, they were in many cases marginalized during the implementation of the project, a fact which indicated the need for the gender sensitization of project personnel. See El-Solh and Chaalala, 1992.

to the substitution of male by female labour in many parts of rural Egypt (cf. Nada, 1991).

In any case, during the course of the past two decades, it is estimated that the number of poor rural women has increased by some 50% in the Third World. In the Near East and North Africa, some 18 million rural women were by the end of the 1980s estimated to be living in poverty (Power, 1992: 5). While disaggregated data by ESCWA country is limited, information available on Egypt and Jordan respectively confirms the above stated global trend in rural women's poverty. Thus, the number of rural women living below the poverty line in Egypt was estimated to have been 2.135 million during the period 1965-1970, and to have more than doubled to 5.381 million by 1988. In Jordan, the number of rural women living below the poverty line in 1988 was believed to have reached 112,000, almost double the number during the preceding two decades (Jazairy et. al., 1993: 274).

Similar to their peers in urban areas, rural women in the ESCWA region have been adversely affected by the complex linkages between the recession, economic restructuring and political upheavals marking the decade of the 1980s and continuing into the 1990s. But there are also the effects of some adverse macro-economic policies, which have had serious implications for factors such as population dynamics, the environment, food security and rural out-migration trends. Added to which are social transformations which have been taking place in Arab societies, and which have had implications for the institution of the family, including perceptions of women's role (cf. Al-Safti, 1992). There is evidence that some of these transformations have had negative effects on the rural household and its survival strategies. A case in point is the erosion of the traditional kinship and community social networks, which add to the disadvantages generally experienced by poor women-headed households. In any case, there is evidence that among the inhabitants of poor rural communities, women will tend to suffer relatively more disadvantage as poor people, as women and as heads of households (Jazairy et. al., 1992: 273).

Various evaluations of the impact of structural adjustment programmes (SAP) have contributed to highlighting past neglects which have been particularly detrimental to rural women. They have also pointed to the more recent miscalculations regarding the social and other impacts of SAP, including the feminization of rural poverty (cf. Elson, 1992).

In effect, rural women in low-income households are affected in a number of ways by the implementation of SAP. For example, the latter generally include the strategy of increasing the volume of export crops, and there is evidence that this tends to encourage the shift away from subsistence farming. This may often be to the detriment of the welfare of poor women and their families by way of its effect on food security, given that poor women are generally more likely to be involved in subsistence farming. Where land ownership, agricultural credit and extension services remain the prerogatives of men, women will tend to lose out when land formerly allocated to

staple crops is taken over by cash crop production. Since women are the primary nurturers of children, this will tend to have adverse effects on the latter's nutritional level and other health and welfare related aspects.

Moreover, similar to the case in urban areas, reductions in public expenditure on health and education as well as subsidies will tend to increase poor women's time allocation to unpaid domestic work, parallel to being obliged to increase their waged/unwaged economic activities outside the home. Here too there is evidence that this trend will tend to be at the expense of girls in the household who are expected to take over their mothers' household responsibilities. With increasing impoverishment, rural girls may join the reservoir of cheap labour and/or be forced into early marriage, a pattern which will tend to perpetuate the feminization of rural poverty.

With regard to the ESCWA region, published studies on the impact of SAP in the rural sector are relatively limited. Moreover, available information tends to be presented in general terms, rather than quantified and disaggregated to reflect intra-country disparities (cf. World Bank, 1991a). The problem of analyzing rural poverty in the ESCWA region is also compounded by the near absence of data which differentiates between the poor and the absolute poor. As indicated earlier, available data on rural populations living below the poverty line in the region tell us little about intra-country variations (see Table 1). None the less, anecdotal evidence suggests that women tend to be over-represented among the poorest of the poor rural inhabitants, an indication of which is the rising number of female-headed rural households (see Table 16).

Evidence from other regions indicates that female-headed households in the rural sector are generally subjected to different economic conditions compared with those headed by men. These differences will tend to be reflected in the limited resources to which female-headed households have access, the lower status and poorly paid income-earning opportunities open to them, a greater dependence on subsistence cropping, limited ownership of livestock, little or no access to labour-saving technology, training and markets, and the greater likelihood of being landless. In particular, poor women find often insurmountable difficulties in gaining access to credit facilities, not only because they lack the necessary collateral, but often due to the unavailability or unwillingness of male kith and kin to act as intermediaries (cf. Holt and Ribe, 1991). There is also the fact that the survival strategies of female-headed rural households will differ depending on whether husbands/male kin are temporarily or permanently absent (cf. Rosenhouse, 1989; Youssef and Hetler, 1984).

The case of northern Yemen provides an example of the cycle of deprivation to which poor female-headed households may be subjected due to male out-migration. In some areas, around 30% of households are estimated to be headed by women (Power, 1992: 25). The impact of male out-migration on women's economic roles will tend to vary, depending on agricultural conditions in the sending areas, the flexibility

of women's gender role as well as the level of remittances. In general, women in low-income households have traditionally been involved in agriculture, but the absence of males has meant that they have had to take on a number of additional agricultural tasks previously carried out by men. There appears to be conflicting evidence whether this trend increases women's autonomy and decision-making powers, a pattern which is affected by a complexity of factors (cf. Buringa, 1988).

In any case, the pressures on women due to their increased workload may be mitigated by the young girls in the household who are expected to carry out their mother's domestic duties, including the arduous tasks of fetching water and collecting firewood. The poorer the household, the more likely that its female members will be engaged in wage labour. The more women are engaged in economic activities outside the home, the heavier the domestic workload for young girls in the family. Coupled with an under-developed rural infrastructure and the continuing custom of early age at first marriage (generally 13-15 years), young rural women in northern Yemen often have little chance of formal education or tend to drop out before completing the primary level (cf. Shaalan, 1988). This pattern has implications for fertility levels, for maternal mortality and morbidity rates, as well as for continuing female impoverishment.

However, in general, the poverty level of the above described female-headed rural households may compare favourably with the landless poor in parts of northern Yemen, whose survival generally depends on sharecropping. Coupled with the fact that they may be paid in kind rather than in cash further reflects their limited bargaining power and impoverishment (Jazairy et. al., 1992: 50). One may assume that the impact of poverty on the women and girls in these households will tend to be particularly harsh.

