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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY ON THE ACTIVITIES
OF THE COMMISSION****IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK
FOR THE BIENNIUM 1998-1999***Regular programme and technical cooperation activities*

The text of this document is largely extracted from the "Report of the Executive Secretary, June 1999 – April 2000" (E/ESCWA/2000/1).

A. OVERVIEW

1. This report provides an overview of the the salient features of the 1998-1999 work programme, the main constraints facing ESCWA in implementing its programme of work and the measures taken to overcome the obstacles. It summarizes activities under the regular programme of work undertaken by each of the five thematic subprogrammes of ESCWA, in accordance with the objectives set out for each subprogramme, as well as technical cooperation activities in the form of technical assistance projects, training, and regional advisory services rendered to member States. The last section presents a qualitative evaluation of ESCWA programme performance aimed at defining indicators on the quality and usefulness of various aspects of its work.

2. The major problems faced by the programme managers in carrying out the work programme were:

(a) The loss of local staff owing to the move of the ESCWA secretariat from Amman and the time needed for recruitment and on-the-job training of local staff in Beirut. This entailed screening, interviewing and examining an inordinate number of applicants and subsequently recruiting, selecting and training more than 120 new General Service staff members;

(b) The high vacancy rate among Professional staff;

(c) The paucity, inconsistency and erratic availability of national data;

(d) The scarcity of extrabudgetary resources, which would have reinforced the regular programme of work and made it more effective;

(e) The computer-related problems caused by the Chernobyl virus hitting some files and resulting in a serious loss of data;

(f) The relative weight of ad hoc assignments of high priority and short notice (requested mainly by the United Nations Secretariat), which absorbed a substantial amount of time of staff members.

3. During the biennium, the vacancy rate in the professional category in the substantive divisions remained high, ranging from about 19 per cent in the Statistics Division to 46 per cent in the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division, with the overall vacancy rate ranging around 27 per cent. If study leaves and other types of special leaves are taken into consideration, the total vacancy rate would amount to 29 per cent, representing almost a third of all allocated posts. While efforts have been made to redress the situation, retirement and relocation of staff to other organizations left their imprint on ESCWA, an organization characterized by a relatively small staff constituency. This is exacerbated by the lengthy recruitment procedures of the United Nations.

4. Despite the high vacancy rate, 99 per cent of the work programme activities were carried out; only one output was postponed to the 2000-2001 biennium. Furthermore, 13 quantifiable outputs were added by legislation and 4 at the initiative of the secretariat, in addition to 4 operational activities. These activities were undertaken owing to the availability of extrabudgetary financing in support of programmed activities. The high rate of performance, despite vacancies, is attributed to several measures, including the use of consultants to offset the high vacancy rate among Professional staff and ensure programme delivery, as well as short-term recruitment against vacant posts and the extra efforts and time put by Professional staff.

5. A major administrative development during the biennium was the implementation of release 3 of the United Nations Integrated Management System (IMIS) in October 1999. This involved the automation of all accounting procedures—general ledger, budgeting, requisitioning, processing of special service agreements for consultants, travel and other personnel applications—and the training of staff members in their use.

6. In response to the Secretary-General's directives for the reform of the United Nations, which included, *inter alia*, the establishment of United Nations houses, ESCWA invited other United Nations agencies operating in Lebanon to share its premises. Thus, during the visit of the Secretary-General to Lebanon on 20 March 1998, the building occupied by the ESCWA secretariat was officially designated as United Nations House in Beirut. It currently includes the offices of ESCWA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Bank, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) Centre for International Crime Prevention (CICP) and Office of the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for Southern Lebanon. This efficiency measure is expected to reduce expenses through cost-sharing.

7. On the occasion of the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Commission in May 1999, ESCWA seized the opportunity to survey and analyse the major political, economic, social and institutional trends experienced by the region since its establishment. In its review of the past, it attempted to identify the priority areas that have emerged and to determine its role in addressing those priorities and also ensuring the involvement of the various actors of society in the process.

8. The substantive achievements of ESCWA are outlined in the relevant sections below. The programme performance covers the 24 months of the 1998-1999 biennium in all areas: the regular programme of work, technical training assistance, and regional advisory services.

B. REGULAR PROGRAMME OF WORK

9. This section summarizes activities undertaken by each of the five thematic subprogrammes of ESCWA, in accordance with the objectives set out for each subprogramme. It is to be noted that, administratively, each thematic subprogramme corresponds to an ESCWA division.

Subprogramme 1. Management of natural resources and environment

10. This subprogramme, which is implemented by the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division, has the following objectives:

(a) To promote regional cooperation in the management of water resources and energy and to follow up on the implementation of the relevant chapters of Agenda 21;

(b) To act as a catalyst for the regional harmonization of environmental standards in the energy and water sectors of the member States;

(c) To assess shared water resources, identify modalities for cooperation in establishing intraregional electricity grid interconnections, address the need for non-conventional energy resources and fresh water in rural areas, and follow up on the implementation of those sections of Agenda 21 that relate specifically to the integration of land and water resources management.

11. In the area of water, the Committee on Water Resources held its second session (Beirut, 14-15 December 1998) and its third session (Beirut, 21-22 April 1999). The deliberations and recommendations of this Committee are expected to promote the adoption of policies and measures for regional cooperation in the area of water resources.

12. In order to contribute to the development of sustainable sources of water and raise public awareness on the rational use and conservation of water, ESCWA carried out in-depth studies and gathered together experts from the region to discuss and share experiences in this field. The Expert Group Meeting on Updating the Assessment of Water Resources in the ESCWA Member Countries (Beirut, 20-23 April 1999) provided a platform for government experts and officials and representatives of regional and international organizations to discuss the assessment, development, utilization and management of water resources at the national and regional levels. A study on the topic was prepared and discussed in the meeting. The study, based on water-related data obtained in a survey conducted through a detailed questionnaire sent to the member States, reported on progress achieved in the assessment of water resources and management trends in the region. It focused on the importance of an integrated approach in developing an efficient management of scarce water resources. It also reported on existing water demand, supply and management practices in the region.

13. Two other studies completed on water issues were "Development of fresh water resources in the rural areas of the ESCWA region by using non-conventional techniques" and "Current water policies and practices in selected ESCWA countries". The first focused on water supply augmentation techniques in rural areas, while the second drew attention to the need for additional efforts in reforming existing water policies and strategies to better address emerging water management problems.

14. Thanks to funding from the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources of Germany (BGR), three reports on groundwater management were prepared under the programme of advisory services to ESCWA member countries in the field of water resources. The first, "Application of satellite remote-sensing methods for hydrogeology in the ESCWA region", offers recommendations on the application of existing and future satellite remote-sensing systems for groundwater research and includes case studies on aquifers in Jordan, Oman, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the desert area of Saudi Arabia. The second report, "Groundwater resources in paleogene carbonate aquifers in the ESCWA region: preliminary evaluation", provides a summary of published information on hydrogeologic conditions and groundwater sources of paleogene formations in the region and combines all known information on the paleogene aquifers in the Arab Peninsula. The third report, "Application of environmental isotope methods for groundwater studies in the ESCWA region", provides a detailed overview of the methods used in isotope hydrology and their possible applications under the particular conditions of the region. It also provides recommendations on the application of isotope techniques in examining common hydrogeologic problems in the region.

15. As for energy issues, the Committee on Energy held its second session (Beirut, 3-4 November 1999). A study completed on "Promotion of new and renewable sources of energy with particular emphasis on rural and remote areas" presented the activities undertaken by ESCWA for the promotion of a renewable energy mechanism; identified renewable energy applications and technology options; and presented a proposal for a regional programme on the dissemination of renewable energy services to rural communities. Three projects were identified for implementation in selected member countries. Two of the projects cover village

electrification in Yemen, while the third relates to the gasification of agricultural waste for energy production in Egypt.

16. ESCWA acted as a catalyst for regional harmonization on energy issues. The status of the interconnection of electricity grids in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, in particular those of Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia, was assessed and cooperation methods and procedures were identified in the study on "Modalities of cooperation with respect to the interconnection of the electric power grids among ESCWA member countries".

17. Additionally, the Expert Group Meeting on the Privatization of the Electric Power Sector was held (Beirut, 1-4 November 1999) and its proceedings were published. The meeting reviewed and discussed the current situation and future prospects for privatization of the power sector, particularly in electricity generation. It examined the experiences of countries in the region as well as those of countries from outside the region in order to benefit from the comparison. The meeting was held in cooperation with Electricité du Liban and the Arab Union for Electricity Producers, Distributors and Transporters. A study on the "Assessment of privatization of power generation in selected ESCWA member countries" (in Arabic) was presented at the meeting. A back-to-back meeting was arranged in cooperation with DESA to conduct and conclude regional discussions for a draft study on evaluation of world energy (prepared by DESA and the World Energy Council).

