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**REPORT OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
ON SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT
AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION**

Beirut, 18 July 2002



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INTRODUCTION

1. The first meeting of the Consultative Committee on Scientific and Technological Development and Technological Innovation was held on 18 July 2002, after the joint Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)/International Labour Organization (ILO) Forum on Technology, Employment and Poverty Alleviation in the ESCWA Member Countries. The Committee was established pursuant to resolution 225 (XXI) adopted by the twenty-first session of ESCWA in May 2001 and subsequently ratified by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (see annex I). Its mandate is to promote activities in member countries aimed at the acquisition, adaptation and development of new technology and provide advice to both member countries and ESCWA on issues concerning the formulation and implementation of science, technology and innovation (STI)-related policies, strategies and programmes. Special attention will be given to the harnessing of selected new technologies for sustainable development in ESCWA member countries. Committee members include Government representatives and the representatives of leading science and technology institutes, relevant non-governmental organizations (NGOs), regional and international organizations and private sector institutions. It is hoped that participation by scientists, technologists and relevant decision makers from non-ESCWA member Arab countries will be arranged through cooperation with the relevant regional and international organizations, in order to reap greater benefits and pool resources.

I. OBJECTIVES

2. The Committee considered specific issues relating to science, technology and innovation policies and programmes in Arab countries, with the emphasis on the goals addressed by the Forum concerning the utilization of new technologies in combating unemployment and poverty.

3. Particular attention was given to the following issues:

(a) STI-related capacity-building and priority-setting in Arab countries;

(b) The use of selected new technologies for employment creation and poverty reduction in Arab countries;

(c) The adaptation of new technology to local needs.

4. With those issues in mind, the Committee considered the following points:

(a) The development of human resources;

(b) The delivery to poor communities of relevant educational, training and related employment-promoting services based on selected new technologies, including information and communication technologies (ICTs);

(c) The assessment, adaptation and dissemination of new technology;

(d) The access of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to new technologies, including ICTs, selected biotechnologies and new materials technologies, with a view to enhancing their prospects for growth and widening their contribution to the creation of employment opportunities and adaptation of those technologies to local needs;

(e) The creation of networks of specialists and organizations;

(f) The formulation of terms of reference for a plan aimed at producing concrete results.