Southern Yemeni women, particularly among the younger generation in urban areas, have generally fared better in terms of educational and employment opportunities officially supported by the state (cf. Molyneux, 1985). However, traditionalist cultural forces, particularly in rural/tribal areas, in conjunction with economic set-backs, combined to obstruct the implementation of some of the more progressive legislation meant to improve the condition of women in southern Yemeni society. Thus here too, women's lives in low-income rural households would tend to follow the predictable pattern of low educational attainment, early marriage and high fertility. While the incidence of male rural out-migration has been lower in southern Yemen compared with the North,^{22/} anecdotal evidence suggests that the above described pattern for poor female-headed households is generally applicable. In addition, land fragmentation, as well as misconceived agricultural policies which overlooked the needs and priorities

^{22/} In fact, restrictions on southern Yemeni out-migration were only lifted in the early 1980s, hence the relatively limited scale of this phenomenon compared with northern Yemen.

of vulnerable rural households, have led to the growing incidence of pauperization (Jazairy et. al., 1992: 65).

The further impoverishment of low-income households in Yemen has been one of the major effects of the 1991 Gulf War. The return of some three quarters of a million returnees, mainly expelled from Saudi Arabia, has further boosted the unemployment rate (cf. ESCWA, 1992b). It is estimated that only around 12% of the return migrants have managed to secure gainful employment (Shuja'-Eldin and Bahaj, 1992: 25). The relatively low life expectancy, the high child and maternal mortality rates, the low literacy levels and high unemployment rates can be expected to prevail in the foreseeable future. The danger of the growing pauperization of landless rural households and those headed by women is reflected in the previously mentioned estimate that around 75% of the rural population in northern Yemen, and 62% in southern Yemen, are believed to be functionally vulnerable (Jazairy et. al., 1992: 408-409). This probability has no doubt risen perceptibly due to the devastation wrought by the recent civil war.

Male labour migration out of Egypt's rural areas has also had important implications for the role and status of the wives left behind. One study found that through the assumption of responsibilities traditionally linked with the male gender role, women's contribution to family welfare became more valued, enhancing their status within the circle of kin as well as in the community. However, this was mainly within nuclear households, where the wives' autonomy was easier to establish. Moreover, the evidence that this trend would continue after the husband's return remains inconclusive (cf. Khattab and Daief, 1982). On the other hand, other research indicates that rural women's increased visibility/ participation in the public sphere does not necessarily widen their social awareness and improve their economic standing. In fact, where rural migrant's wives have had to enter the wage labour market due to the precariousness/irregularity of remittances, i.e. because of poverty, such employment has generally involved low-paid labour-intensive tasks. Due to the prevailing gender bias which accords less importance to these activities compared with the non-peasant monetized occupations that men move into as part of the migration experience, the status of the wives left behind tends to be ambiguous (cf. Abaza, 1987; Toth, 1991).

While there is evidence that labour migration has generally improved the living standard of the rural household with limited access to land, there is also some indication to the contrary. For example, anecdotal evidence in parts of rural Upper Egypt suggests that return migrants may spend their savings on a second marriage rather than on productive investment, with detrimental effects for the first wife and her offspring. In any case, the rural poor in Egypt generally include landless peasants or farmers with small plots which do not ensure subsistence, and there is evidence that many of the female-headed households in rural areas belong to this category (see Table 16). Further evidence suggests that the poorest of the poor includes widows and elderly people who are unable to work or find employment (World Bank, 1991a: xiv). The

influx of return migrants in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf crisis, the reduced opportunities for labour migration, coupled with relatively high unemployment and inflation rates, have no doubt aggravated the incidence of poverty in many areas of rural Egypt.

The glimpses which a study on rural Jordan accords us of women's economic activities indicate that whether they work on the family farm or as wage labourers, prevailing traditional customs as well as more recent developments in the agricultural sector has implications for their access to productive assets. In general, married women provide the unpaid labour on the family farm, though their control over productive assets is restricted to kitchen gardens and small goat herds or poultry. Even when women carry out much of the necessary farm-work, male kin retain control over the production and marketing process. For its part, wage labour is an indication of poverty, and it is generally women without male support who are involved, though generally in sex-stereotypical tasks considered 'easy' for them to carry out (Shami and Taminian, 1990). In any case, one may assume that these female wage labourers are among the 10% female-headed households estimated for the rural sector in Jordan (see Table 16). One may also assume that similar to their urban peers, the combined effects of economic and political upheavals during the past few years have aggravated their situation further.

As in other parts of the ESCWA region, published research on nomads and pastoralists in Jordan is generally limited to ethnographic data, evaluations of pertinent development projects, or information which focuses on economic rather than on social aspects. However, there is growing evidence that the exhaustion of rangelands due to over-grazing and adverse climatic conditions, as well as past neglect to include these communities in the development process, have led many pastoralists to join the pool of rural landless (Jazairy et. al., 1992: 50). There is also some evidence that women in poor pastoralist households are subject to many constraints which serve to perpetuate their poverty (cf. El-Solh and Chaalala, 1992).

B. Some implications of the feminization of poverty

The literature search reveals that published analysis of the implications of the feminization of poverty in the ESCWA region is limited. The few exceptions appear to be Egypt and Jordan, though data do not depict details of intra-country variations (HKJ, 1991; World Bank, 1991a). However, the discussion in the previous sections of the present study do provide glimpses of some implications of womens' poverty at the micro- and community levels. Though they are largely based on anecdotal evidence and the findings of small-scale surveys and studies, and, moreover, indicate trends for selected ESCWA countries only, these insights none the less generally tally with findings in other Third World regions. This pertains specifically to the preponderance of poor women in the informal sector, the likelihood that they will be without male support, and the even greater probability that they will tend to head the list of

impoverished and vulnerable population groups, as well as be over-represented among the absolute poor.

Taking these insights into consideration, the following overview will present some key issues regarding the implications of the feminization of poverty for the ESCWA region, keeping in mind that these are general observations whose application needs to take account of country specificities.

There is evidence that the feminization of poverty is a factor behind the increase in **female school drop-out rates** in both urban and rural sectors. The likelihood of such an increase is further heightened by the general neglect to enforce primary school enrolment, as is legally compulsory in a number of ESCWA countries. In turn, this has implications for the perpetuation of female illiteracy, early age at marriage, high fertility levels as well as high maternal and infant mortality rates. Unless poverty alleviation strategies target this young female population group, they will almost inevitably be caught in the same cycle of poverty and deprivation of which the generation of their mothers are victim, thus perpetuating the inter-generational transmission of poverty.

Another factor is the increase in **child-labour**. The effects of the economic crisis on child-labour is a relatively under-researched subject in the ESCWA region, even though it is by no means a new phenomenon. While the majority of ESCWA countries have legislation prohibiting child-labour, the fact remains that it is a feature of the labour market in many parts of the region, and that it appears to be on the increase. As indicated previously, in very poor households, and particularly those headed by women, child labour may be the only available strategy to ensure the family's survival. While a number of studies on the ESCWA region point to the resourcefulness of poor women to ensure a better life for their children, the fact remains that a complexity of social, cultural and economic factors constrain their efforts and even serve to perpetuate their poverty, and that of their children, even further.