18. In the area of environment, a study and an expert group meeting on the Adequacy of Environmental Legislation and the Promotion of Enforcement Mechanisms were undertaken. The meeting (Beirut, 7-9 June 1999), held in cooperation with the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE), examined and assessed the current status and adequacy of environmental laws and regulations and recommended mechanisms to encourage enforcement. The proceedings of the meeting were published.

19. Within the context of the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and in line with the previous activities of ESCWA relating to the creation of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR), ESCWA invited the Executive Committee of JCEDAR to discuss issues related to coordination and cooperation in the regional implementation of Agenda 21. Additionally, a study on "Progress achieved in the implementation of chapter 18 of Agenda 21, with emphasis on water for sustainable agricultural production: case studies" was completed.

20. A study and an expert group meeting on the Harmonization of Environmental Standards in the Water Sector of the ESCWA Member States (Beirut, 28 September – 1 October 1999) were undertaken. The main objective of the meeting was to discuss and exchange views on the establishment of environmental standards and measures in the water sector and the prospects for their application and harmonization in reaching the optimum provision and management of water resources for household, agricultural and industrial uses. It was established that existing standards and regulations in the water sector should be reviewed and updated on a continuous and systematic basis to identify gaps, inconsistencies, deficiencies, coverage, jurisdiction and implementation requirements at the national and regional levels. The proceedings of the meeting were published.

21. In a parallel effort, a study entitled "Towards harmonization of environmental standards in the energy sector of ESCWA member States" was undertaken. The study reviewed the main features of the energy sector and its environmental implications on the region's development; discussed the prospects for harmonization of environmental standards in the energy sector and their classification; examined and evaluated the development and enforcement of those standards; and assessed the impact of the major energy subsectors and their relevant environmental standards in selected regional groupings and international organizations, and compared them to those in the ESCWA member countries to evaluate their conformity and compatibility. Additionally, the Expert Group Meeting on the Harmonization of Environmental Standards in the Energy Sector of the ESCWA Member States (Cairo, 29 June – 1 July 1999) provided a

platform for experts and officials to exchange views and experiences. Discussions centred on two main themes: environmental legislation and standards in the energy and power sectors; and the relevance of environmental norms, standards and practices in industry and transport. The proceedings of the meeting were published.

Subprogramme 2. Improvement of the quality of life

22. This subprogramme, which is implemented by the Social Development Issues and Policies Division, has the following objectives:

(a) To promote regional cooperation in harmonizing social policies and in setting standards and regulations for improving the quality of life;

(b) To support member States in implementing, within the framework of an integrated regional approach, the recommendations of United Nations global conferences (namely, the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, Habitat II and the Fourth World Conference on Women); in addition to the relevant recommendations of Agenda 21;

(c) To disseminate data and information on population, women, social development and human settlements.

23. The second session of the Committee on Social Development (Beirut, 7-8 April 1999) focused on policy issues, the ESCWA programme of work and the integrated follow-up to global conferences.

24. Work continued on the development of guidelines for applying the concept of sustainable human development, keeping in sight the equal importance of economic and social development in improving the quality of life. Within this context, and in addition to the follow-up on global conferences, efforts in four main areas of activity continued: poverty alleviation, sustainable human development, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the disabled.

25. In support of the efforts of member States to adopt an integrated approach in following up the recommendations of United Nations global conferences, four regional meetings were held in Beirut during 1998: the Arab Conference on the Implementation of the ICPD^{*} Programme of Action (22-25 September 1998); the Regional Meeting in Follow-up to Habitat II: Implementation of the Habitat Agenda in the Arab Region (24-27 November 1998); the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Arab Conference on Integrated Follow-up to Global Conferences: Follow-up of the World Summit for Social Development (8-11 December 1998); and the Second Arab Meeting for Follow-up to the Beijing Conference (12-15 December 1998). These preparatory meetings culminated in the Arab Conference on Integrated Regional Follow-up to United Nations Global Conferences (Beirut, 29 November – 1 December 1999), during which the results and recommendations of the foregoing meetings were examined and discussed. Within this context and in response to gender mainstreaming requirements, a report was prepared on "Regional evaluation of progress achieved in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the Arab countries".

26. In 1998, UNDP and ESCWA initiated the Flagship Project, a mechanism for the integrated regional follow-up by the Arab States to United Nations global conferences, with ESCWA as the executing agency. This project deals with cross-cutting issues and provides a policy framework that reflects the priorities common to the four conferences. Project-related activities are linked to three main themes: (a) setting up networks for following up on the recommendations of the global conferences; (b) capacity-building at the national and regional levels; and (c) advocacy for the enhancement of the follow-up process. Under this project during 1999, ESCWA serviced the first meeting of the Steering Committee; prepared, produced and disseminated information materials on the contents and relevance of the recommendations of the global

* International Conference on Population and Development.

conferences; convened the Round-Table Discussion on Partnership between Governments and Civil Society (Beirut, 4-5 October 1999); created a Web site on the project; and prepared a brochure on cross-cutting issues.

27. Work on poverty alleviation was resumed, but with a change of emphasis. Following the completion of several reports during the last biennium on the extent and measurement of poverty in the region, work was begun on the formulation of poverty alleviation policies for consideration by policy makers. Within this framework, three reports were published: "Poverty reduction policies in Jordan and Lebanon: an overview"; "Sectoral policies to combat poverty in Lebanon in the mid-1990s: health and education sectors" (in Arabic); and "Poverty reduction policies in Egypt: an overview".

28. Two other studies were also completed under the umbrella of alleviating poverty: "Feasibility and operationalization of microcredit finance facilities targeting poor women in urban and rural areas in selected Arab countries: theoretical perspectives and practical considerations", which tackled the interrelated issues of poverty alleviation and women; and "Urban settlements and poverty". The proceedings of the Expert Group Meeting on Improving the Quality of Life in the Arab Mashreq Countries that took place in November 1997 were also published.

29. The second area of activity, relating to the promotion of sustainable human development, included the continued implementation of a local community development project that had been initiated in Egypt and the Syrian Arab Republic during the 1996-1997 biennium. The project, which is in its second phase, aims at mobilizing local capabilities and resources and promoting self-reliance. In connection with this objective, various concepts related to sustainable human development were explored, including the empowerment of local societies, community participation, distribution of income, and the participation of women and youth. The project generated a number of publications which covered the most important aspects of this approach to development and provided a selective review and critical assessment of local community development experiences in the Arab world. The studies were issued in Arabic under the following titles: "Shourouq: the Egyptian national programme for integrated rural development"; "The Omani experience in local community development"; "Community development in Arab rural areas: concepts and experiences"; and "Development schemes programme in selected areas in Sudan: strengths and weaknesses". Another related study was the "The developmental role of the informal sector in community development: cases in Egypt and Yemen". The *Manual on Community Development Services* was also produced, the first in the region based on field experience in community development.

30. Several studies were completed covering the role of NGOs in sustainable development. This subject was explored within the context of a study on "Gender, citizenship and the role of NGOs in the Palestinian National Authority: a critical assessment" (in Arabic), which was incorporated in the *Studies on Arab Women and Development Series*. Other studies and reports issued on NGO involvement in promoting sustainable development included: "The role of NGOs in local community development"; "Frontline support for popular participation" (in Arabic); "The role of Arab NGOs in the implementation of global conferences recommendations and integrated follow-up"; and "Sustainable human development and the role of NGOs" (in Arabic).

31. In its efforts to encourage a strategy for sustainable human development in the region, the Division published three reports under its *Human Development Studies Series*. The first report was "Sustainable human development under globalization: the Arab challenge"; the second was "Human development and acquiring advanced knowledge in Arab countries: the role of higher education, research and technical know-how" (in Arabic); and the third, as mentioned above, dealt with the role of NGOs in sustaining human development.

32. A study, "Social impact of restructuring with special reference to employment", was published, which tackled one of the most important problems confronting the region, the high and alarming rate of unemployment and underemployment, and concluded that ESCWA countries should expedite the restructuring process and initiate the shift from unsustainable to sustainable development policies. Because

of the adverse social repercussions that often accompany the implementation of restructuring policies, the report recommended that countries of the region pay particular attention to reducing the negative impacts of change on various social groups.