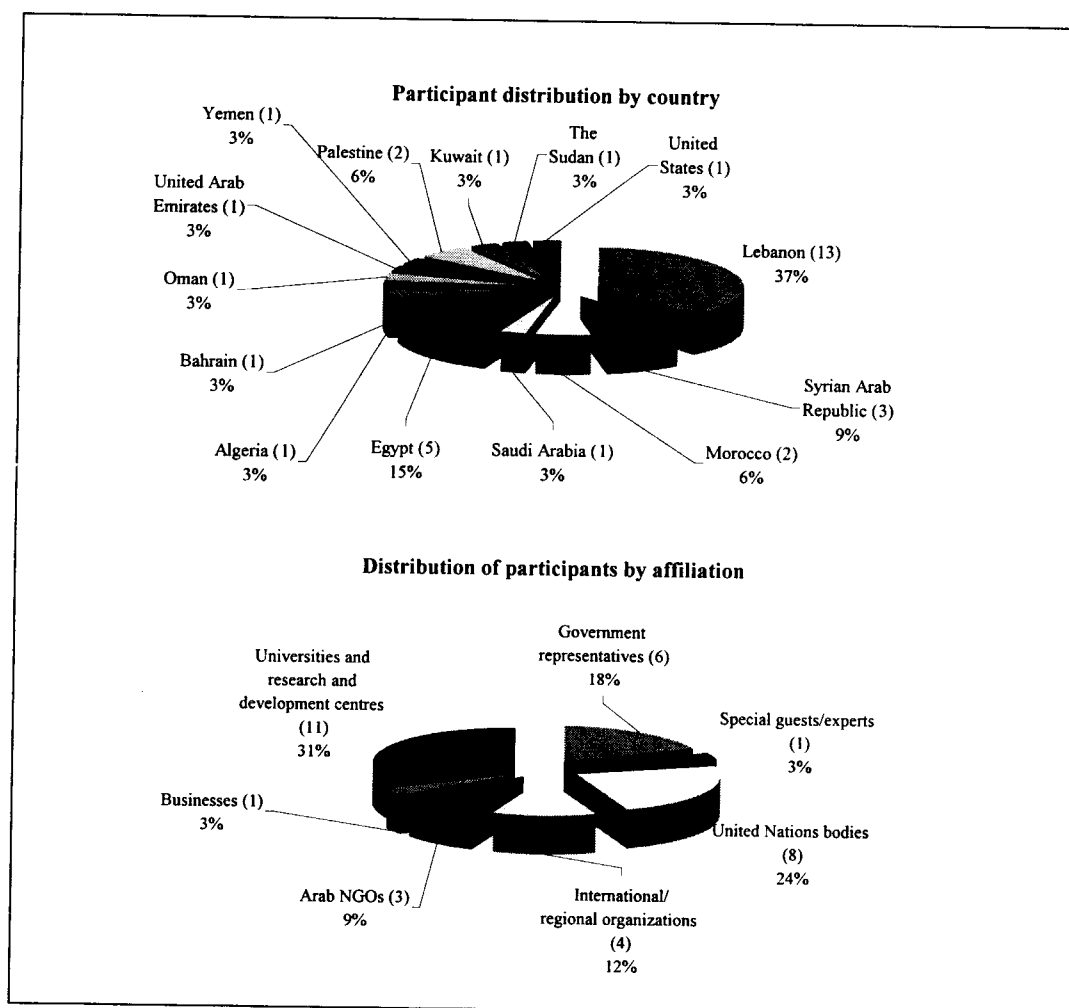
II. ORGANIZATION OF WORK AND PARTICIPANTS

5. The first meeting of the Consultative Committee was chaired jointly by the Executive Secretary of ESCWA, Ms. Mervat Tallawy, and Mr. Duncan Campbell, while Mr. Omar Bizri acted as rapporteur.

6. A round-table discussion involving all participants focused on national technology strategies in Arab countries, and it was followed by the formulation of recommendations on technology strategies in those countries.

7. A total of 34 people attended that meeting (see annex II). The figure below disaggregates the participants by nationality and affiliation. All participants had had the opportunity to attend the sessions of the ESCWA/ILO Forum on Technology, Employment and Poverty Alleviation in the Arab Countries and had received full Forum documentation.

Figure. Distribution of participants in the meeting



Note: The number of participants from each country or affiliation is given between brackets.

III. SUBSTANTIVE MATERIAL SUBMITTED TO THE COMMITTEE

8. The conclusions and recommendations drawn from presentations and participants at the first two days of the ESCWA/ILO Forum were presented to the Committee for consideration and implementation (see Report of the Forum on Technology, Employment and Poverty Alleviation in the Arab Countries, E/ESCWA/TECH/2002/2) and provided information on the following issues:

(a) Science, technology and innovation policies, strategies and action plans aimed at employment creation and poverty reduction. Emphasis was placed upon the development of SMEs and on the delivery of electronic services;

(b) Policies and strategies for new technologies, and, in particular, ICTs; selected biotechnologies; environmentally sound technologies, with the emphasis on technologies designed to improve water desalination, treatment and reuse;

(c) The creation of an enabling environment for technology innovation, through legislative and regulatory instruments; taxation schemes and regimes intended to create investment incentives and improved infrastructure.

9. Other issues covered by material submitted to the Committee included the following:

(a) Schemes to fund STI;

(b) Human resource development, with special emphasis on the role of ICTs in education;

(c) Standards and accreditation schemes;

(d) Sectoral considerations concerning capacity-building in STI;

(e) The roles of Governments, private enterprises, NGOs, civil society institutions and the relevant regional and international organizations.