Though indicators of child vulnerability, such as infant and child mortality rates, child malnutrition and number of children enrolled in school, indicate improvements in parts of the ESCWA region (UNDP, 1993: 140-141; 156-157), there is evidence that some of this progress is being eroded due to the impact of the economic recession, as well as the effect of wars and civil strife. Recent surveys of children in Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestinian Occupied Territories point to the vulnerability of children in poor households, particularly those headed by women (cf. Bryce and Armenian, 1986; Dyregov and Raudalen, 1991; Giacaman, 1988). There are also signs of increasing disability among children, a disturbing trend particularly in the case of low-income families unable to afford the necessary care (cf. El-Solh, 1993). Needless to add, the impoverished illiterate children of today are the unskilled unemployed adults of tomorrow.

Another important implication of the feminization of poverty is its link with the problematics of **food security**. The magnitude of this problem is reflected by the fact that, from being a net-exporter of food during the 1960s, by the end of the 1980s, the Arab region was importing some 40% of all food imports in the Third World. As Table 18 indicates, the food dependency import ratio of the capital-poor ESCWA countries is relatively high.

Briefly, at the micro-level, apart from being related to unfavourable physical and climatic conditions, food security may also be affected by the following factors: the neglect to tackle population issues; under-developed farm management practices which lead to land degradation and repletion of water resources; the shift from subsistence to cash crops which has implications for the household's self-sufficiency in food staples; the shift to livestock production which, particularly in rain-fed and marginal areas, leads to the deterioration of rangelands and to critical pressure on water resources; and misuse of fertilizer and pesticides which has implications for environmental degradation. Efforts to increase food production through improved technology, land reclamation and farming of marginal soil have in many cases also had adverse impacts on the environment. Food security may also be affected by structural factors such as under-developed markets and transportation networks, as well as limited opportunities for off-farm employment, all of which have implications for the survival strategies of poor rural households (cf. Alamgir and Arora, 1991; Mellor, 1988).

With regard to the **gender aspects of food security**, the important role which women play in the agricultural sector in the Third World points to the link between their food-related activities and food security. One way of highlighting the importance of rural women's economic activities in this respect is to analyze their labour contribution to the production of crops which are crucial to food security at the community as well as at the national level. The evidence in many regions of the world points to their largely unacknowledged contribution in this respect. However, since women farmers are predominantly small-scale cultivators, and because of the social, cultural and economic constraints they face on account of their gender, their potential contribution to food security tends to be undermined. Overcoming these obstacles requires the enhancement of their productivity and efficiency in the food cycle, as well as their access to appropriate technology, training, credit and marketing outlets (cf. Whitehead and Bloom, 1992).

In many rural parts of the ESCWA region, women are also predominantly small-scale or subsistence farmers who are subject to a multitude of economic impediments as well as gender-related constraints which, in turn, contribute to their impoverishment. There is also the impact of structural adjustment programmes, which, by focusing on export crops, has in many cases led to income reduction and a deterioration in the health of poor rural households. Poor women and their children will tend to be particularly affected by the shift away from subsistence crops. Neglecting these facts means overlooking the pivotal role female subsistence farmers

play in promoting food security at the community level in many ESCWA countries. Moreover, as is the case in the urban setting, the perpetuation of the poverty of rural women, and in particular those among them who are solely responsible for the survival of their families, has implications for the inter-generational transmission of poverty.

The feminization of poverty also has implications for the **environment**. Research in many Third World regions points to the importance of women's role in the management of natural resources, namely as food producers, as users of water and fuel resources, and as disposers of household waste. The evidence also points to the link between women's poverty and the unintentional mismanagement of natural resources in poverty-stricken communities. The stress here is on 'unintentional', since mismanagement takes place in socio-economic settings which may offer poor women and their families limited means of survival. Such mismanagement is further compounded by adverse ecological and climatic conditions, as well as misconceived macro-economic policies, which have directly or indirectly led to loss of arable land, soil erosion, desertification and depletion of water resources (cf. Steady, 1993a). Thus, promoting 'environmental consciousness' requires tackling the roots of poverty, rather than focusing on macro- and micro-economic policies which are merely palliatives and may contribute little to the protection of the environment (cf. Sachs, 1992a).

The feminization of poverty also has implications for **population dynamics**. As in many other Third World settings, high fertility in the ESCWA region is linked to cultural concepts of women's gender role which attribute a high value to motherhood. However, there are also links between fertility, access to family planning and related health services, female education and female employment. In reality, the inter-relationship between these variables, and a host of others which will not be dwelt upon here, is quite complex and will tend, moreover, to be country-specific. Equally complex is the way they contribute to women's poverty and, in turn, are affected by it. However, that there is a link between population related variables and the feminization of poverty is beyond dispute (cf. Sen, 1994). In fact, development projects implemented by donor agencies in various parts of the ESCWA region acknowledge this link by providing women with access to education and training, to family planning, productive resources as well as income-earning opportunities.^{23/} As pointed out earlier, this link was one of the focal points of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, Egypt.

^{23/} For example, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) supports a number of projects in parts of the ESCWA region which aim to increase family income, reduce infant mortality via improvements in sanitation, nutrition and immunization, and promote female school enrolment.

C. Measuring the feminization of poverty

As indicated previously, published social and economic indicators on the ESCWA region are generally for selected countries only and, moreover, are not up-to-date; nor do they adequately reflect inter-country disparities. More importantly from the perspective of the present study, while some of these indicators provide useful information regarding the stage of a country's development, as well as some insights into the status of women, they generally only skim the surface of the incidence of poverty and its gender aspects. Other published information based on poverty mapping and poverty profiles, or indicating populations living below the poverty line, is not only for selected ESCWA countries and mainly for rural sectors therein. In addition, such information does not reflect intra-country disparities either, and tells us little about the incidence and variability of the feminization of poverty. Moreover, information gleaned from small-scale surveys and ethnographic studies can generally only point out key issues, which need to be adapted to the socio-economic specificities of individual ESCWA countries.

The collection of comprehensive indicators which directly/ indirectly provide insights into poverty in general, and the feminization of poverty in particular, could well be a costly undertaking in terms of training adequate numbers of personnel and the necessary hardware facilitating data computations and analyses. None the less, the key issues emanating from the present study clearly indicate that effective strategies to tackle the feminization of poverty need to be based on comprehensive and up-to-date information. In fact, it may be argued that developing the framework of national statistics in the ESCWA region to include gender sensitive poverty indicators is an investment with long-term positive returns, rather than just simply an issue of promoting women's concerns in the name of development. In fact, dealing with the complex issue of poverty in general, and with the feminization of poverty in particular, is justified by the increasing evidence regarding the link with sustainable human development. Though the complexity of this link should not be overlooked (cf. Behrman, 1990; Harcourt, 1994), as the above discussed key issues indicate, women's poverty has implications for a multitude of variables, ranging from food security to environment to children's welfare to population dynamics. The relevance of these variables to sustainable development cannot be seriously questioned.

