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

Review of recurrent publications of the Commission

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION
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Introduction

In response to the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC), as endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 41/203 of 11 December 1986 entitled "Programme planning", a review of ESCWA recurrent publications programme has been included for the first time as an agenda item. The review has been undertaken in the light of the criteria set forth in General Assembly resolution 38/32 E,^{1/} with a view to discontinuing those publications that do not meet these criteria or to reducing their periodicity or volume of issuance. The criteria set forth in resolution 38/32 E for conducting such a review included the following:

- "(a) Usefulness to the end-user of the publication as gauged from end-user response or from the sales record of a publication;
- "(b) Filling of a need;
- "(c) High standard of analysis or data;
- "(d) Promotion of the principles and purposes of the Organization;
- "(e) Continued validity of the original mandate ..."

In the light of the above, an assessment of ESCWA recurrent publications has been made for review by ESCWA at its fifteenth session. The results of this review will be presented to the Publications Board and reviewed by the CPC.

The current recurrent ESCWA publications, totalling 17 in the 1988-1989 biennium, cover the main programmes and priorities in the ESCWA region in the fields of agriculture, development issues and policies, public finance, external trade, population, social development (including issues on women in development), energy and basic statistics. In addition, some of the publications provide information and data designed to stimulate regional and interregional co-operation between Arab countries. These publications have been assessed with a view to curtailing those which are obsolete and reducing the periodicity and volume of issuance of others, as is stated above. However, in the light of changing programme needs, new recurrent publications have been included. However, the total number of issues has been reduced in the 1990-1991 biennium. The review at the programme level is as follows.

1. Food and agriculture

Agriculture and Development in Western Asia is an annual bulletin published jointly by ESCWA and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and mandated by the strategy for the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989.

^{1/} See General Assembly resolution 38/32 of 25 November 1983 entitled "Pattern of conferences", section E entitled "Control and limitation of documentation".

This bulletin which reviews developments, trends and policy changes in agriculture, both at the national and regional level, is one of the ways by which ESCWA disseminates information on comparative agricultural developments in the region.

It serves policy makers, planners, professionals and administrators in relevant ministries, institutions, universities and other national and regional organizations concerned with agriculture and rural development. Through in-depth analyses of major development problems in agriculture, the bulletin attempts to identify critical issues facing policy makers, provide policy recommendations and give pertinent, up-to-date data and information, including the follow-up of meetings organized under the ESCWA food and agriculture programme.

2. Development issues and policies

(a) Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA Region

The main purpose of this annual survey is to provide policy makers in member countries with a reliable and factual basis for formulating their economic and social policies. The survey enjoys a wide distribution among concerned authorities in member countries, as well as in regional and international organizations. It has proved to be of value to many users, as is indicated by the references made to it in various publications and replies to questionnaires from the survey readers. Moreover, sales of the survey in Geneva and New York are very encouraging.

As in the other regional commissions, the survey fulfills the need to review and analyse socio-economic developments and trends in the region. As a supplement to the survey, a prominent issue of relevance to the social-economic development of the region is selected annually and analysed in depth. The most up-to-date data on the economies of the region are included and analysed thoroughly in the survey in order to promote the principles and purposes of the Commission by clearly illustrating the need for economic co-operation and integration in Western Asia.

The survey was originally mandated by the strategy for the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989. In addition, the General Assembly's resolution to formulate an International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade (1990s) further emphasises the continued validity of the survey's original mandate.^{1/}

(b) Studies on Development Problems in Countries of Western Asia

This publication is a selection of studies undertaken by the ESCWA secretariat that deals with major development problems in the countries of Western Asia. This publication contains reviewed and substantively edited and updated studies of the highest quality for wider distribution. The main purpose of the publication is to fulfil the need to focus the attention of

^{1/} See General Assembly resolution 43/182 of 20 December 1988 entitled "Preparations for an international development strategy for the fourth United Nations development decade".

policy makers in member countries on the major economic and social problems facing the countries of Western Asia and to provide alternative policy options. This publication promotes the principles and purposes of the organization by providing a better understanding of the economic and social conditions in the region, thus contributing to the promotion of regional economic co-operation and integration in Western Asia.

