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THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION  
FOR WESTERN ASIA

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

**FOLLOW-UP ACTION ON THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE  
COMMISSION ADOPTED AT ITS NINETEENTH SESSION**

Resolution 210 (XIX) on the medium-term plan  
of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia for the period 1998-2001

1. This report was prepared in response to resolution 210 (XIX) of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, in which the Executive Secretary was requested "to report to the Commission at its twentieth session on any changes effected in the medium-term plan" for the period 1998-2001.
2. The medium-term plan for the above period was formulated during a time of major programmatic reform; consequently, the revision did not involve any major adjustments. Minor changes were introduced to underscore human rights concerns, within the context of the right to development, and the mainstreaming of gender issues in the work of all United Nations organizations, pursuant to General Assembly mandates and the priorities identified by the Secretary-General of the United Nations.
3. Human rights, in the broadest sense of the term, are inherent in the right to development and, consequently, in effecting sustainable development. The right to development is likewise enshrined in the mandate of ESCWA, which includes fostering economic, social and cultural development as indivisible aspects of human rights leading to social advancement.
4. Gender mainstreaming has been identified by the Secretary-General as a concern that should permeate most areas of the work programme of the United Nations. Gender issues are also issues of human rights, meriting special attention; the advancement of women calls for the formulation of distinct policies that require background material comparing men and women.
5. The above two issues, which were implicit in the medium-term plan, were made more explicit in the revised version. These revisions are indicated by underlined text.

6. The overall orientation of the programme is to enhance sustainable development in the region, promote regional cooperation and policy coordination, increased awareness of the economic, social, cultural, technological and environmental dimensions of development, and mainstream the gender and right-to-development perspectives into these dimensions.
7. The mandate of the programme derives from Economic and Social Council resolutions 1818 (LV) of 9 August 1973 and 1985/69 of 26 July 1985, which established and amended the terms of reference of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The secretariat of the Commission is responsible for the implementation of this programme.
8. In implementing the programme, ESCWA will continue to identify and design a multidisciplinary approach to regional cooperation within the context of the priorities and programmes of its member States, taking into consideration the aspirations of civil society institutions.
9. ESCWA will also work towards implementing article 8, paragraphs 1 and 2, of the Declaration on the Right to Development. It will assist its member States in ensuring that they undertake all necessary measures for the realization of the right to development and ensure, *inter alia*, equality of opportunity for all in their access to basic resources, education, health services, food, housing, employment and the fair distribution of income. ESCWA will also support the efforts of Governments to ensure that women have an active role in the development process and that appropriate economic and social reforms are undertaken in eradicating all social injustices.
10. It is envisaged that, during the period covered by the plan, ESCWA efforts will culminate in the following achievements:
- (a) Establishment of the Commission as the major source of statistics and information in the region, especially gender-disaggregated statistics, through the development of databases, information systems and networks pertinent to the work of ESCWA and end-users;
  - (b) Greater understanding of sustainable human development through defining priorities, formulating plans and undertaking relevant actions;
  - (c) Improved management of natural resources and environmental protection, enhanced cooperation among member States in the area of energy and greater utilization of renewable energy resources;
  - (d) Development of the role of ESCWA as the regional catalyst and forum for development through its assistance to member States in coping with the implications of regional and global changes;
  - (e) Increased cooperation and coordination among member States in harmonizing relevant norms, standards, regulations and definitions, and in adopting relevant regional conventions;
  - (f) Consolidation and expansion of existing regional coordination mechanisms among United Nations agencies and with other regional organizations;
  - (g) Provision of effective assistance to the Palestinian National Authority and to countries with special needs, in particular Yemen, the least developed country in the region;
  - (h) Ensuring that gender and issues pertaining to the right to development are mainstreamed into the plan, policies and programmes of ESCWA.

Subprogramme 1 Management of natural resources and environment

11. The majority of ESCWA member States will face increasingly complex issues related to the development and management of their natural resources as well as addressing serious environmental problems. These issues have to be tackled in the context of increasing intraregional interdependence. The subprogramme, which is implemented by the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division, is expected to play a catalytic role in regional coordination and cooperation for the management of natural resources, in particular water resources and energy, and the protection of the environment.