However, there still remains the challenging question: What kind of cost-effective information may be collected during a reasonable span of time, and which may furnish the basis for effective strategies to tackle the feminization of poverty in the ESCWA region? Not surprisingly, given the wide variations in the incidence of poverty and socio-economic conditions in the Third World, as well as the different schools of thought on the subject, there are numerous suggestions for measuring poverty.

The more conventional means include measuring the extent to which households are able to satisfy their basic needs; poverty lines which measure the extent to which households fall below a nationally defined income and consumption level; as well as poverty mapping and poverty profiles which indicate the incidence of poverty in particular localities/ communities and among specific groups. Another means is the food security index, measured through food import capacity and variability in food production and consumption, in conjunction with a number of other indicators which serve to rank households by poverty level (Jazairy et. al., 1992: 27-30). There are proxy indicators, which take as a starting point a minimally adequate standard of living, and, on the basis of available economic data, attempt to assess the impact of macro-economic policies on poverty (Tabatabai, 1991: 3-4). Yet another suggestion is the Rapid Assessment of Poverty (RAP) which focuses on previously identified poor localities, and, through household and/or community surveys, assesses their needs (Bilsborrow, 1994).

The analysis of the feasibility of these and other possible methods for measuring poverty is beyond the scope of the present study.^{24/} However, it is pertinent here to point out that the choice of methodology should not only be dictated by the criteria of cost-effectiveness and timeliness, but should also lead to the refinement of available indicators which take the specific conditions of individual ESCWA countries into account. In particular, they should promote innovative ways for gender-sensitive poverty monitoring. This implies that the chosen methodology be sensitive to the heterogeneity of poor female population groups in order to ensure that policies and strategies effectively tackle the roots of the feminization of poverty and do not merely address the symptoms.

Taking account of such heterogeneity entails the identification of poor women by location in the individual country; i.e. to differentiate between urban, rural and pastoralist/nomadic women, not forgetting transient poor female population groups such as migrants and refugees. Second, and linked with the question of location, there is a need to pinpoint the gender-specific economic, social and cultural constraints which impede efforts aiming to improve women's living conditions. The extent of these constraints in a specific country may differ from one location to another, though they will tend to have the following facts in common: the unequal access of women to resources, education, training, secure employment, credit, marketing facilities, as well as legal protection.

Third, a distinction needs to be made with regard to the extent of poverty; i.e. to differentiate between women who are functionally vulnerable in the sense defined elsewhere in this study, and poor and absolute poor female population groups. Such

^{24/} Other sources which provide useful insights into the measurement of poverty include Boltvinic, 1994; Ramprakash, 1993; Streeten, 1994; and World Bank, 1991b.

a distinction needs to also take account of women who are seasonally poor, as well as poor women additionally disadvantaged by mental or physical disabilities.

Fourth, given the strong link between poverty and the incidence of female-headed families, an identification of intra-household characteristics is crucial to understanding survival strategies as well as the extent to which such households are averse to risk-taking. The variability of female-headed households is, for example, related to the age/literacy/skill level of the woman head, the age/gender/ number of dependents, as well as the extent of kin/kith support networks.

It is clear that, whatever poverty measurements are resorted to -- the choice obviously being dictated by the specificity of the respective ESCWA country and the incidence of poverty among its population groups -- ensuring that such measures are genuinely gender sensitive can be said to be an optimal way of effectively tackling the roots of poverty.

IV. ALLEVIATING WOMEN'S POVERTY IN THE ESCWA REGION: AN ACTION AGENDA

An action agenda to alleviate the poverty of poor female population groups in urban, rural and pastoralist/nomadic areas in the ESCWA region should be based on the conviction that the feminization of poverty is inimical to sustainable human development. In addition, by taking the multitude of variables which foster and perpetuate the vulnerability of poor women into account, such an agenda can contribute to tackling the structural factors which perpetuate women's poverty and, by implication, that of the communities in which they live.

A. Targeted interventions for poor women

The problem of misconceived interventions aiming to integrate women in the development process, in great part due to the neglect to apply a gender analytical approach, has been alluded to elsewhere in the present study. Taking this into consideration, the following discussion focuses on the criteria deemed necessary for ensuring that targeted interventions for poor women effectively tackle the constraints which hinder them from achieving a life of dignity and relative security.^{25/}

First, all too often, income-generating projects for poor women tend to be under-capitalized, revealing a tendency to view these projects as additional female

^{25/} Targeted interventions are increasingly becoming an option for poverty alleviation, not least because of their relative cost-effectiveness since they focus more directly on groups identified as poor (cf. Ramprakash, 1991).

activities rather than as the support base of the household which they generally are. This view is fed by notions of male/female gender roles which overlook the reality that, particularly in rural areas, women have traditionally been involved in various paid and unpaid economic activities more or less vital to the household's survival. As in other parts of the Third World, there is in the ESCWA region a gap between social attitudes and economic reality.

Second, and related to the first point, there is a need to ensure that the principle of economic viability takes precedence over, or is at least accorded equal importance to, cultural appropriateness when it comes to the choice of project content. Anecdotal evidence in various parts of the ESCWA region suggests that innovative and economically viable projects can encourage more flexibility in traditional concepts of female gender roles than is commonly believed, and that women themselves are quite resourceful in stretching the flexibility of their gender role within the boundaries of acceptable social behaviour.

Third, projects for poor women need to take the issue of sustainability more seriously into consideration. This implies that at the project formulation, implementation and evaluation stages, female target groups are encouraged to define their own needs and priorities and to be actively involved. This not only helps ensure project viability beyond the funding period, but also promotes the principle of self-reliance at grassroots level. In any case, interventions should aim to guide this multi-faceted process rather than dictating solutions with which target beneficiaries cannot easily identify.

Fourth, since poverty and traditionalism tend to be correlated, it may in some instances be necessary to promote projects which target poor women and their families, rather than women as individuals, though keeping in mind that due to intra-household variability in access to resources, women may not automatically benefit. In this case, it is important that additional efforts be expended to raise the status of poor women by ensuring their access to training, family planning etc.

Fifth, there is a need to promote women's associations and female leaders among poor female population groups in order to foster a spirit of self-reliance, and to encourage poor women to define their own priorities and needs in relation to the economic projects which target them. These associations can be multi-purpose (i.e. provide more than one service which contribute directly or indirectly to improving the condition of poor women), or single purpose (e.g. rotating credit association, communal farming, small-scale urban enterprise). In any case, these associations need to be supported by various bodies within the community as well as beyond, while at the same time ensuring that they are not dominated by local elites and vested interests.

