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CONTENTS

Page

Introduction
ESCWA in brief

**PART I
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Economic Trends and Perspectives
Renewable Energy: An Opportunity and a Challenge.....
The Impact of Man-made Disasters on Development
Enhancing the Information Society
Integrating a Social Dimension into National Development Planning.....
Millennium Development Goals: Data Quality and Availability
The Economic Empowerment of Women
Communications Strategy for Outreach and Visibility

**PART II
MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

Sustainable Development and Productivity
Social Development.....
Economic Development and Globalization
Information and Communications Technology
Statistics.....
Gender and the Advancement of Women.....
Emerging and Conflict-related Issues.....
Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation
Management
Administration.....

**PART III
LOOKING AHEAD**

Introduction

This year has marked the thirty-fifth anniversary of ESCWA. Despite the challenges it has faced since its establishment in 1973, the Commission has continued to serve the region through its results-oriented approach, facilitated by the commitment and expertise of its staff. In response to the global conditions and events of recent years, ESCWA has further intensified its efforts towards the achievement of regional economic and social integration, as well as greater interaction between the region and the rest of the world.

Through its seven subprogrammes (integrated management of natural resources for sustainable development; integrated social policies; economic development and integration; information and communications technology for regional integration; statistics for evidence-based policymaking; advancement of women; and conflict mitigation and development), ESCWA provides a framework for the formulation and harmonization of sectoral policies, a forum for in-depth dialogue and the sharing of knowledge, and a hub for regional and global expertise, moving the development agenda forward by supporting member countries to capitalize on the opportunities offered by changing circumstances.

During 2009, the Commission has supported member countries in extending the reach and application of renewable energy; promoting an integrated social policy concept, exploring new fields and partnerships for its application; facilitating regional integration through transport agreements; working towards reducing the digital divide and building a development-oriented information society; enhancing the quality and availability of statistics to support member countries in national and international policymaking; building the capacity of national mechanisms for women; and working towards alleviating the impact of man-made disasters on regional development.

The Commission also places the services of its regional advisors at the disposal of member countries for technical assistance and other advisory work. Such activities support countries in their efforts to formulate and implement effective, inclusive and sustainable development policies and programmes. ESCWA is increasingly working in partnership with governmental agencies and other international organizations operating in the region to develop the demand-driven and result-oriented activities of its technical assistance programme.

In the years to come, such issues as climate change, food security and the impact of regional conflict will continue to pose serious challenges in our region. Working in close partnership with governmental and non-governmental institutions, we will continue to engage all the resources at our disposal to support our member countries to tackle such challenges as effectively as possible. In these testing times, more than ever before, ESCWA encourages member countries to take the opportunity to benefit from its programmes and services, which have been specifically designed for and tailored to their needs, so that the Governments and peoples of the region may finally achieve pan-regional cooperation and integration in its fullest sense.