33. Two other areas of focus covered by the subprogramme included disadvantaged groups, namely, the disabled and the people of the occupied territories. Under the first area, the *Braille Computer Training Manual and Information Access Guidelines for the Blind in the ESCWA Region* (in Arabic and English) was published. Furthermore, an International Seminar on Environmental Accessibility and a Training Workshop on Barrier-free Environment were convened simultaneously (Beirut, 30 November – 3 December 1999). These activities were undertaken in response to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action for the World Summit for Social Development, in particular those provisions which call for promoting public awareness with regard to the impact of negative stereotypes of disabled persons on their participation in the labour market. Further activities were carried out under the project of Enhancing the Accessibility of the Disabled in the ESCWA Region.

34. With regard to the disadvantaged people of the occupied territories, two reports were submitted to the Economic and Social Council, pursuant to its resolution 1997/67 of 25 July 1997, on "Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the Occupied Syrian Golan". A report dealing with the socio-economic effects of occupation was also published to make available more information on this sensitive subject.

35. Population issues were addressed in a study entitled "Five years after the Cairo Conference: population policies in Arab countries" and in the Expert Group Meeting on Migration and Population Policies in the ESCWA Member Countries (Beirut, 23-24 November 1999). In conjunction with the meeting, a workshop on Population Policies and Sustainable Development: Monitoring Indicators and Information Systems was organized in cooperation with UNFPA (Beirut, 15-17 November 1999). Furthermore, two issues of the *Population Bulletin* (No. 46 and No. 47, in Arabic) and socio-economic data sheets were published.

36. Several studies related to human settlements were also completed: "Urban governance and participatory development"; "Urban environmental changes and sustainable development"; "Human settlement data sheets for the ESCWA region"; and "Housing policy in the ESCWA region" (in Arabic). Three issues of *Human Settlements*, a news bulletin on human settlements in the Arab world that is produced in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS), were published in January 1998 (No. 8), June 1998 (No. 9) and January 1999 (No. 10). In addition, the Expert Group Meeting on Urban Management: Follow-up of National Strategies in the ESCWA Member States was convened (Dubai, 8-12 November 1999).

37. The database on social policies was expanded to include information on human development, women and human settlements and was renamed the ESCWA Integrated Information System on Policies, Measures and Indicators. The database on demographic estimates and projections was updated as well.

Subprogramme 3. Economic development and global changes

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

(a) To monitor and survey economic and social development trends in the region;

(b) To support member States in implementing economic reform policies, including financial management, privatization and deregulation measures to enable them to participate more effectively in economic ventures;

(c) To continue to follow up on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s.

39. The first session of the Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade and Economic Globalization in the Countries of the ESCWA Region (Abu Dhabi, 15-16 May 1999) was held to discuss and examine current issues of trade liberalization and globalization and their possible impact on the countries of the region.

40. To track and assess economic and social trends, two annual reports were completed: the *Survey of Economic and Social Developments, 1997-1998* and the *Survey of Economic and Social Developments, 1998-1999*. This publication, which consists of two parts, is a multidisciplinary activity to which many of the substantive divisions of ESCWA contribute.

41. The 1997-1998 *Survey* focused on overall economic conditions during the period and covered economic reform, structural adjustment programmes, inflation and gross domestic product (GDP) growth expectations. In its chapter on social development, human settlement conditions were reviewed and the social integration of disadvantaged groups in the region was assessed. Part two focused on "Unemployment in the ESCWA region: selected case studies".

42. The 1998-1999 *Survey* was a special issue that served to commemorate the Commission's twenty-fifth anniversary. As such, it included focal chapters on environmental issues and major social developments during the past 25 years; and in part two, it covered "Economic developments in the ESCWA region during the last 25 years".

43. Two issues of the *Preliminary Overview of Economic Developments in the ESCWA Region* were also published. This output, produced every year, provides the business community and policy makers with a preview assessment of the region's economic performance and highlights the directions of economic change. In addition, summaries of the 1997-1998 *Survey* and the 1998-1999 *Survey* were completed for submission to the twentieth session of ESCWA.

44. In the area of economic reform policies, the study entitled "Assessment of the privatization programmes in the ESCWA region" reviewed experiences and evaluated achievements in the light of the objectives set for privatization in each country. As part of its efforts to support member States in introducing deregulation measures, analysing global issues that affect national growth and development, and promoting economic integration and cooperation in the region, the Economic Development Issues and Policies Division, in cooperation with the Sectoral Issues and Policies Division, prepared a comprehensive study on trade efficiency and held a seminar on Trade Efficiency in the ESCWA Member States (Beirut, 30 November – 2 December 1998). The study and the seminar explored the relationship between trade and six interrelated areas (trade practices, business information, transport, banking and insurance, customs, and telecommunications) in selected member countries. The roles of the Government, the private sector and NGOs in improving and facilitating the flow of foreign trade were examined in the study and a variety of measures to improve trade efficiency were recommended. A regional plan of action for consideration by member States was formulated at the Seminar and a report on the plan was published.

45. In terms of economic arrangements, the Division completed a study entitled "Euro-Mediterranean Partnership agreements: a critical assessment". Intended to increase awareness and understanding of the economic and financial effects and implications of these agreements, the study included a number of policy recommendations for consideration by decision makers in the region. Another study completed in this domain was the "Appraisal of the Middle East and North Africa Economic Conferences (MENA)".

46. The Expert Group Meeting on the Assessment of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA Region during the Last Twenty-five Years and Regional Priorities for the Next Decade (2000-2009) (Beirut, 4-6 May 1999) provided a regional forum for the discussion and analysis of patterns in economic and social developments over the last 25 years. Drawing conclusions through an assessment of past experiences in the

form of lessons learned, the participants discussed priorities for the next decade, in establishing a basis of sustainable development for the region as a whole.

47. In the area of globalization, including World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements and their impact on the countries of the region, ESCWA prepared a number of studies and meetings. Two studies completed were "Implications of issues negotiated in the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment for ESCWA member countries: the cases of Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon" and "Challenges and opportunities of WTO on services in selected ESCWA member countries: tourism". The Expert Group Meeting on Environment and Trade Issues: the Impact of WTO Environment Committee Decisions on ESCWA Member States was convened (Beirut, 2-4 November 1999). The proceedings of this meeting, as well as those of a previous meeting held in November 1997 in Kuwait, the Expert Group Meeting on the Challenges and Opportunities of the New International Trade Agreement (WTO) for ESCWA Member Countries in Selected Sectors, were also published in an effort to increase awareness and understanding of WTO issues.

48. Several other studies were completed that contribute to a better understanding of developments in economic and financial systems and the effect of globalization. They include "Inflation in the ESCWA region: causes and effects", which provided a historical perspective of inflation, an examination of its causes and effects, a description of adjustment and stabilization measures, and relevant recommendations for member countries; "Development of financial markets in the ESCWA region", which reviewed the status, role and development of financial markets, the factors that determine them and their effect on the mobilization of savings; and "Role of foreign direct investment in economic development in ESCWA member countries", which analysed the inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) to the region and its impact on various economic sectors and activities. A study on "Arab economic integration efforts: a critical assessment" was also issued. Furthermore, a pioneer study was undertaken on "Consumer protection under a liberalized trade system in selected countries of the ESCWA region", which examined the effects of the current structural changes in Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Arab Republic on the attitude of consumers.

49. "Review and appraisal of progress made by the Republic of Yemen in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s" was also published.

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

50. The Sectoral Issues and Policies Division implements this subprogramme. Its main objectives are:

- (a) To support member States in their efforts to harmonize their sectoral policies within the context of emerging globalization trends;
- (b) To provide support to national and regional institutions responsible for setting standards and norms;
- (c) To enhance regional coordination and cooperation among member States;
- (d) To disseminate information and data on developments in agriculture, industry, transport and technology.

51. The Committee on Transport, established pursuant to ESCWA resolution 213 (XIX) of 7 May 1997, held its first session in Beirut on 9 and 10 February 1999. This Committee serves as an important forum for the discussion and adoption of transport policies in the region and for coordination in that respect among ESCWA member countries.

52. In the field of transport, a study entitled "The current situation in and future prospects for the development of maritime fleets and their role in the seaborne trade of the ESCWA region: a regional perspective" was prepared. The study, issued in Arabic, represents a worthy contribution to assisting countries of the region in harmonizing their sectoral policies within the context of globalization trends.

