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

**PREPARATION AND FOLLOW-UP ACTION AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL  
ON UNITED NATIONS WORLD CONFERENCES  
AND ESCWA REGIONAL MEETINGS**

1. ESCWA activities for follow-up of world conferences are implemented through data collection, analysis of economic and social conditions, monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations of global conferences and the provision of technical assistance to member States within a regional framework. The link between the analytical and the operational was clearly marked in the implementation of activities in 1996.

2. In the area of social development, follow-up of the recommendations and programmes of action of four global conferences continues to constitute an overriding theme. Activities undertaken by the Social Development Issues and Policies Division deal with priority issues relevant to the global conferences. While the issue of poverty was one of the main topics at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, it was also a core concern of other conferences. During the period covered by the 1994-1995 programme of work, poverty-related activities dealt with the measurement of poverty and characteristics of the poor in Western Asia. In 1996, poverty-related activities focused on case-studies that would provide valuable inputs into a regional perspective on poverty eradication. In cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), ESCWA completed a study (in Arabic) profiling "Poverty in Lebanon" (E/ESCWA/SD/1995/8/Add.2), which examined poverty-related policies dealing with health, education, employment and fiscal policy. The information provided in the study had a strong impact on the Government of Lebanon, which requested ESCWA assistance in formulating a national strategy for social development. Similar profiles covered Iraq and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. With support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), ESCWA, acting as the executing agency for a regional project on promotion of human development among member States, established national networks in and provided assistance to a number of countries to initiate preparation of country Human Developments Reports. Furthermore, the Social Development Issues and Policies Division initiated work on a database on human development policies.

3. In follow-up of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, the Social Development Issues and Policies Division continues to disseminate information on this subject through its Population Bulletin. ESCWA is also currently coordinating activities with the Population Division at United Nations Headquarters to join the Population Information Network (POPIN), an interconnected regional network that covers population information. ESCWA is also developing two demographic databases to facilitate action in follow-up of the International Conference on Population and Development. The first would harmonize the storage, processing and tabulation system of population data in the countries of the region and subsequently would allow the use of data for the preparation of demographic indicators and population estimates and projections for the ESCWA region. Acting as executing agency for a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) project, ESCWA has taken many steps towards completion of the second database on population policies. Also acting as executing agency for another UNFPA project, ESCWA is extending support to population councils and committees in the region, as part of the follow-up and implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development. Within the context of this project, training was provided to member States on the use of software packages through the First Training Workshop on Computer Software Packages for Population Policies and Sustainable Development (Amman, April 1996). Training was also held on the formulation of population policies as they relate to health care, education and housing through the Training Workshop on Population Policies and Sustainable Development: Health Care, Education and Housing (Amman, September 1996). The Expert Group Meeting on Population Dynamics and Sustainable Development in the Arab World (Amman, October 1996) examined issues pertinent to the International Conference on Population and Development, such as the implications of economic reform for various population issues and the information system required for monitoring population policies.

4. With regard to the follow-up of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the Social Development Issues and Policies Division updated the study on "Review and Assessment of Progress Achieved in the Advancement of Arab Women in the Light of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies", including all the information available in the country reports and national plans of action that were prepared for the Fourth World Conference on Women. The study covered Arab countries in Western Asia and North Africa, as it was a joint activity with the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR). In line with the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference, ESCWA is in the process of compiling gender-specific data to facilitate the monitoring of the implementation of the Platform of Action at the regional level. In addition, a regional database on policies related to the advancement of Arab women was initiated covering Jordan and Lebanon. This database will complement the database on population policies and will facilitate the monitoring of changes in gender-related policies.

5. In follow-up of the 1996 United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), the Social Development Issues and Policies Division initiated work on a database on human settlements policies, with emphasis on housing and urbanization. This database complements those on population policies, human development and gender issues. ESCWA also continued to cooperate with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) in issuing the News Bulletin on Human Settlements in the Arab World. Attention was also given to Bedouin communities, a population group with special needs that are often neglected. In cooperation with the United Arab Emirates University in Al-Ain, ESCWA held a Symposium on Environmentally Sustainable Human Settlements Development in Desert Regions (Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, October 1996). This particular topic is becoming increasingly significant in the light of the intention of the Gulf countries to adopt development policy decisions to preserve the cultural components of Bedouin societies.

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6. In the area of statistics and information, the ESCWA Statistics Division, in response to the system-wide mandates calling for the development of gender statistics, and in cooperation with CAWTAR, completed the first phase of a gender statistics database that was used to issue a publication entitled Arab Women: Statistical Database in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women. In addition, ESCWA prepared a study on "Arab women 1995: trends, statistics and indicators" (under publication). Over the coming three years, ESCWA, in collaboration with CAWTAR, and with financial support from UNDP, the International Development Research Centre (Canada) and UNICEF, will develop national gender statistics programmes in selected Arab countries, with other countries to be included in later phases of the project. Moreover, the Statistics Division is promoting the adoption by member States of the minimum national social data set recommended by the United Nations Statistical Commission in response to plans of action adopted by major United Nations conferences.
7. In addition to integrating follow-up of world conferences in its regular activities, ESCWA has completed a draft of the common issues that would constitute a regional programme of action for follow-up of world conferences, in line with the United Nations System Consolidated Action Plan (UNSCAP). It is proposed that this plan include analytical activities, advisory services and technical assistance. It would also be linked to the follow-up action to be undertaken by the League of Arab States.
8. Owing to the importance of this issue, a multidisciplinary task force on follow-up of global conferences is being established and attached to the Office of the Executive Secretary. It is responsible for planning and coordinating the formulation, implementation, monitoring and assessment of the programme of action. In addition, the theme of the first session of the Committee on Social Development (Amman, 25-26 March 1997) is follow-up of global conferences.
9. ESCWA has been entrusted by the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group to prepare the above proposal as a flagship project for UNDP support. ESCWA is also in the process of completing a similar arrangement with the League of Arab States. Both projects will be closely linked and will contribute to building consensus around a limited number of issues that are regional priorities and that lend themselves to regional cooperation among the member States, the United Nations, the League of Arab States and the donor community.
10. Also upon the request of the League of Arab States, ESCWA provided substantive support and conference services to the Conference of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs on the formulation of a unified Arab programme and a follow-up mechanism for the Platform of Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (held in Beijing in 1995). Hosted by the Government of Jordan, the Conference of Arab Ministers was held in Amman from 25 to 29 September 1996 to follow up post-Beijing action. The Conference adopted three core areas of concern: women and poverty (the economic dimension); women in decision-making (the political dimension); and the Arab family (the social dimension). In a resolution adopted at the Conference, the Ministers of Social Affairs requested the League of Arab States to cooperate with ESCWA, in consultation with the other agencies, to prepare a programme for follow-up action.
11. Follow-up of global conferences has also been further integrated into the 1998-1999 programme of work, with intergovernmental meetings to review the progress achieved in the follow-up of global plans of action and to develop individual as well as integrated regional action plans.

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