Bader Omar AlDafa
Under-Secretary-General

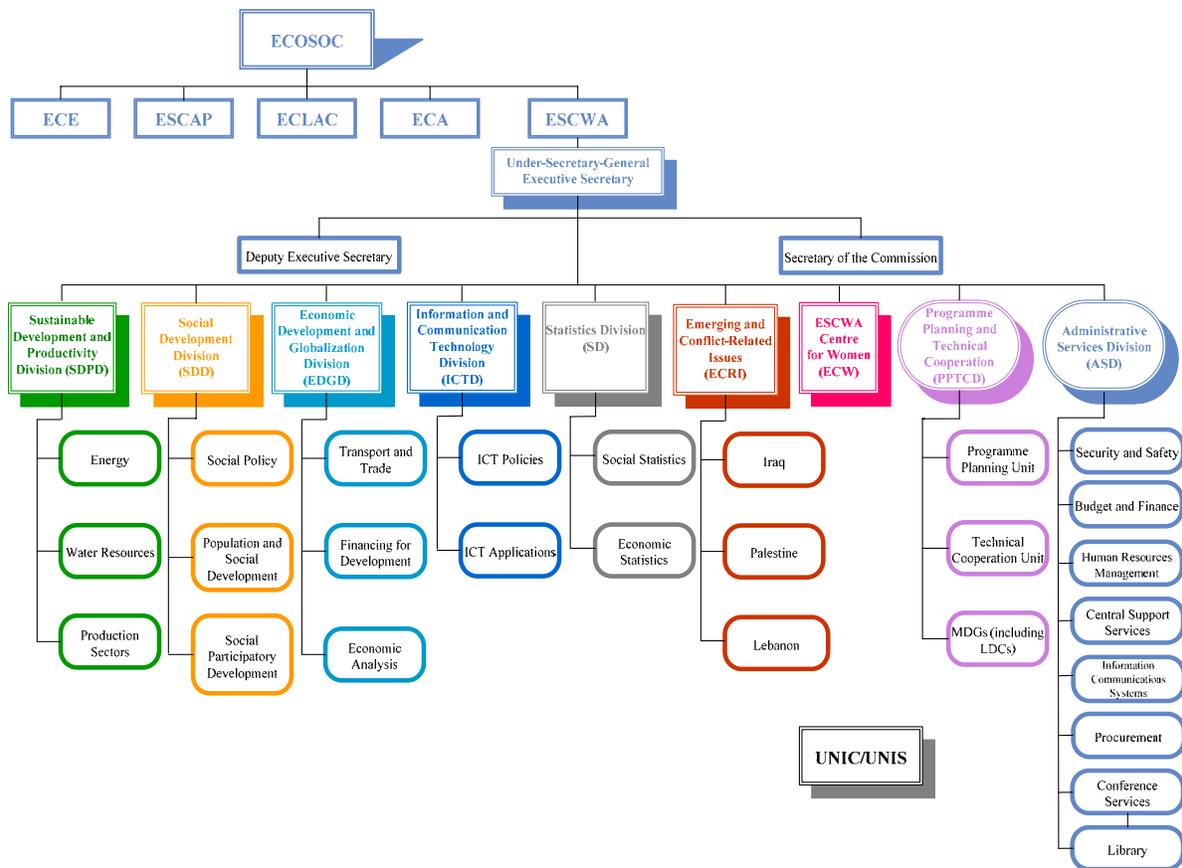
ESCWA in brief

THE ROLE OF ESCWA IN THE UNITED NATIONS

Stability and prosperity are the watchwords of the United Nations Charter. They are prerequisites for sound and cordial relations between nations, based on respect for the principle of equal rights that ensures self-determination and provides equality of opportunity to pursue a higher standard of living and employment for all through consistent economic growth and social development. The five regional commissions were created by the United Nations in order to fulfil the economic and social goals set out in the United Nations Charter by promoting cooperation and integration between countries in each region of the world. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) was established in 1973 and comprises 14 member countries, namely Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

ORGANIZATION CHART

ESCWA forms part of the United Nations Secretariat and, like the other regional commissions, operates under the supervision of the United Nations Economic and Social Council.



Objectives

The objectives of the Commission are to support economic and social development in the countries of the region; promote cooperation between the countries of the region; encourage interaction between member countries and promote the exchange of experience, best practice and lessons learned; achieve regional integration between member countries; and ensure interaction between Western Asia and other regions, bringing the circumstances and needs of the countries in the region to the attention of the rest of the world.

Mission

ESCWA provides a framework for the formulation and harmonization of sectoral policies for member countries, a platform for congress and coordination, a hub for expertise and knowledge, and an information observatory. ESCWA activities are coordinated with the divisions and main offices of the Headquarters of the United Nations, specialized agencies, and regional and international organizations, including the League of Arab States, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The Commission and Other Intergovernmental Bodies

The ministerial session, held every two years, is the governing body of ESCWA (the Commission) and mandates its policy. In addition, ESCWA has seven specialized subsidiary intergovernmental committees that meet biennially, with the exception of the Committee on Transport, which meets annually. Those committees are as follows:

- The Statistical Committee (established in 1992);
- The Committee on Social Development (established in 1994);
- The Committee on Energy (established in 1995);
- The Committee on Water Resources (established in 1995);
- The Committee on Transport (established in 1997);
- The Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development in the Countries of the ESCWA Region (established in 1997);
- The Committee on Women (established in 2003).

Financial Resources

The ESCWA budget is funded by United Nations financial resources. The Commission also receives financial contributions and donations from outside the regular budget, which are used to fund additional projects to serve ESCWA member countries. Those contributions are deposited in trust funds and their use is regulated by formal agreements. Additional contributions from Governments, business people and private sector companies are also sought in order to enable ESCWA to assume an ever more effective role in the interests of the countries of the region.