10. Papers submitted to the meeting as background material included four ESCWA papers, namely, *Technology, Employment, and Poverty Alleviation; Challenges for the Arab Countries; Technology and Innovation in the Arab Countries; Status, Trends and Future Needs; Notes on Science, Technology and Innovation Indicators: Concepts, Recent Developments and Future Prospects; and New Technology-based Institutional Forms as Instruments for Capacity-Building and Sustainable Development.*

11. Elements of an action plan for the advancement of STI and to promote the contribution of new technologies to sustainable development in the Arab countries, some of which had been introduced at the ESCWA/ILO Forum, were also submitted for consideration at the meeting (see part V).

IV. DISCUSSIONS

12. During Committee discussions, the need to implement the conclusions reached and recommendations made by the Forum was reiterated. Bodies must be set up and charged with implementing specific tasks, in order to harness new technologies for sustainable development and link national STI capacity-building to efforts aimed at employment creation and poverty reduction in Arab countries.

13. A number of ideas pertaining to the roles that the Committee should play and activities in which it should engage were discussed. The Committee's consultative role in the development of scientific and technological research and development (R&D) in the region was strongly endorsed.

14. The role of the Committee in launching national awareness-raising campaigns to educate policy and decision makers and technology end-users as to the potential benefits of STI, especially in respect of poverty alleviation, employment creation and economic growth, was also emphasized.

15. Participants thought that the Committee should act as a facilitator for the various players and provide a mechanism for the coordination efforts by R&D centres, the academic world and Government and private enterprises to harness new technologies in combating unemployment and poverty.

16. Reference was made to the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society, scheduled for December 2003, which is expected to provide an excellent forum for discussion of the outcome of activities

carried out by ESCWA and other regional bodies concerned with promoting STI and the achievement of the Millennium Goals. The work of the Committee and the bodies to which it may delegate specific tasks could be used to illustrate the action taken to create information societies in the region and the relevant opportunities and challenges.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

17. An advisory board comprising experts from science, technology, business and Government should be created in order to provide consultancy services on STI-related activities in Arab countries. The primary functions of that board would be to review developments in STI and make specific proposals to Government, decision-making and private sector institutions regarding dissemination and effective utilization.

18. The Committee proposed the creation of two task forces consisting of experts from various fields. The primary responsibility of the first such force would be to outline a future vision for STI in the Arab countries and propose specific measures to guarantee translation of that vision into plans of action and workable strategies, the ultimate objective being to promote conditions that would lead to a 'renaissance', rather than gradual and modest improvements. The second task force would deal with the issue of harnessing new technologies for the purposes of employment, and would be responsible for bringing new technology applications closer to end-users in the region. Other task forces could be created as necessary.

19. Periodic meetings of scientists, technologists, decision and policy makers in Governments and private enterprise, and representatives of NGOs and civil society institutions must be held in order to review developments and make specific proposals on future policy and implementation modalities.

20. Awareness-raising campaigns are required in order to acquaint the public in Arab societies of the benefits of new technologies in terms of the achievement of sustainable development objectives, employment creation and poverty reduction. Such campaigns must be launched at national and regional levels.

21. Several activities should be implemented concurrently in order to raise awareness and promote action, with specific reference to the utilization of new technologies in employment creation and poverty reduction. Such activities could include the production and distribution of a short documentary film on the success of certain Arab countries in harnessing new technologies for employment creation and poverty reduction. The film could also present success stories from other countries and regions, and lessons learned, highlighting the effectiveness of the development and implementation of "pro-poor" technologies.

22. With specific reference to ESCWA/ILO cooperation, it was recommended that steps should be taken by both organizations with a view to implementing the regional agenda for action on technology, employment and poverty alleviation in the Arab countries, which was discussed at the ESCWA/ILO Forum and approved as the basis for future action. As part of that agenda, attention should also be paid to the impact of globalization on employment creation and poverty reduction in the Arab countries.