53. In an effort to enhance regional coordination and cooperation among member States, the Expert Group Meeting on Economic Reform Coordination of Transport Policies, including Merchant Fleets in the ESCWA Region, within the Emerging Globalization Trends was organized (Beirut, 17-19 November 1998). The meeting proposed the establishment of a regional land, maritime, air and multimodal transport network. A statement on the development of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM) was adopted by the Commission at its twentieth session.
54. Two other meetings were held to support member States in their efforts to harmonize their sectoral policies and globalization trends in transport. One was the Expert Group Meeting on the WTO Agreement on Maritime and Air Transport Services in the Arab Region (Beirut, 9-11 June 1999). The other was the Expert Group Meeting on Harmonization of Transport Norms and Legislative Instruments for Regional Cooperation, including UN/EDIFACT* (Beirut, 16-18 November 1999).
55. In a further effort related to transport, ESCWA undertook a study on the "Harmonization of environmental standards in the transport sector in ESCWA member countries", in which the major issue of environmental pollution caused by land transport was examined from both the regional and global points of view. The study presented data on current national standards for selected countries in the region for vehicle emissions, fuels and ambient air, assessed the impact of noise pollution, and reviewed the status of environmental legislation in selected countries.
56. A preliminary report on the "Assessment of transport and related infrastructure in the GCC region" (in Arabic), which was requested by the GCC countries, was finalized, and a pamphlet entitled "Review of port legislation in ESCWA member countries" was issued. In addition, the workshop on Land Transport Policy in Lebanon was organized (Beirut, 6-8 July 1999).
57. Within the framework of providing assistance in the harmonization of sectoral policies, the Expert Group Meeting on Science and Technology Policies and Strategies in the ESCWA Member Countries for the Twenty-first Century was organized (Beirut, 10-12 March 1999), to review preparations for the World Conference on Science that was held in Budapest in June 1999. The meeting focused on promoting and harmonizing efforts to formulate science and technology policies in the Arab countries, and gave consideration to the methodologies to be utilized in that respect, including their harmonization and integration with relevant national development policies and in the creation of inward and outward linkages.
58. ESCWA also issued two publications prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the subject of science and technology: *Higher Education Systems in the Arab States: Development of Science and Technology Indicators, 1998* and *Research and Development Systems in the Arab States: Development of Science and Technology Indicators, 1998*.
59. Furthermore, the Expert Group Meeting on Project Planning and Management in Research and Development and Quality Assurance was organized (Beirut, 21-23 September 1999). The purpose of the meeting was to enhance project planning and management capabilities in research and development, on the one hand, and to formulate activities aimed at the introduction of new quality regimes, on the other hand. The deliberations were intended to provide a launch pad for cooperative efforts to improve technology planning and management through encouraging institutions in the region to join together in linking up with international networks and sources of expertise in developed countries. A contribution made by the Science and Technology Management Arab Regional Network Programme enabled more participants from the region to attend the meeting.
60. Three studies carried out in the biennium 1998-1999 examined various aspects of the agro-food sector in the region, including the effect of technology on the agro-food industry. These were: "Environmentally

* United Nations Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport.

sound technologies in the food industry”, “Production and quality assurance technologies in the agro-food industries in ESCWA member countries” and “The status of selected branches of agro-food industries in selected ESCWA member countries to improve productivity and competitiveness” (in Arabic).

61. The Expert Group Meeting on Standardization in the Arab Countries (Amman, 2-5 February 1999) was held in cooperation with the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO) and UNIDO. The meeting aimed at providing support to national and regional institutions responsible for setting standards and norms in the industrial sector. It was followed by the High-level Meeting on Management and Harmonization of Standardization and Conformity Assessment in the Arab Countries (Rabat, 20-21 November 1999).

62. Additionally, two studies were undertaken with respect to standardization: a report in Arabic on “Early implementation of ISO^{*} 14000” (the international standard on environmental management systems) and “National capacity-building in selected ESCWA countries in view of technical barriers to trade and the WTO Agreement”. The objective of the latter study was to create awareness among suppliers and relevant official bodies of the main elements of the WTO agreements on technical barriers to trade, sanitary and phytosanitary measures and rules of origin and their implications. It attempted to highlight the importance to exporters in applying international standards in manufacturing, and abiding by technical regulations and rules of origin, and cited the experience of exporters of food, textiles and clothing in selected member countries (Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic).

63. In support of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), technical assistance was provided to a number of institutions with the aim of strengthening their capabilities. Four national meetings were held to address the competitiveness of the region’s textile and clothing industries within the context of globalization and the changing conditions of international trade. These meetings constituted an input to the Expert Group Meeting on Enhancing the Competitiveness of Exports of Textiles and Clothing in Countries of the ESCWA Region in the Light of Globalization and the WTO Agreement (Beirut, 3-5 November 1999).

64. A study was undertaken on “Small and medium enterprises: strategies, policies and support institutions” (with a contribution from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in funding the interviews of small entrepreneurs in Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic). It described the support schemes for SMEs that are available in selected ESCWA member countries and attempted to assess the services delivered by support institutions. The profiles of entrepreneurs in those countries and the importance of small-sized industries in the national economy were also reviewed. Moreover, a project document on “Development and capacity-building of small and medium-sized enterprises” was prepared.

65. Another activity was the preparation of a report on “Monitoring and assessment of MENA conferences: industry and transport”. This was complemented by a study on “Peace and regional economic cooperation in the agricultural sector in the ESCWA region” (in Arabic).

66. As for harmonization in the agricultural sector, the Expert Group Meeting on the Harmonization of Norms and Standards for Selected Agricultural Commodities to Facilitate Trade in the ESCWA Region was organized (Beirut, 27-29 April 1999), and a study entitled “The harmonization of norms and standards for selected agricultural commodities for export to the European market from ESCWA member countries” (in Arabic) was published.

67. A number of studies were undertaken in an effort to disseminate more information on agricultural issues. Among them were “Export-oriented and marketing policies for selected agricultural products, within national, regional and global developments” (in Arabic); “Economic assessment of on-farm water-use efficiency in agriculture: two case studies”; “Evaluation of agricultural policies in selected ESCWA member countries: a case study of Lebanon (Policy Matrix Approach [PAM])”; and “Rural community development

* International Organization for Standardization.

through strengthening institution building: two case studies from Lebanon". The *National Farm Data Handbook for Lebanon* was also published, as was the annual *Review of Agriculture in ESCWA Member Countries*.

68. Two project documents were prepared on the rehabilitation of the agricultural sector in the occupied territories. The first was "Suggestions for the establishment of agricultural incubators" and the second was "Rehabilitation of agricultural statistics in the occupied territories".

69. In its effort to widen the scope of information disseminated on agriculture, industry, transport and technology in the region, ESCWA published a variety of sectoral reviews. Two of them are new annual publications, namely, the *Review of Science and Technology in ESCWA Member Countries* (No. 1 and No. 2) and the *Review of Industry in ESCWA Member Countries* (No. 1 and No. 2). Two other reviews issued are longstanding ESCWA publications that have been given new serial titles: the *Review of Transport in ESCWA Member Countries* (No. 9 and No. 10), previously published as the *Transport Bulletin*; and the *Review of Agriculture in ESCWA Member Countries* (No. 20 and No. 21), previously published as *Agriculture and Development in Western Asia*. These reviews provide updated information on trends, developments and critical problems in the agriculture, industry, technology and transport sectors and focus on policy issues, especially those concerned with furthering intercountry cooperation and regional integration.

70. In the area of technical material, the Spatial Information System for Selected Sectors in ESCWA Member Countries was realized, by developing at least one geographic information layer for selected data on transport, industry, agriculture and technology in the region. This Geographic Information System (GIS) is a computer-based database that links information to location for mapping and analysing data.

*Subprogramme 5. Development, coordination and harmonization
of statistics and information*

71. The Statistics Division implements this subprogramme. Its objectives are:

(a) To provide support to member States in harmonizing statistics and information, in applying international concepts, standards and classifications and in implementing international systems and programmes;

(b) To contribute to the development of national statistical systems and to their harmonization at the regional and international levels;

(c) To establish and develop regional statistical databases and information systems in line with ESCWA role as a prime regional source of statistics and information.

72. The third session of the ESCWA Statistical Committee (Beirut, 16-18 March 1999) was convened to discuss policy issues and to inform those attending about the secretariat's activities in the field of statistics.