ESCWA Fast Facts

Established: 1973
Location: Beirut, Lebanon
Member countries: 14
Budget for the biennium 2008-2009: US\$ 80,400,000
Executive Secretary: Bader Omar AlDafa
ESCWA staff: 361
Meetings: 245 in 2009
Documents and publications: 72 in 2009
Official languages: Arabic, English and French

Part I

Challenges and Opportunities

The financial crisis which hit developed countries in the last quarter of 2008 rapidly became a global crisis, affecting the real economy and leading to deep recession. While all ESCWA member countries have suffered losses as a result of the crisis, each has been affected in different ways and to differing extents.

The direct and indirect effects on member countries have included a sharp decline in stock market indices, a significant reduction in both direct and portfolio investments, a decrease in workers' remittances, a fall in oil revenues, an anticipated slowdown in inward official development assistance (ODA) and, in a number of countries, a slump in tourism receipts. Moreover, slow economic growth, particularly in non-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member countries, has negatively affected Government efforts to reduce unemployment and poverty rates.

Following a year of unprecedented growth in 2008, during which average growth reached 7.5 per cent, growth in the ESCWA region slowed down to 3.2 per cent in 2009, although preliminary estimates for 2010 indicate that member countries are likely to achieve a growth rate of some 5.5 per cent.¹ Despite the decrease in growth in 2009, rates remained positive in all member countries except Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The negative growth rates in these countries are directly attributable to the significant losses incurred as a result of the sharp decline in oil revenues and the financial sector, coupled, particularly in the United Arab Emirates, with the slowdown in the real estate sector caused by the return of migrants and the associated losses incurred by major corporations investing in this sector. Such growth rates, however, should be viewed in the light of the significant accumulated reserves and considerable growth realized in these countries in previous years.

With the emergence of the crisis in 2008, the average basket price of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) fell from a record high of US\$140/barrel in July 2008 to US\$33/barrel in December 2008, its lowest level for over a decade. In 2009, the average basket price fluctuated between US\$41.1/barrel and US\$76.3/barrel.² The fluctuations in 2009, coupled with deep recession in the industrialized countries which are the principal destination for oil exports from the GCC countries, led to a decrease in oil revenues in GCC countries.

The depreciation of the US dollar vis-à-vis other major currencies has had a negative effect on imports in the ESCWA region, since over 50 per cent of such imports originate from countries in Europe or Asia. In addition, most member countries have pegged their currencies to the US dollar, and the combination of these two factors has led to an increase in the value of imported goods. The increase in the value of imports, coupled with the decrease in oil exports, has thus increased the trade balance deficit of most ESCWA member countries.

The effect of the global crisis has also been seen in the reduction in foreign direct investment (FDI) in the region, as the sectors which were the principal recipients of FDI inflows have been affected by the decrease in oil prices, the significant losses incurred by the financial services sector and the slowdown in the real estate sector, the effect of which has been felt across the region, but which has been particularly severe in the GCC countries.

Stock markets in the ESCWA region witnessed dramatic losses in 2008 and were able to recover only part of those losses in 2009. The 11 stock markets operating in the region lost some 44 per cent of their

¹ IMF, *Regional Economic Outlook, Middle East and Central Asia*, October 2009. Available at: <http://www.imf.org/>.

² Figures sourced from www.opec.org/.

market capitalization between 2007 and 2008, falling from US\$1,307 million to US\$736 million. In 2009, however, the markets realized an 11 per cent increase, rising to US\$817 million.³ The sovereign wealth funds of GCC countries also incurred sizeable losses – estimated at some US\$60 billion⁴ – as a result of the crisis, notably through investments in banks in Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Non-GCC ESCWA member countries in particular will continue to experience the indirect effects of the crisis for some time to come, including the results of the decline in tourism, the fall in workers' remittances and the anticipated decrease in ODA. Given the financial challenges faced by their principal Arab donors and the persistence of the recession in the industrialized countries, non-GCC ESCWA member countries are deeply concerned about the anticipated decrease in ODA, particularly since developed countries remain well below the agreed ODA level of 0.7 per cent of their gross national income by 2015.

The ESCWA region attracts a number of different types of tourism, including business, leisure, medical and religious. However, the tourism sector has had to face the dual challenge of the financial crisis and the emergence of the H1N1 virus, and in 2009 the number of tourists visiting ESCWA member countries fell by some six per cent.⁵ There are notable variations between countries, however, and while countries that attract international tourists (such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) experienced a substantial fall in visitor numbers, those that attract more regional tourists (such as Lebanon, Oman and the Syrian Arab Republic) actually recorded an increase in the number of visitors.