23. Both ESCWA and ILO are urged to take steps to implement that regional agenda and to secure funding for this purpose.

Annex I

RESOLUTION ADOPTED AT THE ESCWA TWENTY-FIRST SESSION

**225 (XXI). THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ESCWA CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
ON SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT
AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION**

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Recognizing the vital role played by the development of scientific and technological capabilities and technological innovation in achieving the goals of sustainable development,

Recognizing also the need to integrate and coordinate the endeavours of all the parties concerned with the development of scientific and technological capabilities, including bodies from the public, joint and private sectors and the institutions of civil society, to employ technological innovation in order to promote the productivity and competitiveness of the production and services sectors in member countries,

Noting the possibilities which technological innovation capabilities offer with regard to facing the challenges and demands of globalization and the new systems and measures relating to the quality of products, the preservation of intellectual property rights and environmental protection,

Inspired by the specialized committees for the support of development endeavours based on scientific and technological development established by the other United Nations regional commissions,

1. *Decides* to establish a consultative committee on scientific and technological development and technological innovation, the main responsibility of which will be to sponsor endeavours aimed at scientific and technological development and technological innovation. The committee shall be composed of distinguished experts in the field, and shall have the following duties:

(a) To advise on the endeavours exerted by member countries with a view to acquiring modern technology and support such endeavours with regional and international expertise, with particular reference to information and communications technology, biotechnology and new materials technology;

(b) To propose ways of integrating and coordinating efforts aimed at transferring, adapting and mastering this technology, and promoting regional cooperation in these fields;

(c) To advise on priorities related to the programmes of work and medium-term plans adopted by ESCWA in the fields of developing scientific and technological capabilities and technological innovation;

(d) To follow up on the resolutions and recommendations of international and regional conferences relating to the development of scientific and technological capabilities and technological innovation which are attended by member countries; and to coordinate efforts related to the implementation of such resolutions and recommendations;

2. *Decides also* that this consultative committee on scientific and technological development and technological innovation shall hold its meetings at least once every two years, with effect from 2002;

3. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to follow up implementation of this resolution and to submit a report on the progress that has been achieved in this regard to the Commission's twenty-second session.

3rd plenary meeting
11 May 2001

Annex II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. ARAB NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The General Federation of Bahrain Trade Union

Mr. Abdulgaffar Abdelhussein Abdulla
President
General Committee for Bahrain Workers
P.O. Box 26805
Manama, Bahrain
Tel.: 973-727333
Mobile: 9641164
Fax: 973-729599
E-mail: gcbw@batelco.com.bh

General Union of Chambers of Commerce,
Industry and Agriculture for Arab Countries

Ms. Naela Ibrahim Haddad
Director
Labour and Investment Directorate
P.O. Box 11-2837 Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: 961-1-814270/806840
Fax: 961-1-814269
E-mail: gucciaac@destination.com.lb

National Rehabilitation and Development Centre

Mr. Khaled Toufik El-Mohtar
General Manager
P.O. Box 11-7732
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: 01-630134
Mobile: 03-206633
Fax: 01-630134
E-mail: nrdc@destination.com.lb

B. BUSINESS

National Center for Information and Studies

Mr. Fadi Kamil El-Demachki
President
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: 05-430303
Mobile: 03-374744
Fax: 05-430303/301299
E-mail: ncis@orientix.com

C. SPECIAL GUESTS/EXPERTS

Mr. Mostafa K. Tolba
President
International Center for Environment and Development
23 Fawzi El-Ramah Street
Mohandesin 12411
Giza, Egypt
Tel.: 202-3046032/3/4
012-2112603
Fax: 202-3046033/4
E-mail: iced@intouch.com

D. INTERNATIONAL/REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development

Mr. Abdul Hamid Mahfouz Zigalaie
Economic Advisor
Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development
P.O. Box 21923 Safat 13080 Kuwait
Tel.: 965-4844500
Mobile: 965-7893644
Fax: 965-4815750/60/70
E-mail: mahfouz42@hotmail.com