73. Within the context of assisting member countries in the adoption and implementation of international classifications and methods, several expert group meetings were held. The Expert Group Meeting on Evaluation of the Initial Stages of the Implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts (SNA) in the ESCWA Member States (Beirut, 18-22 May 1998) presented the results of efforts by the secretariat to prepare a strategy for the implementation of the 1993 SNA in the region. The Expert Group Meeting on the Implications of the United Nations Global Conferences on Social Statistics (Beirut, 1-3 December 1998) assessed the national capacities of the countries of the region in the field of social statistics and indicators; discussed the validity, effectiveness and availability of the Minimum National Social Data Set (MNSDS) and the Common Country Assessment (CCA) Indicator Framework; established a programme of action to define national and regional activities to be undertaken; and reviewed the coordination of regional activities related to the development of social indicators and to the follow-up on the implications of international conferences

for social statistics. This meeting marked the beginning of regional efforts to redress the data imbalance that has resulted from according high importance to economic statistics at the cost of neglecting social statistics.

74. With the increasing importance of and need for environmental statistics, ESCWA organized the Workshop on Environmental Statistics, Indicators and Accounting (Cairo, 1-5 November 1998) in cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division.

75. Two workshops were convened in the second half of 1999: the Regional Workshop on Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems in the ESCWA Member States (Cairo, 16-21 October 1999) and the Training Workshop on Industrial and Construction Statistics (Beirut, 29 November – 4 December 1999), which aimed at providing capacity-building in these important areas.

76. Five recurrent statistical publications, as well as the *Statistical Newsletter* (four issues) were produced as part of the secretariat's efforts to disseminate information on statistical issues and contribute to the development of national statistical systems and their harmonization at the regional and international levels. The recurrent publications were: the *Statistical Abstract of the ESCWA Region* (No. 18 and No. 19), comprised of eight chapters classified by topic instead of by country, to facilitate comparability between the countries of the region; the *External Trade Bulletin of the ESCWA Region* (No. 9), which included tables on the imports and exports of the member countries; *National Accounts Studies of the ESCWA Region* (No. 18 and No. 19), which featured tables of selected indicators, consolidated accounts, and estimates of GDP in both national currencies and United States dollars; the *Bulletin on Vital Statistics in the ESCWA Region* (No. 1 and No. 2), which provided data essential for population projections and estimates; and the *Bulletin of Industrial Statistics for the Arab Countries (fourth issue)*, published once every two years in cooperation with AIDMO, which covered the period 1990-1998 and is divided into three parts (one on the share of the industrial sector in GDP, one on industrial statistics for each Arab country and the third on foreign trade statistics).

77. For the first time, a publication on gender statistics was issued. Entitled *Women and Men in the Arab Region: A Statistical Portrait*, the publication is considered one of the outputs of the regional project, Development of National Gender Statistics Programmes in the Arab Countries, which is funded by UNDP and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada and executed by ESCWA. It offers a statistical portrait of the situation of women relative to men in the Arab region and is intended to increase awareness and promote change in achieving gender equality.

78. In addition, several national workshops on gender statistics were convened during 1998 and 1999 in order to train both users and producers of gender statistics. The countries and areas covered in the national workshops were: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen. This training activity culminated in the Second Regional Workshop on Gender Statistics in the Arab Countries (Amman, 8-11 November 1999).

79. Two reports were also issued as part of the effort to contribute to the development and harmonization of national statistical systems. The first, "Purchasing power parities: comparison of price and volume levels of economic aggregates for the ESCWA region 1995", contributed to a better comparison of levels of income across countries and of the real value of GDP and its components. The second report was on "Implementation of the International Comparison Programme in the ESCWA region".

80. The Division initiated a home page on statistics for the ESCWA Web site. The development and maintenance of statistical databases on prices, energy, labour force, and social and industrial statistics was continued. The introduction of a new database on gender statistics and indicators was undertaken in response to United Nations mandates calling for mainstreaming gender issues in all aspects of the work of the organization. The statistical databases are being used mainly for the preparation of statistical reports and in-house publications, but they will eventually be accessible to end-users outside the secretariat. The on-line facilities currently utilized by the ESCWA Statistics Division will be made available to other divisions on the local area network and on Internet to regional and international information networks. These activities are

contributing to the realization of the Division's objective of establishing and developing regional statistical databases and information systems and fulfilling the ESCWA secretariat's role as the major source of statistics and information in the region.

C. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECTS

81. This section describes technical assistance projects provided by ESCWA to member countries. Technical assistance depends largely on extrabudgetary resources from donors in specific areas. Resources for technical assistance are rather limited compared to the needs and the tapping of extrabudgetary resources has become onerous in the past few years. The region's needs in capacity-building and the implementation of technical assistance projects are vast. Much more could be done if more extrabudgetary funding was made available. A selection of the projects undertaken during 1998 and 1999 are outlined below.

1. Water

82. *The application of appropriate modern methods for groundwater management in the ESCWA region.* This project, financed by BGR, aims at providing advisory services in the field of water resources; conducting joint projects with member States on the assessment of water resources, and their development at the regional and subregional levels; undertaking studies on the regional carbonate aquifer system; and developing guidelines for groundwater protection. Three reports were completed during 1998-1999: "Groundwater resources in paleogene carbonate aquifers in the ESCWA region: preliminary evaluation"; "Application of satellite remote-sensing methods for hydrogeology in the ESCWA region"; and "Application of environmental isotope methods for groundwater studies in the ESCWA region". The project financed the provision of advisory services to the Ministry of Water Resources in Oman, the purchase and installation in ESCWA of GIS software, and the initiation of a training course for its staff on GIS, as well as the publication of a report on "Groundwater quality control and conservation in the ESCWA region".

2. Human development

83. With regards to human development, assistance was provided in the following areas:

(a) *Community development services.* This project's objectives are to mobilize the participation of local communities in improving their living conditions; encourage the development of local cooperatives; establish revolving funds to support income-generating activities; and develop rural cooperation. The project, financed by the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND), has been ongoing since 1995. The project so far has covered local communities in Egypt and the Syrian Arab Republic. ESCWA designed a training programme for local government officials and NGOs, developed a project document on extending the project, and reached agreement with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic on developing women's participation in local community development;

(b) *Preparatory assistance for regional support to national efforts in pursuit of sustainable human development.* The objective of this project, which was initiated in 1995, is to enhance regional capacity in the support of national efforts to develop the methodology required to achieve sustainable human development, and to serve as a vehicle for the formulation of a long-term strategy for building that capacity at a regional or subregional level. The project, which was completed in December 1999, accomplished the following: it established sustainable human development national networks in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen; disseminated information and experiences related to the project; and further enriched and developed the concept in 13 publications issued through the *Sustainable Human Development Series*;

(c) *The Yemen National Poverty Eradication Programme.* Financed by UNDP, implementation of this project was initiated in 1998. Its objective is to assist the Government of Yemen in establishing within its Central Statistical Organization a poverty information and monitoring system that will support the formulation of anti-poverty policies and assess the impact of the measures in this respect.

3. *The disabled*

84. In this area, technical assistance provided by ESCWA was concerned with the following:

(a) *Enhancing the accessibility of the disabled in the ESCWA region.* A pilot scheme was undertaken in collaboration with UNESCO, Norwegian Peoples Aid, the Municipality of Nabatieh/Lebanon and local NGOs to make local high schools accessible to the disabled. It involved local partners at all stages of the design and implementation process;

(b) *The regional computer-training programme for blind girls/women.* This ESCWA project was established in Amman in 1995, with the help of the Saudi Regional Center for Rehabilitation and Training, AGFUND and the Government of Japan. During 1998-1999, 15 women were trained, bringing the total of women trained over the project period to more than 40. The programme benefited blind girls/women from Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and the Gulf, and also included the publication of a training manual in Braille (in both Arabic and English);

(c) *Community-based rehabilitation activities.* ESCWA initiated designing and establishing a database on disability; launched networking with organizations dealing with disability; and disseminated information on rehabilitation. These activities were funded by DESA. ESCWA also prepared a project document on vocational training for the disabled in Burj Al Brajneh/Beirut, in cooperation with AGFUND.

4. *The Flagship Project*

85. *The Integrated Regional Follow-up by the Arab States to United Nations Global Conferences.* Known as the Flagship Project, this effort aims at achieving an integrated follow-up by Arab countries to the United Nations global conferences by pooling the efforts of United Nations agencies active in related areas in the region. The three-year project, which was launched in 1998, is financed by UNDP. ESCWA prepared, produced and disseminated information materials on the contents and relevance of the recommendations of the global conferences; convened a round-table discussion on civil society partnership; and created a Web site on the Flagship Project.