As the international financial crisis has deepened, many workers have been made redundant and a concomitant decline in workers' remittances is anticipated. The impact of this will be greatest in the least developed countries in the region, namely the Sudan and Yemen, as such remittances not only represent an important source of foreign exchange and external financing, but also play a significant role in poverty reduction.

Soon after the emergence of the crisis in 2008, ESCWA member country Governments initiated a number of rescue plans to counter the recession and lessen the economic and social effects of the crisis. These included adopting expansionary fiscal policies to boost domestic consumption, extending assistance to corporations in financial difficulty by injecting liquidity, guaranteeing bank deposits, reducing interest rates and lowering the minimum required reserve for banks. However, despite such rescue plans, the picture across the region remains gloomy. The persistence of the global recession, the loss of confidence in capital markets and banks, a fragile real estate sector and an uncertain economic outlook all constitute additional challenges to member countries in their commitment to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. In response to these challenges and with a view to supporting member countries, ESCWA initiated a number of projects in 2009, held a regional high-level consultative forum entitled *The Impact of the International Financial Crisis on ESCWA Member Countries: the Way Forward* (Damascus, 5-7 May 2009), and the Economic Development and Globalization Division (EDGD) prepared several papers on the Arab MDGs and the impact of the financial crisis on the region.

³ Arab Monetary Fund. Available at: <http://www.amf.org.ae/yearlyperformance>.

⁴ ESCWA and International Labour Organization, *The Impacts of the International Financial and Economic Crisis on ESCWA Member Countries: Challenges and Opportunities* (E/ESCWA/EDGD/2009/Technical Paper.3).

⁵ United Nations World Tourism Organization News Conference, Madrid, 18 January 2010.

Many ESCWA member countries continue to face significant challenges as a result of limited access to energy services in rural areas. While some countries have extended electricity grids and gas supplies to certain rural areas, most of the rural population in the region, which in 2009 constituted some 45 per cent of the total population,^{6, 7} still lack energy supplies and services or are under-supplied. In certain non-GCC countries, this rate is much higher (for example, 70 per cent in Yemen and 60 per cent in the Sudan). The supply of conventional energy services to many rural areas is difficult or, in some cases, impossible and many rural inhabitants still rely on wood and other non-commercial fuels for their energy needs. Rural populations frequently also lack adequate water supply, health-care and education services; this is a particular issue for women and children. Poverty, which has a direct link to access to energy, is a serious problem in many rural areas in the region, and there is a clear need for vigorous initiatives to increase energy accessibility in rural areas with the aim of addressing energy needs and mitigating rural poverty. Ensuring provision of energy supplies to rural areas is therefore crucial to enhance sustainable development and improve quality of life. It also contributes to alleviating poverty and facilitating economic development in support of MDGs 1 and 7: “Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger” and “Ensure environmental sustainability”.

Renewable energy resources (solar and wind) are widely available in the region and offer a potential solution to the problem of energy access in remote rural areas. However, the widespread use of renewable energy technologies in rural areas continues to face a number of physical, technical, economic and social barriers, all of which underline the need for intensive efforts to secure the dissemination of such applications to rural areas in the region. In the light of the ESCWA mandate to enhance the capacity of member countries to improve the sustainable management of natural resources, support the promotion of sustainable energy technologies and apply best practice for improving sustainable rural development, a pilot project on solar photovoltaic (PV) electrification in villages was developed with the aim of increasing access to energy services in rural areas.

Yemen was selected for the implementation of the pilot project, since the inhabitants of thousands of rural villages across the country have no access to electricity services; indeed, in 2007, only 47 per cent of the Yemeni population had access to electricity,⁸ due primarily to the wide geographical dispersal of villages in areas far removed from the national grid. Such villages are naturally characterized by low electricity consumption at the household level. Under such conditions, one of the most promising solutions for the electrification of rural areas is the installation of stand-alone solar photovoltaic systems for domestic lighting and the operation of low current appliances. The village of Ka’awa was selected for the pilot project, which aimed to improve access to a modern energy service through the use of clean, renewable energy resources, thus enhancing rural development, alleviating poverty, empowering women, ensuring environmental sustainability and creating employment for young people.