12. In the area of water, the objectives are:

- (a) To promote integrated approaches in order to meet the challenges stemming from a combination of shortage of freshwater resources, deterioration of their quality and a rapid increase in water demand for multi-utilization, viewed in the context of population growth, agricultural land use and socio-economic development;
- (b) To contribute to the design and propagation of schemes for more rational utilization and conservation of freshwater resources, taking into consideration the need for increasing public awareness and ensuring the participation of men and women in local communities in the management and use of water, implementation of water projects and environment protection programmes;
- (c) To provide effective assistance to member States in the formulation and execution of programmes for capacity-building, as well as diffusion of modern techniques and technologies for the development of both surface and groundwater resources, including non-conventional sources;
- (d) To support Governments in their efforts to establish appropriate intraregional and interregional mechanisms for the development and management of shared water basins, in full compliance with the various articles of the Convention on the law of the non-navigational uses of international watercourses in the region;
- (e) To encourage optimal utilization of freshwater resources, enforcement of efficient water pricing and demand management, taking into consideration the social well being of the disadvantaged.

13. In the area of energy, the objectives are:

- (a) To strengthen the capacity of member States to improve their energy policies and planning methodologies and techniques;
- (b) To promote the use of alternative sources of energy and encourage the development of programmes for the efficient use of energy;
- (c) To contribute to the dissemination of new and renewable energy technologies, mainly as part of integrated rural development in ESCWA countries;
- (d) To foster intra- and interregional cooperation in the field of electric energy networks.

14. In the area of environment, the objectives are:

- (a) To promote environmental awareness and action to address environmental degradation issues in the region;
- (b) To strengthen cooperation within the secretariat and with national, regional and international organizations in monitoring, analysing and reporting on emerging environmental issues and conventions; and to follow up on the implementation of Agenda 21, especially those chapters dealing with integration of land and water resource management and conservation;

(c) To promote environmentally sound technologies to achieve sustainable sectoral development in selected priority areas, with a view to reversing environmental damage and degradation of natural resources, improving the efficiency of resource use, minimizing waste, maximizing recycling and environmental protection, and assessing the environmental impact of transport operations and energy utilization.

#### Subprogramme 2 Improvement of the quality of life

15. The rapidly changing global and regional economic conditions pose serious problems in terms of their impact on community cohesion and family structure and values. These have been compounded by the effects of financial constraints to investment in social sectors and the growing problems of urbanization.

16. Attempting the resolution of these social problems has to take account of emerging international and regional trends and the globalization of issues pertaining to the improvement of the quality of life.

17. Notwithstanding the fact that issues pertaining to the improvement of the quality of life are indivisible and interdependent and will, therefore, be addressed in an interdisciplinary manner insofar as possible, the subprogramme, which is implemented by the Social Development Issues and Policies Division, will seek to achieve objectives related to four specific yet complementary areas pertaining to the improvement of the quality of life: population, human development, advancement of women and human settlements. In that context, the subprogramme will follow up on the implementation and seek to operationalize recommendations relevant to the region emanating from five world conferences, namely, the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women, the World Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), and the World Conference on Human Rights. Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all activities will be accorded priority.

18. In the area of population, the objectives are:

(a) To enhance the capabilities of countries of the region and their awareness in the areas of methodologies and techniques of demographic analysis with gender variables, population policies and migration;

(b) To increase awareness and understanding of the population situation, trends, issues and challenges and their interrelationships with sustainable development;

(c) To increase understanding of the linkages between population factors, gender, poverty, human rights and environment.

19. In the area of human development, the objectives are:

(a) To promote integrated approaches to rural development and the alleviation of poverty, taking into consideration the increased impact of poverty on women;

(b) To encourage production and income-generating capabilities, in particular for less advantaged groups;

(c) To support partnership between governmental and non-governmental bodies, including people's participation in national and regional governance to foster sustained human development;

(d) To mobilize and enhance institutions of civil society such as the private sector, non-governmental organizations, community organizations and family structures;

(e) To promote the cultural dimension of development.

20. In the area of the advancement of women, the objectives are:

(a) To follow up on the gender-related recommendations that emanated from the five world conferences referred to above;

(b) To provide support to the family as a basic unit of society and underscore family-related roles, values and identity;

(c) To sensitize society to gender-related issues, including partnership and participation, raise awareness with regard to legislation and institutional support mechanisms, and act as a catalyst in mainstreaming a gender perspective into development policies, plans and programmes;

(d) To assist in building capacities of non-governmental organizations as tools for monitoring and promoting the advancement of women.