5. *Statistics*

86. With regard to statistics, ESCWA undertook the following projects:

(a) *Development of national gender statistics.* This project aims at strengthening national capacities in the production, use and dissemination of statistics on gender. Cooperating and funding agencies include UNDP, UNICEF, the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) and IDRC of Canada. The project covered nine Arab countries and areas in 1998-1999, namely, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen. Thirteen national workshops were convened in several Arab countries to train staff members of national statistical offices in the compilation and assessment of gender statistics. Upon completion of this training phase at the national level, the Second Regional Workshop on Gender Statistics in the Arab Countries was convened (Amman, 8-1 November 1999).

(b) *Regional household survey project.* This is an ongoing project that commenced in 1981. The first three stages have been completed and ESCWA is currently implementing the fourth stage, which focuses on the use and development of a GIS in ESCWA and the continuity of the household survey programmes. A database on Palestinians in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic for the years 1998-2000 is now under preparation.

6. *Environment*

87. *National Environmental Strategy and Environmental Action for the United Arab Emirates.* Started in 1997 and continued in 1998-1999, this project is implemented by ESCWA in cooperation with UNDP and the Government of the United Arab Emirates. Its purpose is to assist the Federal Environment Agency in

preparing a national environmental action plan to promote sustainable development. Under this project, a national Agenda 21 and national environmental strategies were devised, and a national environmental plan is currently under preparation.

D. TRAINING

88. Training is carried out through workshops, seminars and courses. Below is an account of the training activities organized by ESCWA, in general and at the country level.

1. *Training activities in general*

89. In the area of capacity-building in statistics, three workshops were organized by ESCWA:

(a) The Workshop on Environment Statistics, Indicators and Accounting (Cairo, 1-5 November 1998);

(b) The Workshop on the Compilation of Integrated Economic Accounts of the 1993 SNA (Beirut, 26-28 October 1999);

(c) The second Regional Workshop on Gender Statistics (Amman, 8-11 November 1999). This was a culmination to the national workshops held in several ESCWA member countries, as well as in Algeria and Tunisia.

90. ESCWA also organized the following training activities related to social issues (including the disabled):

(a) A Workshop on Population Policies and Sustainable Development: Follow-up Indicators and Information Systems (Beirut, 15-19 November 1999);

(b) The International Seminar on Environmental Accessibility (Beirut, 30 November – 3 December 1999);

(c) The Training Workshop on Barrier-free Environment: Technical Exchange on the Planning and Design of Accessible Urban Development in the Developing Countries (Beirut, 30 November – 3 December 1999);

(d) The regional computer-training programme in Arabic/English Braille for blind Arab girls/women, which was completed in 1999.

91. At the subregional level, upon the request of the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Turin, ESCWA conducted a four-day course on the Creation and Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises for Arab Mediterranean Countries: Business Plan Preparation (Turin, 20-25 May 1998). A total of 22 participants from various Mediterranean Arab countries (Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia) attended the course.

92. ESCWA, together with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), organized the two-day Regional Workshop on Technical Cooperation for Enterprise Development Initiatives (Amman, 24-25 July 1998). The objectives of the workshop were to discuss the terms of reference of a technical resource unit, as well as the appropriate mechanisms of coordination and cooperation between concerned institutions in the region. The workshop was attended by 49 participants from several member countries, representing government agencies, NGOs, women's associations and credit institutions, as well as free lance trainers and the representatives of several United Nations agencies.

2. Training activities at the country level

93. Below is a brief review of the technical training assistance provided at the country level:

(a) *Egypt*

94. The first National Workshop for Users and Producers of Gender Statistics was held (Cairo, 8-9 August 1999).

(b) *Jordan*

95. In cooperation with the Jordanian Department of Statistics and the Princess Basma Women's Research Centre, ESCWA conducted the first and second National Workshop for Users and Producers of Gender Statistics in Jordan (7-9 June 1998 and 5-6 July 1999, respectively).

96. The Regional Centre for Rehabilitation and Training of Blind Girls/Women, established by ESCWA in Amman in 1995, was completed and became functionally independent in 1999. Training in Braille computer applications and operation was provided to a total of 40 women, thus qualifying them for essential employment.

(c) *Kuwait*

97. In line with the memorandum of understanding between ESCWA and the Arab Planning Institute (API), the latter requested ESCWA to conduct a training course on "Start your own business". The training course, addressed to Kuwaiti artisans (start-ups and existing businesses), was attended by 16 participants (Kuwait, 8-23 February 1998).

(d) *Lebanon*

98. ESCWA conducted the following training activities in Lebanon:

(a) The one-day Training Workshop on Methods of Farm Data Collection and Budgeting, which was attended by 12 participants (Beirut, 19 June 1998);

(b) A training course for business counselors of the Ministry for Social Affairs in Lebanon in the summer of 1998;

(c) The first and second National Workshop for Users and Producers of Gender Statistics in Lebanon, with over 50 participants attending each workshop (Beirut, 7-8 July 1998 and 29-30 June 1999, respectively). The participants included representatives from governmental organizations and departments, various NGOs and scientific research centres (including university professors, experts and technicians) as well as representatives from United Nations bodies and specialized agencies;

(d) The Workshop on Land Transport Policy in Lebanon (Beirut, 6-8 July 1999).

(e) *Oman*

99. ESCWA organized and conducted the following training workshops:

(a) Social Monitoring and Evaluation Techniques (Muscat, 24-27 May 1998);

(b) Hydrological Data Processing (Muscat, 7-22 May 1999), conducted by the ESCWA regional adviser on water issues;

(c) The first National Workshop for Users and Producers of Gender Statistics in Oman (Muscat, 28-30 September 1998), which was attended by 43 participants.

(f) *Palestine*

100. Training activities included:

(a) A one-day training seminar on a proposal for an agricultural development policy in the occupied territories, conducted at the request of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Planning Office of the Palestinian President. More than 60 government officials attended the seminar (Gaza, 26 July 1998);

(b) The first National Workshop for Users and Producers of Gender Statistics in Palestine, conducted in cooperation with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. The workshop was attended by about 70 participants (Jerusalem, 20-24 March 1999);

(c) A two-week training programme for local staff on hydrology and water harvesting (5-19 November 1999), conducted by the ESCWA regional adviser on water issues at the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics and Natural Resources in Damascus.

(g) *Syrian Arab Republic*

101. Training activities included:

(a) The first and second National Workshop for Users and Producers of Gender Statistics in the Syrian Arab Republic (Damascus, 21-23 April 1998 and 3-4 August 1999, respectively). The participants included representatives from governmental organizations and departments, various NGOs and scientific research centres (including university professors, experts and technicians) as well as representatives from United Nations bodies and specialized agencies;

(b) A training workshop for trainers on the "Start your own business" programme for women agricultural engineers in the Ministry of Agriculture (Damascus, 31 October – 11 November 1998), conducted at the request of the World Food Programme (WFP).

(h) *Yemen*

102. ESCWA conducted the first National Workshop for Users and Producers of Gender Statistics in Yemen (San'a, 14-15 December 1998). The workshop, held at the Ministry of Planning and Development and Central Statistical Organization, was attended by 43 participants from the National Working Group and representatives from United Nations bodies and specialized agencies.

E. REGIONAL ADVISORY SERVICES

103. The ESCWA regional advisory services programme makes available to member countries, upon their request, the professional knowledge and expertise of a number of regional advisers. The services are intended to support member countries in their development efforts; recommend measures and policies to help them overcome specific problems; undertake capacity-building; disseminate up-to-date knowledge and information in the various fields of specialty through lectures, papers, and participation in national, international and ESCWA meetings; provide training; and assist in the preparation and formulation of project proposals, among other related activities.

104. The Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Division in ESCWA is responsible for managing and coordinating requests received from Governments, making travel arrangements and disseminating to the countries concerned the reports prepared by regional advisers.

105. The following section briefly reviews the advisory services provided to Governments and regional or national institutions during the biennium 1998-1999. Although provided mostly by regional advisers, the services are complemented by the efforts of ESCWA staff members, especially in certain areas where no regional adviser is available, such as in transport.