Ka’awa is an isolated fishing village located on the southern coast of Yemen with no proper road access and no access to electricity services. The population of some 300 lacks adequate educational opportunities (85 per cent of men and 95 per cent of women are illiterate). There is only one school in the village and a high percentage of pupils leave school to support their families before completing their education. A health centre was recently established in the village to provide basic medical services; however,

⁶ ESCWA, *Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA Region 2007-2008* (E/ESCWA/EDGD/2008/3).

⁷ United Nations, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2007 Revision* (ESA/P/WP/205).

⁸ Arab Union of Electricity, *Statistical Bulletin 2008*, Issue 17.

it is unable to provide vaccination services, as there is no electricity to power a refrigerator for storing vaccines.

At the start of the project, ESCWA experts visited the village to assess the requirements of a PV system to provide the village with electricity, subsequent to which the scope of work and technical requirements for the supply, installation, testing and commissioning of the pilot project were developed. The electrification of the village was subsequently completed, including the supply, delivery, installation, testing and commissioning of solar PV stand-alone systems for 87 homes, the health centre (including a vaccine refrigerator), the school, a mosque (including a sound system) and three solar PV street lighting lamp-posts.

The project also included two capacity-building training sessions on renewable energy applications in rural villages, one for end-users and another for engineers and technicians, both conducted in December 2009. The first, for 70 local villagers, explained the operation and maintenance of the PV solar home systems and included the distribution of a user's manual in Arabic to all households, which included simple information about the electricity supply systems from the PV panels installed in their homes and instructions on how to maintain the systems. The on-the-job training provided for engineers and technicians taught 10 participants (drawn from the Yemeni Ministry of Electricity, Sana'a University and Ka'awa village) both theoretical and practical tools related to the installation, operation and maintenance of the systems. Final inspection, testing and commissioning of the project has been carried out, and longer-term assessment and evaluation will be undertaken in September 2010.

The main beneficiaries of the project are the local community (particularly women and young people), the local authority and the Yemeni Ministry of Electricity and Energy. The impact of the project will be seen in the improved quality of life for villagers, the reduction of poverty through increased accessibility to modern energy services, and improvements to health and education services. Furthermore, by providing better access to educational facilities and by connecting villagers to the outside world through television and radio, the project will help to integrate them into the development process, thus improving their living conditions. The project will also create environmental benefits by reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that are associated with the use of traditional fuels. In addition, it is anticipated that the project will encourage the establishment of small enterprises, which will lead to job creation and income generation, and increase the capacity of the Yemeni authorities to replicate the project elsewhere with a view to addressing regional sustainable development priorities.

Conflict in the Arab world has claimed many hundreds of thousands of lives since 1980,⁹ and has cost the region some US\$12 trillion in missed economic growth and development in the last two decades alone.¹⁰ Almost half of all ESCWA member countries experienced war in the 1990s, while almost all member countries border a country currently experiencing war. Moreover, conflict drives military expenditure, which in turn affects spending on sustainable development, as the funding channelled into military expenditure, some 7 per cent of regional gross domestic product (GDP) in 1996, is not available for other priority areas.¹¹ This state of affairs has undermined the ability of the population to obtain sufficient food, proper employment, health care, education and other essentials vital for human security. Hardest hit in the ESCWA region have been Iraq, Palestine, the Sudan and Yemen.

The Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory remains the leading cause of suffering in Palestine, where an Israeli-imposed regime of closures and mobility restrictions, the blockade of the Gaza Strip, the construction of a separation wall in the West Bank and continuous Israeli settlement expansion have contributed to poverty rates, which in 2007 reached 76.9 per cent in the Gaza Strip and 47.2 per cent in the West Bank.¹² Iraq continues to suffer from the socio-economic and humanitarian ramifications of violence and the aftermath of the 2003 United States-led invasion, 13 years of sanctions and three major wars. In 2009, some 23 per cent of the population lived below the US\$2.2 per day poverty line,¹³ while rising food prices and other factors have rendered a large proportion of the population vulnerable to food insecurity, exemplified by the 20 per cent decrease in consumption of protein by the Iraqi population.¹⁴ In Yemen, security, political and other domestic challenges have compounded poverty levels to the extent that 45.2 per cent of the population now live below the poverty line of US\$2 per day, 15.7 per cent of whom live in abject poverty, defined as living on less than US\$1 per day.¹⁵ The Sudan has suffered recurrent conflicts in recent decades, severely affecting human development in the country. According to United Nations figures, in 2007, 90 per cent of the population in southern Sudan and 60-75 per cent in the north was reported to be living under the US\$1 per day poverty line.¹⁶