The problems confronting the countries of the region justify the periodic issue of a publication that deals with problems in various fields of development. However, since 1985, owing to financial constraints and in order to provide a better selection of studies, this publication has been reduced from an annual to a biennial issue.

3. Human settlements

The in-depth publications issued under the title of human settlement country profiles were completed during the 1986-1987 biennium. They gave a broad view of the situation of human settlements in the region and contributed to building up a data base on the subject of human settlements. Since all ESCWA countries were covered by the end of the 1986-1987 biennium, the profiles have been replaced by two new recurrent publications initiated in the current biennium: (a) human settlements data sheets for the ESCWA region; and (b) human settlements situation in the ESCWA region. The first publication will contain statistical information concerning human settlements indicators in the ESCWA region, including population, economic variables, dwelling characteristics, housing stock, infrastructural and social services, capital investment and building materials. The first issue will appear in 1989. The second publication, which will contain a short, concise analysis of the human settlements situation in each of the countries of the region and a review of human settlements development trends at the regional level, will be published in the 1990-1991 biennium. Both publications aim at providing policy makers, researchers and government officials working in the field of human settlements with comprehensive information that can be used as a basis for decision-making. These publications will be published every four years since, unlike other indicators, human settlements indicators change over long periods of time.

4. Industrial development

In the 1988-1989 biennium, plans were made to publish five technical publications under the industrial development series, but owing to the irregularity of these publications, they will be discontinued in the 1990-1991 biennium. Future studies will be issued as technical publications.

5. International trade and development finance programme

The international trade programme has published annual reviews of developments in the external sector of the ESCWA region. These reviews provide analytical and extensive statistical information on the trade and payments flows of member countries. They are intended to be used as background material in national planning and policy formulation and as a teaching input in universities and training and research institutes. This has been an ongoing activity since the beginning of the current medium-term plan.

The reliability and availability of detailed trade statistics are major constraints to research and analysis in this field. Two new recurrent publications dealing with terms of trade index numbers and intraregional trade and trade with other developing countries will be initiated in the forthcoming biennium as recurrent publications that will deal with other aspects and numerical indicators on trade. These publications aim at the compilation, classification and standardization of trade data for analytical purposes and to render support for future activities under the programme. Similar publications were previously undertaken at the initiative of the secretariat during the previous biennia, including the current biennium. They have already been programmed and from the 1990-1991 biennium will be published regularly as recurrent publications. The envisaged output will include a computation and analysis of regional and national terms of trade and related indices, together with a statistical review and analysis of intraregional and interregional trade flows according to selected economic criteria.

6. Energy

Two recurrent publications are envisaged under this programme in the 1990-1991 biennium. They will be entitled "Bulletin of energy data" and "Survey and assessment of energy-related activities in the ESCWA region". In fact, these two publications will be issued annually in the current biennium as technical publications entitled "Print-outs of energy data" and "Survey and assessment of energy-related activities and developments in the ESCWA region". The aim is to set up a comprehensive data bank on energy-related activities and to follow up and assess the activities undertaken in the region for the development of energy resources. In view of their usefulness for researchers and policy makers in the energy field, they will be included in the list of recurrent ESCWA publications to be published annually on a regular basis.

7. Natural resources

The recurrent publication entitled Natural Resources Bulletin will be discontinued as of the current biennium, and publications will appear in the form of technical studies with the same end-user coverage.