Arab School of Science and Technology

Mr. Imad Moustapha
Secretary General
P.O. Box 7028, Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Tel.: 963-11-5118904
963-93-248586
Residence: 963-11-5136670
Fax: 963-11-5111083
E-mail: asst@net.sy

International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions

Mr. Ammar Sammak
Director of Social and Economic Affairs
Kassaa, Tahreer Square
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Tel.: 963-11-4444974
Fax: 963-11-4420323
E-mail: icatu@net.sy

Arab Science and Technology Foundation

Mr. Abdalla Alnajjar
President
University City
Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
Tel.: 971-6-5050550/1
Mobile: 971-050-6290333
Fax: 971-6-5050553
E-mail: an@sharjah.ac.ae

E. UNITED NATIONS BODIES, SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS IN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

International Telecommunication Union – Regional Office in Cairo

Mr. Ibrahim Kadi
Head
P.O. Box 8092 Nasr City
Cairo, Egypt
Tel.: 202-2626620/44
Fax: 202-2622274
E-mail: kadi@itu.int

International Labour Office – Headquarters

Mr. Duncan Campbell
Thematic Section on ICTs
Geneva, Switzerland
Tel.: 41-22-7996480
E-mail: campbell@ilo.org

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNDEBAS – Beirut Office)

Mr. Sulieman Awad Sulieman
Programme Specialist: TVE
P.O. Box 5244
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: 850013/4/5 - 850075
Fax: 824854
E-mail: uhbei@unesco.org

F. ESCWA/ARAB COUNTRIES

Algeria

Ms. Fatiha Djeheiche
Ministry of Agriculture and rural development
Alger
Tel.: 21321746157
Fax: 21321915300
E-mail: fdjehiche@hotmail.com

Egypt

Ms. Mona Mohamed El-Tobgui
Assistant Professor
National Research Center
El-Tahrir Street,
Dokki 12311, Cairo
Tel.: 202-3371010 (office)
Mobile: 20-10-6602437
Fax: 200-3370931
E-mail: mtobgui@idsc.net.eg

Egypt (continued)

Mr. Nader Fergany
Director
Almishkat Centre for Research
20 Al-Sadd Al-A'aly St.
Dokki 12311, Giza
Tel.: 202-3375656
Fax: 202-3375656, 3444429
E-mail: webmaster@almishkat.org

Mr. Sherif Hashem
Director
Information Society Development Office
Ministry of Communications and Information
Technology
Giza
Tel.: 202-3088232 - 3444546
Fax: 202-3444534
E-mail: shashem@mcit.gov.eg

Lebanon

Ms. Nabila Saab Fathallah
Social expert
Ex. Executive Director of Labour Organization in
Beirut
Ministry of Social Affairs
Tel.: 03-216404
Fax: 01-800255/800364
E-mail: Reem-design@hotmail.com

Mr. Mouin Haidar Hamzé
General Secretary
Lebanese National Council for Scientific Research
P.O. Box 11-8281, Beirut
Tel.: 961-1-822665 - 840260/1/2/3/4
Mobile: 961-3-241630
Fax: 961-1-822639/822842
E-mail: hamze@cncs.edu.lb

Mr. Nashat Mansour
Associate Professor of Computer Science
Lebanese American University
Kreitem, Madam Curie St., Beirut
Mobile: 961-3-379647
Fax: 961-1-867089
E-mail: nmansour@lau.edu.lb

Mr. Fouad Mrad
Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering
American University of Beirut
Mobile: 961-3-852452
Fax: 961-1-744462
E-mail: fouad@aub.edu.lb

Morocco

Mr. Yahia Bouabdellaoui
Counselor of Information Technologies Affairs
and Water Desalination Expert
Prime Minister Office
Palais Royal, Rabat
Tel.: 21237219400
Mobile: 21261211589
Fax: 21237731010
E-mail: bouabdellaoui@pm.gov.ma

Mr. Mehdi Amrani Souhli
Pr. de l'Enseignement Supérieur
Conseiller au Cabinet du Secrétaire d'Etat
Chargé de la Recherche Scientifique
Tel.: 212-7-737258/59 - 61342900
Fax: 212-7-737260
E-mail: amrani@enssup.gov.ma