The socio-economic ramifications of such man-made disasters, whether occupation, internal or external conflicts, are clearly not restricted to the few indicators highlighted above. Indeed, man-made disasters have set in motion a series of destructive dynamics, including conflict-driven displacement and communal tensions. Thirty-six per cent of displaced persons globally are to be found in the ESCWA region. Conflict and instability have resulted in 7.6 million refugees and 7.2 million internally-displaced persons in the region. The 4.6 million Palestinian refugees account for more than 25 per cent of all refugees worldwide and their protracted situation continues to have political, social and economic ramifications for the entire region. The Sudan has 4.3 million internally-displaced persons and 2.2 million persons have been internally

⁹ The Economist, 2009, *Waking from its Sleep – A Special Report on the Arab World*.

¹⁰ Waslekar, S. et al., 2009, *Cost of Conflict in the Middle East*, Mumbai: Strategic Foresight Group.

¹¹ The Economist, op. cit.

¹² United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) unpublished 2007 poverty estimates in the forthcoming 2010 Note by the Secretary-General on the 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.

¹³ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2009, *Iraq 2010 Humanitarian Action Plan*, p. 9.

¹⁴ OCHA, 2009, *Iraq 2010 Humanitarian Action Plan*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008, *Country Profile: Yemen*, p. 12.

¹⁶ Source: UNDP website: http://www.sd.undp.org/mdg_sudan.htm.

displaced in Iraq, while a further 2 million Iraqi refugees have fled to neighbouring countries.¹⁷ Other cases of internal displacement include the 300,000 Syrians expelled by Israel from the Golan Heights after the Six Day War of 1967.¹⁸ Tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees were displaced following the Israeli military assault on the Gaza Strip in December 2008-January 2009. The number of internally-displaced persons in the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese war stood at several hundred thousand, and some 32,000 Palestinian refugees¹⁹ and a small number of Lebanese were displaced when the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in north Lebanon was destroyed during three months of fighting between the Lebanese Army and the militant group Fatah al-Islam in May 2007. The burden of hosting displaced populations in the region adds to the economic challenges already facing host countries and is disproportionately borne by Lebanon, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic (primarily Iraqi refugees) and the Palestinian Authority, which also host the largest populations of long-term Palestinian refugees.

Conflict and political tensions in the ESCWA region have also revived communal tensions in certain areas. Communal tensions are compounded by the interplay of social, economic, political, cultural and external factors. They are potential catalysts of never-ending civil wars, in which national socio-economic capital is rapidly decimated. Communal tensions are also an impediment to the emergence of an inclusive, active society, one that celebrates inclusive civic duties and human rights over narrow exclusive identities.

A clear illustration of this is provided by an examination of the dynamics of communal tensions, in which four building blocks are intertwined in such a way as to reinforce such tensions, leading to the constant reproduction of communal identity. This is primarily driven by instability, tension and situations in which the collective nature of competing identities produces a “them and us” pattern of intercommunal relations, compounded by the perception of collective grievances, collective self-victimization, and traumatic memories of civil wars and major incidents of political violence. The second building block is the compartmentalization of intercommunal social relations. It appears that in most instances the quality of social interaction is only skin-deep: social trust is minimal and the portrayal of the “negative-other” and “positive-self” is rampant. The third building block represents the exclusionary spaces of social relations, in which, for example, living in mixed community neighbourhoods is neither common nor encouraged. The fourth building block is the clientelistic nature of a political system in which a confession-based patronage system for public access to essential services and employment generates unhealthy and inefficient competition for resources between the various communities.²⁰

The huge numbers of conflict-driven displaced persons and the dynamics that feed communal tensions both represent worrying trends, even more so if the challenges posed by youth unemployment are factored into the equation. Given current trends in employment and projected population growth rates, if prospective young entrants to the labour market are not to face an empty future, Arab countries need to create some 51 million new jobs by 2020 to incorporate them fully into the workforce.²¹