106. Currently, ESCWA provides regional advisory services in the areas of telecommunications, data processing, energy, environment, food and agriculture, industrial development, national accounts, social development, technology, transport, water resources and WTO issues, as follows:

(a) *Telecommunications.* Advisory services were provided on information and communications technology, utilized to promote trade efficiency; new methods for linking and exchanging information on foreign trade; means of improving data collection and entry procedures by using Internet and other advanced communications tools; assessment of data bank activities and programmes; development of informatics and network systems; computer-related year-2000 (Y2K) problems; establishment of information technology systems; formulation of electronic commerce policies and strategies; and on the requirements of hardware/software and network systems;

(b) *Data processing.* Advisory services were rendered on the implementation of surveys on manpower, unemployment, household expenditures and income, industry, commerce and agriculture; on the assessment of statistical methodology applied for population census; the establishment of a database for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic; the establishment of a comprehensive data bank at the regional level for the GCC countries; and on a pre-feasibility study for the establishment of a national geographic information centre;

(c) *Energy.* Advisory services covered the advantages and problems of electricity grid interconnections; the implementation of a survey on energy in the transport sector; sustainable energy; and national greenhouse-gas mitigation strategies;

(d) *Environment.* Advisory services included the preparation of a framework for science and technology programmes and policies; environmental regulations and the formulation of policies and measures for the enforcement of environmental legislation; the evaluation of results of a project on environmental information systems; the formulation of national environmental impact assessment; setting criteria for water quality and standards; the preparation of a project document on monitoring and reporting environment strategies; the development of an environmental survey of heavy industries and a programme for the prevention of industrial pollution; control and monitoring measures for medical waste disposal; sustainable agricultural development; reviewing indicators of urban pollution and greenhouse effects; and assessing linkages between environmental preservation and the promotion of tourism;

(e) *Food and agriculture.* Services included conducting a training programme on agricultural issues and policies, overall dairy production and marketing and the preparation of a project document on sustainable agricultural development;

(f) *Industrial development.* Advisory services included the development of SMEs and the formation of industrial policies and strategies;

(g) *National accounts.* The focus of advisory services in this area was on the provision of training with regard to relating the balance of payments to the 1993 SNA and assessing the status of current accounts accordingly; proposing methodologies to estimate GDP growth in the agriculture and fisheries sector; reviewing and assessing the terms of reference of women's employment opportunities; formulating methodology for a price collection survey; developing social and economic indicators, and on the application of the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC);

(h) *Social development.* Advisory services in this area concentrated on social welfare and employment opportunities; strategies on sustaining human development; the preparation of a work plan for

the development of a social training centre; support to the project on Education for All: 2000 Assessment; advice on the preparation of a human development report; the development of women's centres and associations; a social survey related to progress achieved in the Beijing Platform for Action; contacts with NGOs concerned with women and family for assistance in capacity and institution-building; preparation of a national strategy and action plan for the social affairs sector; assistance in the preparation of a study on manpower planning and school drop-outs;

(i) *Technology*. Advisory services included the promotion of trade efficiency and electronic commerce; product standardization; the use of Arabic in information technology; formulation of a national science and technology policy/strategy; the Y2K problem in relation to technology and telecommunications; informatics technology policy; restructuring and computerizing the information technology system and methodology; improving information and documentation activities; establishing laboratories for a master of science programme; and the preparation of a project document on information technology;

(j) *Transport*. Advisory services were rendered on the preparation of guidelines for the classification of transport data; assessing the implications of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and WTO on transport; and the preparation of a feasibility study for the establishment of an agency for public transport;

(k) *Water resources*. Advisory services were provided in the assessment of municipal water supply; water-well field management; water resources and sustainable development; flood hydrology; hydrological data processing; wastewater treatment; assessing the environmental impact of water projects and methodologies; assisting in the formulation of water resource policies; and providing training and follow-up on several water projects;

(l) *WTO*. Advisory services focused on the GATS; the impact of accession to WTO on the financing and banking system; the principles of WTO; the impact of WTO on agriculture; preparations for the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle; and a training programme on commercial diplomacy.

F. QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

107. In response to system-wide directives to conduct evaluation exercises that would gauge impact rather than measure delivery of outputs, ESCWA conducted a partial evaluation exercise at the end of the biennium 1998-1999. This included the evaluation of outputs and selected activities by end-users, in addition to a self-evaluation exercise covering both the regular programme of work and regional advisory services.

108. The selected activities and outputs were the following:

(a) Two key publications from each of the five substantive divisions of ESCWA, in addition to one project;

(b) An evaluation of 34 meetings and workshops, at least one from each division, based on questionnaires circulated to the participants at the end of each meeting to assess the efficacy of such meetings;

(c) A self-evaluation of thematic subprogrammes by each of the substantive divisions of their activities and outputs as a whole relative to the objectives set out for each division;

(d) A self-evaluation by regional advisers, through a standardized questionnaire and including a key task performed by each;

(e) An overall evaluation of regional advisory services by focal points in member countries, through a standardized questionnaire;

(f) An overall evaluation of the ESCWA secretariat's work since its inception 25 years ago, through discussions at a meeting of Arab intellectuals in December 1999.

109. The evaluation exercise was intended to be indicative, not exhaustive. It is planned that a comprehensive system for evaluation will be devised and put in place during the biennium 2000-2001. For the time being, by having conducted this exercise, ESCWA hopes to define indicators on the quality and usefulness of various aspects of its work and, in so doing, refine its evaluation mechanisms in the light of lessons learned from the experience.

1. *Evaluation by experts of selected outputs*

110. The outputs selected include a variety of both recurrent and non-recurrent publications: those focusing on regional coverage, those on national coverage, and those based on fieldwork. These outputs were evaluated through a standardized questionnaire completed by two experts for each output: one from the government sector and one from the private sector (academicians and professionals active in the field).

111. All the experts consulted in this evaluation exercise considered themselves as end-users of the outputs they were queried on. Other end-users, according to these experts, would be governments, university professors and students and researchers, followed closely by NGOs. The general public and the private business sector were not considered as end-users of these outputs. The results of this evaluation exercise indicated the following:

(a) The level of awareness among the experts regarding the outputs was relatively high; only one of the experts indicated being unaware of the output;

(b) The majority of experts reported that they had cited the output in their work and had recommended it to others in their field. This positive opinion indicated that ESCWA outputs are useful to the work of experts in their respective fields and are also perceived by them as useful to others. The only setback recorded with regard to the outputs was the language barrier;

(c) Most of the experts were aware of similar outputs published by other organizations, including universities and research centres, but they all agreed that the ESCWA outputs were generally of better quality or at least of similar quality;

(d) The majority of the experts stated that they would have preferred to see more coordination between ESCWA and other organizations in producing outputs on similar issues. They were also of the opinion that ESCWA outputs do not receive enough publicity and should be more widely circulated. The suggestions they made for increasing the circulation and usefulness of ESCWA outputs included:

- (i) *Building awareness*: by announcing the issuance date of publications; organizing seminars; and conducting meetings outside ESCWA headquarters;
- (ii) *Availability and widened distribution*: by producing electronic versions of the outputs for downloading from the Internet; expanding mailing lists; and increasing distribution through book stores;
- (iii) *Promotion*: by the free distribution of publications to governments and NGOs; and utilizing other promotional measures;
- (iv) *Accessibility*: by the translation of outputs into several languages and producing summarizations of them to reach a wider audience;
- (v) *Usefulness*: by elaborating on the recommendations contained therein to make them more useful as guides to policy makers.

2. Evaluation by governmental focal points

112. Most focal points in member countries considered decision makers at the governmental level as potential end-users of ESCWA outputs, while a minority considered researchers, university professors, students and NGOs instead as the main end-users.

113. Even though the focal points considered themselves familiar with the subject of the output given to them for evaluation, all affirmed that it had contributed in increasing their knowledge on the subject, indicating that the subject matter dealt with by ESCWA was not exhausted.

114. The outputs were perceived as informative, policy-oriented, and containing actionable recommendations. They were considered to have reached, in most of the cases, decision makers in the field. However, only half of the decision makers had actually implemented the recommendations proposed in the outputs, even though the recommendations were regarded by most focal points as effective guides to achieving goals. The bulky volume of the output was indicated as the main factor that caused decision makers to disregard the output, despite the fact that they knew that the subject of the output was relevant to the priorities and needs of their country.

115. It was recognized, however, that the outputs were not being given sufficient publicity and circulation. The suggestions made to improve publicity and circulation focused on increasing awareness and distribution and improving presentation.

116. The focal points also suggested other subjects and actions to be undertaken by ESCWA that could help member countries make better use of its activities. Among these suggestions were:

- (a) To increase direct contact with decision makers and experts in the region;
- (b) To publicize ESCWA activities more widely;
- (c) To improve the mechanisms of follow-up to ESCWA activities.