21. In the area of human settlements, the objectives are:

(a) To monitor and identify problems resulting from rapid urbanization and social change, and assess their impact on the quality of life;

(b) To promote understanding and raise awareness of the problems and needs of human settlements, in particular the provision of adequate and affordable housing and related services, aiming at the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing;

(c) To strengthen the capacity of Governments of the region in formulating appropriate policies and strategies for sustainable human settlement development.

### Subprogramme 3 Economic development and global changes

22. The economic development of ESCWA member countries will be challenged by the rapidly unfolding regional and global economic changes emanating from the globalization of the world economy, new regional developments, including the economic implications of the Middle East peace process and an increasing trend towards market-oriented economies, including economic reform and structural adjustment measures.

23. The objectives of the subprogramme, which is implemented by the Economic Development Issues and Policies Division, are:

(a) To expand understanding of economic development with a view to enhancing macroeconomic management, international and intraregional trade, finance, debt management and domestic and foreign direct investment;

(b) To increase understanding of the impact of liberalization of economic activity and improve the preparedness of member States for participating in world economic arrangements (e.g. WTO/GATT, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership);

(c) To identify modalities for enhancing regional financing infrastructures, with a view to facilitating intraregional capital movements and integration in the global financial system;

(d) To strengthen the capacity of member States to implement economic reform policies, financial management, privatization and deregulation measures.

Subprogramme 4 Coordination of policies and harmonization of norms and regulations for sectoral development

24. Regional economic cooperation, in the context of a prevailing global economic culture and environment, is predicated, in part, on the harmonization at the regional level, of standards, norms and regulations, taking into consideration the implications of global treaties, conventions and standards. The harmonization of regional standards assumes special significance in the areas of transport, industry and technology.

25. The subprogramme, which is implemented by the Sectoral Issues and Policies Division, will focus on four areas: transport, industry, agriculture and technology.

26. The objectives in these areas are:

(a) Transport. To promote cooperation among member States based on improved transport operations and infrastructure policies, as well as harmonization of standards and the adoption of legal regimes for removing barriers impeding the streamlining and liberalization of border crossings and transit traffic;

(b) Industry. To improve the competitiveness of existing industries through the development of skills and policies, enhancing coordination and networking among national and regional support institutions and enabling industries to meet the requirements of regional and international standards, norms and regulations;

(c) Agriculture. To identify and promote appropriate agricultural strategies and practices in terms of agricultural management, resource conservation and institution-building, and to identify areas that require harmonization of agricultural policies, regulations and norms, with a view to developing the agricultural potential of member States;

(d) Technology. To strengthen capabilities of member States in technology policy and effective transfer of technology, to strengthen their technological capacity and to promote research and development activities, their networking and linkages with the production sectors.

Subprogramme 5 Development, coordination and harmonization of statistics and information

27. Sound economic and social policy formulation and judicial decision-making are based on the availability, reliability and comparability of gender-disaggregated economic and social statistical data and their linkages. The formulation of appropriate gender-sensitive development policies is also rooted in access to regional and international sources of information. Effective linkages of information and networking, in an era of globalization and sharing of information, have become essential components in the formulation of statistical strategies and have far-reaching effects on it.

28. The objectives of the subprogramme, which is to be implemented by the Statistics Division, are:

(a) To develop the statistical systems of the ESCWA member States, with a view to improving the relevance, accuracy and gender-sensitivity of economic and social data;

(b) To expand the coverage of the subprogramme to new statistical areas, especially in the fields of gender-sensitive and social statistics as required for follow-up action on the implementation of the recommendations emanating from the above-mentioned world conferences, and in monitoring the exercise of the right to development;

(c) To promote the use of standardized reporting procedures and comparable statistics through the implementation of international statistical systems and programmes, in particular, the 1993 System of National Accounts, the International Comparison Programme and the 2000 round of population and housing censuses;

(d) To improve the reliability of statistical information and data and accessibility to them for planners and researchers;

(e) To develop gender-disaggregated statistical and textual databases in various socio-economic fields.

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