Sixth, since sustainability and economic viability of projects are also dependent on improving women's productivity, there is a need to ensure that poor women have

the necessary economic support, be it in terms of access to affordable credit, to relevant extension services, to marketing facilities within easy reach, as well as to training which up-grades their skills in ways which are relevant to the economic circumstances of the localities/areas in which they live. This also includes access to appropriate technology which takes account of the fact that poor women are more likely to be involved in labour-intensive economic activities.

Seventh, the needs of very poor women and of impoverished female-headed households, as well as the specific constraints they face, need to be particularly taken into consideration. The risk-aversion often exhibited by these target groups is generally due to their inability to secure the collateral required for inclusion in income-generating projects, rather than because of any innate conservatism. Pertinent interventions need to support and further develop the survival strategies of very poor female target groups, while at the same time ensuring that the above mentioned criteria for project sustainability are put into practice. Enabling poor women to escape the vicious cycle of poverty in which they are trapped is an effective means for tackling the inter-generational transmission of poverty.

Eight, providing poor women with access to economic opportunities needs to be counter-balanced by support which alleviates the double burdens they shoulder due to the demands of their reproductive and productive roles. The content of such support should be geared to the reality of these women's lives, allowing them to define their own priorities. However, though here again interventions should ideally seek to guide rather than dictate the definition of priorities, there is nevertheless a need to actively promote family planning motivation and quality health care, and in particular the education of girls and women. The latter tends to be a prime victim of poverty and of economic distress. Female education does not only have important ripple effects with regard to health, family planning and access to better paid employment. Above all it plays a role in ensuring that women are more aware of their legal rights, and encourages their self-confidence in dealing with the world outside the confines of their homes. This is particularly important in traditional communities where customary laws undermine the application of legal laws which accord women certain rights, however unequal to men (such as the right to own and control land and other productive assets, for example).

Last but not least, more attention needs to be paid to the older generation of poor women who, either through widowhood, divorce or desertion, and due to the high incidence of illiteracy and low skill levels among them, will tend to have even less means of securing their livelihood than is the case among the younger generation of poor women. There is evidence in parts of the ESCWA region of demographic changes reflecting an increase in the number of elderly people. There is also evidence that some of the social transformations which are taking place have eroded the traditional support networks which provided security in old age. In any case, income-generation projects also need to take account of the special needs of elderly poor women, as well as

incorporate some of the positive aspects of their traditional knowledge which can be relevant to the promotion of self-reliance.

B. Appropriate poverty alleviation strategies

The above discussion of interventions targeting poor female population groups at the micro-level can obviously not succeed without adequate support at the macro- and national levels. The following discusses a number of strategies deemed particularly crucial to tackling the feminization of poverty.

A first important step entails the formulation of a conceptual framework at the national level which is guided by the principle that poverty alleviation is an integral part of macro- and micro- policy formulations. This framework should also take explicit account of the complex ways in which macro-economic policy changes can affect the incidence of poverty in general, and the feminization of poverty in particular, at both the sub-national and community levels.

Second, the feed-back between micro- and macro-levels needs to be supported by quantitative as well as qualitative information. This includes disaggregated data which adequately reflect and measure the economic activities of women, in particular poor women who tend to be the hardest to capture in statistics due to their preponderance in the informal sector. In turn, this enables the formulation of strategies which effectively address the structural roots of poverty rather than merely alleviating its symptoms.

Third, there is a need to ensure that the promotion of sustainable projects targeting poor population groups are supported by legislation which encourage genuine grassroots participation and the principle of self-reliance. This entails setting into motion a process of decentralization, and encouraging regions and localities to define their own priorities and needs within nationally defined target frameworks.

Fourth, and following on from the above point, promoting genuine grassroots participation requires addressing at the national as well as at the local levels the many impediments which inhibit women's integration in the development process, and which have particularly adverse implications for the situation of poor female population groups. In turn, this implies tackling the often contradictory messages on women's socio-economic roles. Specifically, the female role models propagated by programmes aiming to integrate women in development, as well as the principle of gender equality inherent in the constitutions of various ESCWA countries, are often undermined by pervasive customs and legal injunctions which undermine the recognition of women's social and economic contributions to the welfare of their families, communities and societies.

Fifth, grassroots participation also needs to be supported by flexible policies which ensure access of the very poor to basic services which they are unable to provide for themselves, or are unable to pay for however minimal the user fee. This entails the formulation of flexible poverty alleviation policies which can mobilize public resources where private initiatives are either lacking or inadequate, and which take the particular need of poor female population groups into account.

Sixth, there is a need to establish safety nets in the form of public funds to ensure that the poorest among poor women are protected from further destitution. There is an obvious link between the provision of relevant data on the incidence of poverty, and the implementation of a system which effectively targets the very poor and avoids the problem of subsidizing less needy population groups. Obviously, the actual content of safety nets, i.e. whether resource transfers are in cash or in kind or a combination of both, will depend on the particular circumstances of individual ESCWA countries.

Seventh, poverty alleviation strategies need to incorporate measures which facilitate the access of poor women to productive employment by way of tackling the more immediate barriers to such access. In the first instance, this should entail the provision of affordable credit and the up-grading of skills enabling poor women to move into better paid and more secure economic activities. Such measures should also take account of the gender-specific concerns of poor women, such as lack of access to information on credit and training, as well as the time constraints they may be subjected to and which inhibit them from taking advantage of opportunities meant to alleviate their poverty. In effect, this calls for sectoral policies which are both poverty as well as gender sensitive.

The eight point pertains specifically to poverty in the rural sector. There is evidence that increasing impoverishment among rural populations has implications for urban pauperization by way of rising rural out-migration. Poverty alleviation strategies targeting poor women in the rural sector need to take this into consideration by promoting the economic viability of subsistence farms (a category in which women tend to predominate), which, in turn, contributes to food security and minimizes environmental degradation. But there is also a need for supporting investment in off-farm employment opportunities. The latter may include the promotion of informal activities directly or indirectly related to agricultural production, and/or the revival of economically viable traditional activities which contribute to the household's survival.

C. Cooperation between public and private sectors

The on-going economic recession in many parts of the ESCWA region, as well as the implementation of structural adjustment programmes (SAP) in various ESCWA countries, has a number of implications for the role of the public sector in the alleviation of poverty. The scope of public sector involvement is the subject of much

controversy, discussion of which will not be entered into here. Suffice it to point out that in as much as the subject of poverty, and in particular the feminization of poverty, need to be accorded national priority, both the public and private sectors have important roles to play.

On the governmental side, there is a need to devise macro-level policies which provide the basis for the successful implementation of strategies at the sub-national and micro-levels. This includes the reform of legislation which impede poor population groups, and in particular poor women, from seizing chances of improving the conditions under which they live. It also includes taking on board relevant strategies, some of which have been discussed in the previous section.