3. Evaluation of meetings and workshops

117. ESCWA conducted 34 meetings and workshops, 12 of which were evaluated (at least one meeting for each substantive subprogramme and, at the most, four). The questionnaires developed for this purpose were not uniform, although they addressed similar criteria. Thus, the questions were grouped into five main categories to secure uniformity and were analysed as such.

118. A total of 280 questionnaires were completed by participants in these meetings/workshops. The data compiled indicate that the highest ratings were given to the overall logistics and preparation of ESCWA meetings and workshops and also to the quality level of the papers presented. The ratings were also positive in relation to the ESCWA secretariat's capacity in identifying issues of concern to member States and in achieving the anticipated objectives of the meetings/workshops. However, the indicators were less favourable with regard to whether or not the participants would actually use the information provided by the meetings/workshops. This may infer that either the participants selected were not the actual end-users or decision makers, or that the recommendations of the meetings/workshops were not action-oriented, that is, the recommendations were too theoretical or were not related to real needs. This particular aspect needs to be investigated further.

119. The participants offered other comments, which, together with the above, fall into two categories in terms of lessons learned:

- (a) *Substantive considerations*: the need to formulate actionable recommendations that the participants themselves can apply;

(b) *Technical/organizational considerations*: the need to improve this category by:

- (i) Improving the selection of the participants in the meetings/workshops;
- (ii) Translating papers and documents presented to meetings/workshops into Arabic or English, as appropriate;
- (iii) Including more practical experiences and case studies;
- (iv) Emphasizing partnership between civil society and governmental institutions in relation to the issues addressed;
- (v) Distributing relevant documents in advance to allow the participants to better prepare themselves for the meetings/workshops.

4. *Self-evaluation by substantive divisions*

120. The majority of the five substantive divisions were of the opinion that they had fulfilled their goals. However, they identified the following constraints in carrying out their mandates:

- (a) The overall high rate of ESCWA staff vacancy, which averaged 29 per cent of total authorized work months in substantive divisions;
- (b) The weak involvement of governments in applying the recommendations forwarded by ESCWA and in programme implementation;
- (c) The political considerations which hamper the implementation of recommendations pertaining to strengthening regional cooperation, one of the ESCWA secretariat's principal mandates;
- (d) Insufficient inter-agency coordination on issues of common interest;
- (e) Limited budget for travel to obtain first-hand information and interact with counterparts;
- (f) Paucity of data and expertise in certain fields, especially on water and social issues;
- (g) The timely accessibility of required statistical data.

121. The suggestions made for improvement in reaching more end-users centred on the following promotional tools:

- (a) Using non-traditional methods for disseminating publications, especially the Internet, to reach a wider audience;
- (b) Creating a special Web site devoted to summaries of ESCWA publications;
- (c) Launching leading publications through press conferences to create awareness and obtain wider coverage;
- (d) Increasing participation in book fairs;
- (e) Improving the appearance of publications in terms of cover design and layout;
- (f) Ensuring the timely reproduction and distribution of outputs;
- (g) Periodically updating mailing lists.

122. Other kinds of improvements suggested were: soliciting partnership with civil society institutions by ensuring closer involvement of these institutions in ESCWA activities; and soliciting consistent feedback on outputs from end-users through questionnaires distributed after the conclusion of all meetings and the issuance of publications.

123. The foregoing suggestions clearly indicate the need to propagate ESCWA publications through innovative means to reach end-users and the public at large and to deepen the partnership with civil society institutions.

5. Self-evaluation by regional advisers

124. A standardized questionnaire for self-evaluation was distributed to regional advisers, nine of whom answered the questionnaire. The main findings were as follows:

(a) All believed that they had achieved the objectives of their services as reflected in the following indicators:

- (i) Services were rendered to the majority of member countries as well as to regional and international organizations and NGOs;
- (ii) All missions requested by member countries met with their satisfaction;
- (iii) The awareness of member countries was raised on issues of concern to them;
- (iv) The advisers proposed specific solutions to important problems;

(b) All believed that member countries made good use of their services and cited evidence, such as approval of proposals, adoption of policies and recommendations, initiation of projects, recurrence of requests, and written and verbal expressions of appreciation;

(c) Seven out of the nine regional advisers reported that member countries had suggested ways and means of improving the ESCWA secretariat's advisory services. Among the suggestions were: increasing communication between the Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Division and member countries; more personal contacts; better publicity on the availability of the secretariat's technical assistance; and expanding advisory services to include new specialized fields of activity;

(d) Technical advice on substantive issues came to the forefront as the type of advisory service most requested, followed by the proposal of policies and the preparation of plans of action. Next in priority came training and workshops, then the proposal of projects and, finally, the review and commentary of studies and projects;

(e) Only 35 per cent of the regional advisers agreed that the ESCWA secretariat's mission in rendering regional advisory services should continue along the lines of current practices. The suggestions made for improving services included: the promotion of multidisciplinary missions; the active participation of regional advisers in formulating the ESCWA work programme and medium-term plan; activating the role of the Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Division in drawing up an effective strategy and work plan for technical cooperation; promoting the qualifications and work experience of regional advisers; assuming a more effective role in marketing technical assistance; strengthening logistic and administrative support for regional advisers; and establishing better communications with concerned sectors in member countries.

6. *Overall evaluation of regional advisory services by governmental focal points*

125. On this evaluation exercise, not all member countries answered the ESCWA questionnaire, despite repeated reminders by fax and telephone. Out of the 13 member countries, only five responded to the questionnaire. Some of the other countries responded with an overall evaluation, while others submitted an evaluation on individual advisory services, which raised the total number of replies to 14.

126. In summarizing the evaluation of governmental focal entities, it was found that the majority agreed that the present topics covered by the ESCWA regional advisory services met their priorities. Some suggested new topics to be added. Training and workshops were the types of advisory services most desired, followed by technical advice on substantive issues and the proposal of projects. Less interest was expressed in advisory services related to reviewing and commenting on studies and projects or in formulating policies and preparing plans of action (in that order).

127. With regard to how the ESCWA secretariat could help member countries make better use of its regional advisory services, several suggestions were made. The most important among them were:

- (a) To promote the use of regional advisers in member countries;
- (b) To devise a plan of demand for regional advisers by member countries;
- (c) To follow up with governments on projects and recommendations made by regional advisers beyond the duration of the latter's mission.

128. The results of the two questionnaires completed on the evaluation of regional advisory services, though not sufficiently comprehensive, highlighted a number of issues from which lessons can be learned to improve ESCWA activities in this respect:

- (a) ESCWA should make more effort in promoting regional advisory services in member countries and establish more effective relationships with the parties concerned, including identification of the focal entity of reference for regional advisory services in member countries;
- (b) Member countries should be urged to plan the bulk of their demand for regional advisory services in advance. This will help ESCWA make more effective use, in time and cost, of its regional advisory services and enable it to schedule the services in a feasible order of priority;
- (c) Technical assistance requests by member countries exceed the number of regional advisers available. Thus, some regional advisory posts should be filled on an ad hoc basis in order to satisfy the needs of member countries in a timely manner;
- (d) Regional advisers should follow up with member countries on policy and project recommendations.

7. *Overall evaluation of the ESCWA secretariat's work over the past 25 years*

129. Another form of evaluation of ESCWA activities may be inferred from the conclusions of the meeting of eminent persons held in December 1999 on the role of ESCWA in the development of the region at the dawn of the twenty-first century. During this meeting, the participants reviewed the publication issued on the occasion of the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of ESCWA, entitled *ESCWA (1974-1999): Twenty-five Years of Service to the Region's Development*, and expressed the following views on the work of ESCWA and its role:

- (a) *In administrative terms:* ESCWA needs to promote its publications and activities better among end-users and to solicit their opinions thereon;

(b) *In substantive terms:* ESCWA needs to continue to strengthen its efforts along the following lines:

- (i) In addressing the effects of globalization on the development of the region;
- (ii) In addressing the impact of political considerations on socio-economic development;
- (iii) In addressing social issues specific to the region;
- (iv) In forging and recommending a development strategy for the region, especially in terms of social development;
- (v) In expanding the operational aspects of its activities and training programmes;
- (vi) In developing a closer partnership with institutions of civil society;
- (vii) In heeding regional specificities while upholding international principles, norms and standards;
- (viii) In strengthening the ESCWA secretariat's role in furthering and operationalizing regional cooperation in its capacity as the arm of the United Nations in the region.