8. Population

The two recurrent publications under this programme are as follows:

(a) Population Bulletin of ESCWA

This bulletin, which is the only bulletin concerned with population issues in the region, is a journal concerned with: (i) population and related issues relevant to Arab countries; and (ii) theoretical and methodological subjects of relevance to population training in the Arab world. The main objective of this publication is to provide researchers and scholars interested in population issues relevant to the region with a forum for their research. This publication, which was issued twice a year in both English and

Arabic, was mandated by the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989, which has been revised and extended to 1991. However, three instead of four issues will be published during this biennium, and three will be published in the forthcoming biennium. The reduction in the number of issues was made in order to save resources by reducing the periodicity of issuance. This activity is totally funded by extrabudgetary resources (provided by the United Nations Population Fund) (UNFPA).

(b) Demographic and Socio-economic Data Sheets for Countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

The main objective of these data sheets is to present the most recent data and estimates on a set of demographic and socio-economic variables for the member States of ESCWA in line with the strategy set in the medium-term plan for 1984-1989, which has been revised and extended to 1991. These data sheets are issued every two years and are totally funded by extrabudgetary resources (provided by UNFPA).

9. Social development

The only recurrent publication under this programme is entitled "Directory of Arab professional women for activities in the field of technical co-operation among developing countries". It was planned for the 1986-1987 biennium, but was postponed and is being finalized for publication by the second half of 1989. The updating of the directory will be a continuous activity and a publication will appear every two years. This publication was mandated by the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the World Conference on the United Nations Decade for Women, which was held in Baghdad in December 1984, and by the Strategy for the Development of Arab Women in Western Asia to the Year 2000.

The first phase of this activity was financed on an equal basis by the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development (DTCO). At the request of DTCO, from the 1990-1991 biennium, the updating of the directory will be integrated into the regular work programme of ESCWA in order to ensure its continuity and regular updating.

The main objectives of this activity are linked to the growing need to identify the expertise that women possess to undertake assignments and projects in their own and in other countries.

The end-users will be Governments, the United Nations and other international organizations, League of Arab States and its specific agencies, other regional organizations, universities and non-governmental organizations, especially those dealing with women.

10. Public finance

The annual recurrent publication under this programme is now entitled "Current developments and trends in the monetary and financial sectors of the economies of the ESCWA region". Its aim is to examine recent developments in the field of money and finance at the national and regional level. It also identifies the critical issues confronting policy makers and provides

guidelines to improve the performance and management of national financial systems in order to promote co-operation at the subregional and regional level. As such, this annual publication fulfils the need to monitor trends and problems in development finance, as mandated by the medium-term plan.

This output is essentially intended for member Governments (ministries of planning, finance and economy, together with central banks), inter-governmental policy-making organs and organizations concerned with money and finance, as well as research institutes dealing with the subject of public finance.

11. Statistics

The following statistical publications were prepared within the framework of the 1984-1989 medium-term plan and its revisions, and are in line with the terms of reference of the ESCWA Statistics Division.

(a) Statistical Abstract of the Region of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

This publication has been issued annually since 1977. It is designed to be a general and comprehensive publication providing, for each ESCWA country, main data on population, social conditions, national accounts, agriculture, industry, energy, foreign trade, finance, transport, communications and tourism.

Because of the broad coverage of its content, this publication is intended for a wide variety of end-users, especially research institutes, universities, libraries, Arab missions in New York and Geneva and regional and international organizations, including ESCWA substantive divisions.

In view of the introduction in 1987 of the Unified Arab Statistical Abstract, from the 1990-1991 biennium the ESCWA Statistical Abstract is planned to be issued on a biennial rather than an annual basis.

(b) Unified Arab Statistical Abstract

This publication was introduced in 1987 as a joint activity with the secretariat of the League of Arab States. For the future, it is planned to replace the individual abstracts that are prepared by various regional organizations in order to reduce the duplication of work in this field.

The Unified Arab Statistical Abstract differs from the Statistical Abstract of the ESCWA Region in terms of scope (since it covers all Arab countries) and the pattern of its presentation (as it is organized by subject and not by country). Its aim is to give comparable statistical series in various economic and social areas in the Arab world.