However, there is also a need to dismantle legal and other barriers which inhibit the establishment and development of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based associations (CBAs) which can make important contributions to poverty alleviation. Both have a vital role to play, not least because of their familiarity with conditions at the micro- and community levels.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which have a clear development aim can play a role in promoting and supporting poverty alleviation projects at the community level through funding and provision of technical expertise. They can also be an important conduit between the local, sub-national and national levels, mobilizing people at the grassroots and lobbying governmental institutions for changes in policies and strategies which are detrimental to the interests of poor population groups. NGOs whose focal point is women and development are particularly well placed to tackle aspects of the feminization of poverty.

However, it needs to be pointed out that the effective contribution of NGOs in the ESCWA region hinges on a number of factors. First, hurdles to their registration as legal entities need to be dismantled. Second, a framework of constructive cooperation between NGOs and government authorities needs to be set up to ensure that efforts expended in the field of poverty alleviation reinforce one another, thus avoiding wastage and duplication. On the government's part, this includes ensuring that macro-policies and related strategies are conducive to poverty alleviation programmes carried out by NGOs at the micro-level. Third, NGOs which focus on women's concerns need to gender sensitize their staff, as well as promote the involvement of men in their activities. This would serve to avoid the marginalization of targeted interventions for poor women as one more 'woman and development project'. Fourth, NGOs need to also sensitize their staff on poverty issues and concerns to ensure that their programmes and projects are sustainable and effectively encourage grassroots participation. Such sensitization needs

to be also extended to governmental staff who work in the fields of women and/or poverty, in order to ensure that the collaboration between public and private sectors respectively is effective in the long-term.

With regard to community-based associations (CBAs), the literature search reveals that there is no consensus regarding their role in development, not surprising given the diversity of socio-economic settings in the Third World. Thus, opinions tend to be divided between those who believe that existing CBAs should be supported through developing their technical expertise to enable them to be effectively involved in development programmes; and others who believe that innovative approaches, particularly in the field of women and development and in poverty alleviation, require the establishment of new associations unencumbered by beliefs and actions which may be inimical to development goals.

However, with regard to the ESCWA region, this should not be an either/or choice. Much will depend on the situational context in the communities of the respective countries. Thus, in some areas, conditions may be conducive to evolving existing CBAs, while in others, conditions may require the formation of new associations, either because existing ones are too entrenched in traditional attitudes, or because they are non-existent. Either way, the fundamental issue is to promote the economic, social and legal climate which enables CBAs to evolve into genuine grassroots organizations which can effectively tackle poverty and its manifestations among the local populations they are serving. There is obviously also a need to ensure that poverty sensitization of staff and volunteers involved in CBAs is balanced by an equal focus on the gender aspects of poverty.

Last but not least, there is a need to encourage and support local women's associations at the grassroots level. Through their familiarity with local conditions and with the constraints which hinder poor women from improving their own and their families' welfare, such associations are ideally placed to rally poor women into cooperative action. However, these associations need the support of CBAs, of NGOs as well as of governmental channels if they are to succeed in helping their members to define their needs and priorities, and to actively attempt to overcome the disadvantages which perpetuate their poverty.

To conclude, a gender sensitive poverty alleviation policy requires an action agenda which is flexible enough to respond to the social and economic diversities in the ESCWA region. It should also help ensure that actors and agencies at the local, sub-national and national levels are not only aware of the link between poverty and gender, but actively involved in overcoming the many adverse manifestations of vulnerability and pauperization. **Above all, there is a need to promote the crucial reality in the ESCWA region that investment in poverty alleviation, and in particular in comprehensive strategies to tackle the structural factors behind the feminization of poverty, is an investment in sustainable human development.**

APPENDIX

TABLE 1. PERCENTAGE OF RURAL POPULATION LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE IN SELECTED ESCWA COUNTRIES, 1988

Country	% of rural population
Egypt	25
Iraq	30
Jordan	17
Lebanon	15
Oman	6
Syria	54
Yemen	30

Source: Jazairy et. al., 1992: 404-405.

TABLE 2. PERCENTAGE OF URBAN/RURAL POPULATION WITH ACCESS TO SAFE WATER AND ADEQUATE SANITATION FACILITIES IN THE ESCWA REGION
(Latest available data)*

Country	% Access to water		
	Total	Urban	Rural
Bahrain (1989)	96	-	-
Egypt (1986)	98	100	97
Iraq (1987)	80	93	47
Jordan (1979)	70	90	41
Kuwait (1987)	94	-	-
Lebanon	-	-	-
Occupied Territories	-	-	-
Oman (1989)	83	-	-
Qatar (1986)	89	-	-
Saudi Arabia (1987)	56	-	-
Syria	-	-	-
United Arab Emirates (1987)	66	-	-
Yemen			
North (1986)	26	75	17
South (1988)	52	-	-

Table 2. (continued)

Country	% Access to sanitation		
	Total	Urban	Rural
Bahrain (1989)	65	-	-
Egypt	-	-	-
Iraq	-	-	-
Jordan (1979)	94	98	89
Kuwait (1987)	89	-	-
Lebanon	-	-	-
Oman (1989)	73	-	-
Qatar (1987)	94	-	-
Saudi Arabia (1987)	75	-	-
Syria	-	-	-
United Arab Emirates (1987)	98	-	-
Yemen North (1986)	16	53	8
Yemen South	-	-	-

Source: Adapted from UNWWS, 1993, Table 6b; * based on ESCWA country sources.

TABLE 3. POPULATION IN ESCWA COUNTRIES WITHOUT ACCESS TO SAFE WATER, SANITATION AND HEALTH SERVICES, 1992

Country	Safe Water	Sanitation in millions (%)*	Health
Bahrain	-	-	-
Egypt	6.3(11.5)	27.0(49.1)	0.3(1.0)
Iraq	1.7(8.8)	5.8(30.1)	0.2(10.4)
Jordan	-	1.0(23.3)	0.2(4.7)
Kuwait	-	-	-
Lebanon	0.1(3.4)	0.6(20.1)	0.1(3.4)
Occupied Terr.	-	-	-
Oman	0.3(18.6)	0.9(56.3)	0.2(12.5)
Qatar	0.1(20.0)	-	-
Saudi Arabia	1.1(6.9)	2.9(18.1)	0.4(2.5)
Syria	3.6(27.1)	2.3(17.3)	0.1(1.0)
United Arab Emirates	-	0.1(5.9)	-
Yemen	-	4.1(32.5)	8.8(70.0)

Source: UNDP, 1994: 134-135.

* Calculated on the basis of estimated total population in 1992 in the respective country; UNDP, 1994: 174-175.