Oman

Mr. Saleh ben Abdallah Al-Farsi
Director General
Information and Publication Center
Ministry of National Economy
Tel.: 968-604852
Fax: 968-698467
E-mail: infodg@moneoman.gov.om

Palestine

Mr. Said A. Assaf
Director General
ANSAR and ASIR
Palestinian Authority
P.O. Box 903 Ramallah
Tel.: 97022954223/97252747098
Fax: 97022954223
E-mail: kassaf@planet.edu

Mr. Karim A. Tahboub
Consultant
Directorate of Science and Technology
Ministry of Planning
Dean
College of Engineering and Technology
Palestine Polytechnic University
P.O. Box 103 Hebron
Tel.: 972-2-2228 912 (office)
Residence: 972-2-2228 176
Mobile: 972-59-520525
Fax: 972-2-2217 248
E-mail: tahboub@ppu.edu
tahboub@MIT.EDU
Web site: <http://www.ppu.edu/tahboub>

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Mohamed Ahmed Tarabzouni
Director of Technology Department
Director of Saudi Center for Remote Sensing
Technology Department
King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology
P.O. Box 94690, Riyadh 11614
Tel.: 966-1-4882721
Mobile: 966-55-420077
Fax: 966-1-4881051
E-mail: mtrabzon@kacst.edu.sa

Sudan

Mr. Mobarak Mohamed Ali Magzoub
The Minister
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific
Research
Tel.: 24911779312 (office)
Mobile: 24912392572
Fax: 24911779312 (office)

Syrian Arab Republic

Mr. Ibrahim Othman
Director General
Atomic Energy Commission
P.O. Box 6091 Damascus
Tel.: 963-2133952/6111926/7
Fax: 963-11-6112289
E-mail: atomic@net.sy
aecs@mail.sy

Yemen

Mr. Hassan Sharafuddin
Professor of Economics
Faculty of Commerce and Economics
Sana'a University
Tel.: 967-1-415364
Mobile: 967-7909766
Fax: 967-1-415364
E-mail: sharafha@hotmail.com

United Nations Economic and Social Commission
for Western Asia

Ms. Mervat Tallawy
Executive Secretary
ESCWA, UN House
Riad El-Solh Square, Beirut, Lebanon
P.O. Box 11-8575 Riad El-Solh, Beirut
Tel.: 961-1-981301/981311/981401 ext. 1802
Fax: 961-1-981510/1/2

Ms. Mariam Al-Awadhi
Deputy Executive Secretary
ESCWA - UN House
Riad El-Solh Square, Beirut, Lebanon
P.O. Box 11-8575 Riad El-Solh, Beirut
Tel.: 961-1-981301/981311/981401 ext. 1805
Fax: 961-1-981510/1/2

Mr. Hassan Charif
OIC
Sectoral Issues and Policies Division
ESCWA - UN House
Riad El-Solh Square, Beirut, Lebanon
P.O. Box 11-8575 Riad El-Solh, Beirut
Tel.: 961-1-981301/981311/981401 ext. 1502
Fax: 961-1-981510/1/2
E-mail: charif@escwa.org.lb

Mr. Omar F. Bizri
Chief
Technology Section
Sectoral Issues and Policies Division
ESCWA - UN House
Riad El-Solh Square, Beirut, Lebanon
P.O. Box 11-8575 Riad El-Solh, Beirut
Tel.: 961-1-981301/981311/981401 ext. 1506
Fax: 961-1-981510/1/2
E-mail: bizri@escwa.org.lb

Mr. Mansour Farah
First Economic Affairs Officer
Technology Section
Sectoral Issues and Policies Division
ESCWA - UN House
Riad El-Solh Square, Beirut, Lebanon
P.O. Box 11-8575 Riad El-Solh, Beirut
Tel.: 961-1-981301/981311/981401 ext. 1519
Fax: 961-1-981510/1/2