This publication is intended for a wide range of end-users in Arab countries, especially national and regional institutions, as well as research institutes and individuals. Its distribution is undertaken partly by the ESCWA secretariat and partly by the League of Arab States.

It is planned to continue this publication on an annual basis, in accordance with the agreement concluded with the secretariat of the League of Arab States and in line with General Assembly resolution 42/5 of 15 October 1987 entitled "Co-operation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States".

(c) External Trade Bulletin of the ESCWA Region

This specialized bulletin was issued annually from 1983 to 1986. Its periodicity was then reduced to once every biennium. It presents relevant statistical series on the evolution of international trade of the ESCWA region, the intraregional flows of commodity trade classified by sections of the Standard International Trade Classification and the geographical distribution of trade of ESCWA countries.

This publication is addressed primarily to the researchers, planners and economic analysts of national and regional institutions. It is planned to be continued on a biennial basis in the 1990-1991 biennium.

(d) National Accounts Studies of the ESCWA Region

This bulletin has been issued on an annual basis since 1977. It includes, for each ESCWA country, consolidated accounts at current price and estimates of gross domestic product at constant prices. It also includes selected indicators of national accounts aggregates for comparison purposes within the region.

This specialized publication is intended for economic analysts, planners and researchers and academic institutions in addition to economic and statistical departments of regional and international organizations, including ESCWA substantive divisions.

This publication is highly valued and is requested by various categories of users in view of the quality, timeliness and availability of its various accounts and supporting tables. It will be continued on an annual basis, but, as of 1988, its volume was reduced by one third.

(e) Prices and Financial Statistics in the ESCWA Region

This yearly bulletin has been published on an annual basis since 1979. It contains time series of consumer price indices and retail prices of main foodstuff items of ESCWA member countries. It also contains data on government finance, monetary statistics and the balance of payments.

The main end-users of this bulletin are financial institutions, research centres, universities and regional organizations, as well as the ESCWA secretariat.

In view of the need observed in the region to publish a regional bulletin on price statistics, this specialized publication will not be discontinued but it will be issued on a biennial rather than annual basis.

(f) Bulletin of Industrial Statistics of the ESCWA Region

The first issue of this bulletin was published in 1987. It contains the usual industrial tables by country and commodity, in addition to analytical tables that reflect the importance of the industrial sector within the national economy of member States.

This bulletin is intended to be used primarily by ministries of planning, research centres, regional organizations and individual researchers and economists, in addition to the ESCWA secretariat.

This specialized publication is prepared in co-ordination with the Joint ESCWA/UNIDO Industry Division and presents systematic and meaningful data that can be used for economic analysis and research. It is planned to update the corresponding industrial data regularly and to issue the bulletin once every two years.

(g) Compendium of Social Statistics

The first issue of this bulletin appeared in 1985. It provides main indicators and statistical series on the social situation of ESCWA member States for the purpose of temporal and spacial comparisons.

It is mainly directed at social planners, research bodies and national and regional organizations involved in social development, including ESCWA.

This specialized publication is essential as it fills a gap in the field of social statistics in the region. It was planned to issue the compendium once every two years. However, owing to the low rate of change of social and population variables, it is now planned to issue this publication every other biennium.

12. Transport and communications

Since the 1984-1985 biennium, the Transport Bulletin was planned to be issued on an annual basis. The first issue of the Bulletin was published in December 1985, but for budgetary reasons and owing to post vacancies in the Transport and Communications Division, it was discontinued in 1986. Taking into account the importance of transport information and the dissemination of transport data at the ESCWA regional level, the issuance of an annual Bulletin is envisaged within the framework of the proposed transport work programme for the coming 1990-1991 biennium. It will gain momentum with the implementation of the Transport and Communications Decade in Western Asia.

This periodical publication is an integral part of the programme which aims, inter alia, at the establishment of a data base for transport statistics. The regular dissemination of transport data and information will be carried out through the publication of the Bulletin.