TABLE 4. INDICATORS OF URBAN/RURAL DISPARITIES
IN THE ESCWA REGION

Country	Percentage population with access to services					
	Health		Water		Sanitation	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
	1988-90		1988-90		1988-90	
Bahrain	100	100	100	100	100	100
Egypt	100	99	96	82	80	26
Iraq	100	96	100	72	96	-
Jordan	-	-	100	98	100	32
Kuwait	100	100	100	100	98	98
Lebanon	-	-	-	-	94	18
Occupied Terr.	-	-	-	-	-	-
Oman	100	85	91	77	75	40
Qatar	100	100	100	48	100	85
Saudi Arabia	97	100	100	74	100	30
Syria	100	99	90	58	84	82
United Ar. Em.	100	100	100	30	100	77
Yemen	50	22	-	-	87	60

Source: UNDP, 1994: 148-149.

TABLE 5. MALNUTRITION AMONG CHILDREN UNDER AGE FIVE
IN THE ESCWA REGION
(in thousands)

Country	1990*	1992**
Bahrain	-	-
Egypt	800	759
Iraq	400	373
Jordan	-	87
Kuwait	-	15
Lebanon	-	31
Oman	-	-
Occupied Terr.	-	-
Qatar	-	-
Saudi Arabia	-	309
Syria	-	294
United Arab Emirates	-	12
Yemen	1400	645

Sources:

* 1990: UNDP, 1993: 140-141.

** 1992: UNDP, 1994: 134-135.

TABLE 6. WOMEN'S STATUS INDEX IN SELECTED ESCWA
COUNTRIES BY MID-1980S

Country	Rank from lowest relative to total of 115 Third World countries
North Yemen	3
Oman	6
South Yemen	15
Syria	38
Egypt	43
Iraq	46
Jordan	68
Lebanon	99

Source: Jazairy et. al., 1992: 456-457.

TABLE 7. WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE IN THE ESCWA REGION

Country	% Female of total labour force	
	1988-1990*	1990-1992**
Bahrain	10	18
Egypt	11	29
Iraq	6	6
Jordan	10	10
Kuwait	14	24
Lebanon	27	27
Occupied Territories	-	-
Oman	8	8
Qatar	7	7
Saudi Arabia	7	7
Syria	15	18
United Arab Emirates	6	6
Yemen	13	13

Sources: * 1988-1990: UNDP, 1992: 158-159.
 ** 1990-1992: UNDP, 1994: 162-163.

TABLE 8. PERCENTAGE OF FEMALES AMONG THE ECONOMICALLY
ACTIVE IN THE ESCWA REGION
(Latest available year)

Country	Source	Age	% Female
Bahrain	-	-	-
Egypt (1989)	LFS	12-64	28.7
Iraq (1987)	Census	15+	11.6
Jordan (1991)	LFS	13+	13.4
Kuwait (1988)	LFS	15+	23.4
Lebanon (1988)* Occupied	-	15+	12.0
Terr. (1988)*	-	-	13.0
Oman (1988)*	-	-	6.0
Qatar (1986)	Census	-	9.8
Saudi Arabia (1986)	LFS	15+	5.6
Syria (1988)*	-	-	9.0
United Arab Emirates (1985)	Census	15+	9.6
Yemen North (1986)	Census	-	11.7
South (1986)	Census	-	12.3

Source: unless otherwise indicated, adapted from UNWWS, 1993: Table 8d; data for countries identified by * are estimates derived from ESCWA, 1992b.

TABLE 9. PERCENTAGE OF UNEMPLOYED FEMALES AMONG TOTAL
ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE FEMALES
(Latest available year)

Country	Source	Total No. econ. active	% Unemployed
Bahrain (1981)	Census	16214	9.5
Egypt (1989)	LFS	45573	10.8
Iraq (1987)	Census	443219	7.1
Jordan (1991)	LFS	10559	34.2
Kuwait (1988)	LFS	177345	2.6
Lebanon	-	-	-
Occupied Territories	-	-	-
Oman	-	-	-
Qatar (1986)	Census	19635	1.0
Saudi Arabia	-	-	-
Syria (1991)	LFS	627786	14.0
United Arab Em. (1986)	Census	65415	2.1
Yemen			
North (1986)	Census	33956	13.0
South (1986)	Census	41791	15.3

Source: Adapted from UNWWS, 1993: Table 8c/3; age group for all countries is 15+, except for Syria and South Yemen, where it is 10+.

TABLE 10. MALE/FEMALE ILLITERACY RATES IN THE ESCWA REGION
(Latest available year)

Country	Age 15+		Total		Age 25+	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Bahrain	-	-	-	-	-	-
Egypt (1986)	43	69	29	49	50	79
Iraq (1987)	23	40	11	20	31	53
Jordan (1991)	9	25	2	3	15	41
Kuwait (1985)	22	32	9	16	26	39
Lebanon (1970)	26	48	10	24	32	58
Occupied Terr. (1986)*	14	33	-	-	-	-
Oman	-	-	-	-	-	-
Qatar (1986)	23	28	11	9	26	35
Saudi Arabia (1974)	60	86	44	73	68	93
Syria (1981)	26	63	11	41	36	76
United Arab Emirates (1985)	28	31	19	15	30	38
Yemen North (1986)	59	94	38	88	49	97
South (1973)	51	91	-	-	-	-

Source: Adapted from UNWWS, 1993: Table 4a.

* Data from ESCWA, 1992: 219.

Table 10. (continued)

Country	Age 15+		Urban Age 15-24		Age 25+	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Bahrain	-	-	-	-	-	-
Egypt (1986)	30	51	19	21	35	62
Iraq (1987)	20	34	10	14	26	47
Jordan (1979)	13	41	2	10	21	57
Kuwait	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lebanon (1970)	22	40	9	20	27	49
Occupied Terr.	-	-	-	-	-	-
Oman	-	-	-	-	-	-
Qatar	-	-	-	-	-	-
Saudi Arabia	-	-	-	-	-	-
United Arab Emirates	-	-	-	-	-	-
Yemen North (1986)	36	77	18	55	45	87
South (1973)	38	80	-	-	-	-

Source: Adapted from UNWWS, 1993: Table 4a.

Table 10. (continued)

Country	Age 15+		Rural Age 15-24		Age 25+	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Bahrain	-	-	-	-	-	-
Egypt (1986)	54	85	36	67	63	93
Iraq (1987)	33	56	15	33	46	70
Jordan (1979)	27	64	5	26	41	85
Kuwait	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lebanon (1970)	31	61	10	32	40	73
Occupied Terr.	-	-	-	-	-	-
Oman	-	-	-	-	-	-
Qatar	-	-	-	-	-	-
Saudi Arabia	-	-	-	-	-	-
Syria (1970)	50	93	27	84	62	97
United Arab Emirates	-	-	-	-	-	-
Yemen North (1986)	65	97	45	94	72	98
South (1973)	59	97	-	-	-	-

Source: Adapted from UNWWS, 1993, Table 4a.

TABLE 11. FEMALE LITERACY AS PERCENTAGE OF MALES*

Country	1970	1990
Bahrain	-	84
Egypt	40	54
Iraq	36	70
Jordan	45	79
Kuwait	65	87
Lebanon	73	83
Oman	-	-
Occupied Terr.	-	-
Qatar	-	-
Saudi Arabia	13	66
Syria	33	-
United Arab Emirates	29	-
Yemen	15	51

Source: UNDP 1994: 146-147.

- * Figures expressed in relation to male average indexed to equal 100; the higher the figure, the smaller the gap between male and female literacy levels.

TABLE 12. MALE/FEMALE LITERACY RATES IN THE ESCWA REGION

Country	Adult literacy as % of 15 years +					
	Male			Female		
	1990	1992	Rank	1990	1992	Rank
Bahrain	82	84	(3)	69	71	(3)
Egypt	63	66	(8)	34	35	(8)
Iraq	70	73	(7)	49	51	(6)
Jordan	89	91	(1)	70	72	(2)
Kuwait	77	78	(5)	67	68	(4)
Lebanon	88	89	(2)	73	74	(1)
Oman	-	-		-	-	
Occupied Terr. (1986)	86	-		67	-	
Qatar (1986)	76	-		72	-	
Saudi Arabia	73	76	(6)	48	50	(7)
Syria	-	82	(4)	-	53	(5)
United Arab Em. (1985)	72	-		69	-	
Yemen	53	56	(9)	27	28	(9)

Sources: Data for 1990: UNDP, 1993: 144-145.
Data for 1992: UNDP, 1994: 138-139.

Data for Occupied Territories, Qatar and United Arab Emirates: ESCWA, 1992a: 219.

Rank in 1992 (unless otherwise indicated): Calculated on basis of countries for which data are available; the higher the figure, the lower the rank.

TABLE 13. PRIMARY SCHOOL DROP-OUT RATE
IN THE ESCWA REGION, 1985-1987

Country	Total male/female
Bahrain	8
Egypt	36
Iraq	28
Jordan	4
Kuwait	2
Lebanon	34
Occupied Territories	-
Oman	9
Qatar	4
Saudi Arabia	10
Syria	11
United Arab Emirates	13
Yemen	69

Source: UNDP, 1991: 148-149.

TABLE 14. FEMALE ENROLMENT IN FIRST, SECOND AND TERTIARY
LEVEL EDUCATION IN THE ESCWA REGION

(Latest available year)

Country	First level enrolled per 100 males
Bahrain (1989-90)	96
Egypt (1990-91)	80
Iraq (1990-91)	81
Jordan (1990-91)	94
Kuwait (1989-90)	96
Lebanon	-
Occupied Terr.	-
Oman (1990-91)	87
Qatar (1991-92)	90
Saudi Arabia (1989-90)	84
Syria (1990-91)	87
United Arab Emirates (1989-90)	94
Yemen	
North (1990-91)	32
South (1990-91)	50

Source: Adapted from UNWWS, 1993: Table 4b.

Table 14. *(continued)*

Country	Second level enrolled per 100 males
Bahrain (1989-90)	98
Egypt (1990-91)	76
Iraq (1990-91)	64
Jordan (1990-91)	89
Kuwait (1989-90)	94
Lebanon	-
Occupied Territories	-
Oman (1990-1991)	88
Qatar (1991-92)	99
Saudi Arabia (1989-90)	73
Syria (1990-91)	69
United Arab Emirates (1989-90)	100
Yemen North (1990-91)	17
South (1990-91)	34

Source: Adapted from UNWWS, 1993: Table 4b.

Table 14. (continued)

Country	Tertiary level enrolment per 100 males
Bahrain (1989-90)	130
Egypt (1990-91)	35
Iraq (1990-91)	54
Jordan (1990-91)	96
Kuwait (1989-90)	178
Lebanon	-
Occupied Territories	-
Oman (1990-91)	88
Qatar (1991-92)	258
Saudi Arabia (1989-90)	37
Syria (1990-91)	60
United Arab Emirates (1989-90)	223
Yemen North (1990-91)	17*
South (1990-91)	

Source: Adapted from UNWWS, 1993: Table 4c.

* Combined figure for North and South Yemen.

TABLE 15. MATERNAL MORTALITY RATES IN THE ESCWA REGION,
1988

Country	per 100,000 live births
Bahrain	80
Egypt	300
Iraq	250
Jordan	200
Kuwait	30
Lebanon	200
Occupied Territories	-
Oman	220
Qatar	140
Saudi Arabia	220
Syria	200
United Arab Emirates	130
Yemen	800

Source: UNDP, 1994: 150-151.

TABLE 16. FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN RURAL AREAS
IN SELECTED ESCWA COUNTRIES, 1988

Country	Female-headed households as percentage of rural households
Egypt	30
Iraq	6
Jordan	10
Lebanon	10
Syria	13
Yemen	5

Source: Jazairy et. al., 1992: 406-407.

TABLE 17. WOMEN IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR IN THE
ESCWA REGION: INDIRECT INDICATORS
(Latest available year)

Country	Age	Percentage Female	
		Employed own accord	Unpaid family worker
Bahrain (1981)	15+	1.2	8.3
Egypt (1986)	15+	1.7	6.8
Iraq (1987)	15+	6.3	53.0
Jordan (1991)	15+	12.6	14.3
Kuwait (1985)	-	1.6	3.5
Lebanon	-	-	-
Occupied Territories	-	-	-
Oman	-	-	-
Qatar (1986)	15+	1.0	4.1
Saudi Arabia	-	-	-
Syria (1991)	-	3.3	47.9
United Arab Emirates (1985)	15+	1.0	8.5
Yemen			
North (1986)	10+	14.8	69.2
South	-	-	-

Source: Adapted from UNWWS, 1993: Table 9a; data for Jordan and Syria are derived from labour force surveys; the rest are from national census.

TABLE 18. FOOD SECURITY IN ESCWA COUNTRIES

Country	Food Import 1969/71	Dependency Ratio (%) 1988/90
Bahrain	-	-
Egypt	19.8	42.6
Iraq	30.7	64.5
Jordan	61.0	87.2
Lebanon	80.7	74.9
Occupied Territories	-	-
Oman	-	-
Qatar	-	-
Saudi Arabia	57.3	72.4
Syria	31.8	31.7
United Arab Emirates	93.2	132.5
Yemen	29.4	66.0

Source: UNDP, 1994: 154-155.

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