Whether tackling displacement, communal tensions or youth unemployment, Governments are under constant pressure to respond to the growing demands of their citizens and to function within increasingly complex regional and global environments, adapting to new situations and developing the institutional capacity necessary to deal with them. Central to this is an efficient and capable public sector, able to deliver core government functions and to provide a solid infrastructure for development, economic advancement,

¹⁷ ESCWA, *Trends and Impacts in Conflict Settings: The Socio-Economic Impact of Conflict-driven Displacement in the ESCWA region*, Issue No. 1, March 2009.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

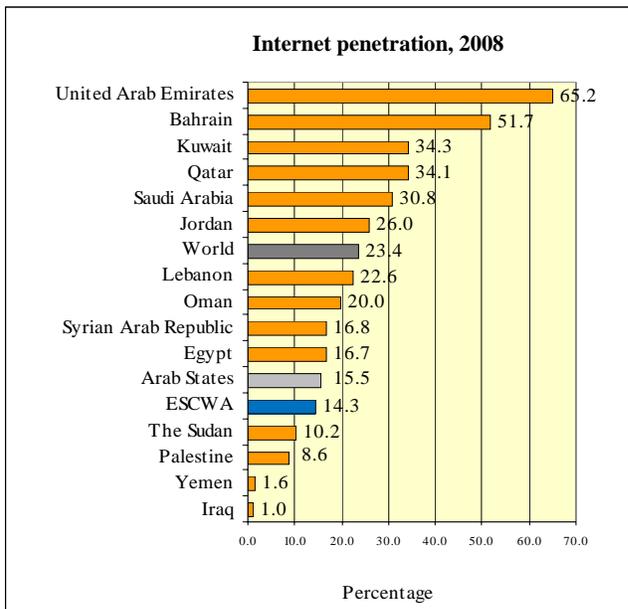
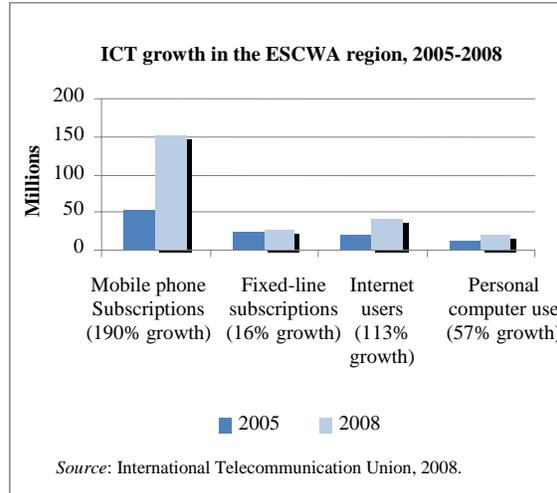
²⁰ For further information on communal tension, see ESCWA and Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2009, *Unpacking the Dynamics of Communal Tensions: A Focus Group Analysis of Perception among Youth in Lebanon*. (E/ESCWA/ECRI/2009/5).

²¹ UNDP, 2009, *Arab Human Development Report 2009*, p. 10.

reconciliation, conflict mitigation and peacebuilding. Greatly increased investment by all stakeholders needs to target that infrastructure if policy recommendations and strategic planning are to be implemented, so that both socio-economic and political advancement can take firm root in the ESCWA region and the staggering cost of man-made disasters can be curtailed.

The ESCWA region faces major challenges in developing the information society and bridging the digital divide, both within the region (between GCC and non-GCC countries) and beyond (between the ESCWA region and other regions of the world). It is vital for countries in the region to build their information societies and knowledge-based economies in order to sustain socio-economic development and achieve internationally-agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

Information and communications technology (ICT) usage has increased significantly in recent years. Between 2005 and 2008, mobile phone use grew exponentially and Internet usage more than doubled. Yet despite such growth, there remains



Source: International Telecommunication Union, 2008.

inequality between high-income and low-income countries in the region, not only in terms of Internet access, but in the adoption of ICT services generally. The extent of the digital divide is clear from the 2008 Internet penetration data from the International Telecommunication Union, which show that the average Internet penetration rate across the region stands at just 14 per cent, compared with a global average of 23 per cent. The difference is even greater when comparing broadband penetration rates, which average just 1.6 per cent in the ESCWA region, compared with 6.1 per cent globally.

As reliance on ICT applications and e-services has increased, Governments in the region have assumed a greater role in the development of the information society, and the technical advisory and support services provided by ESCWA to member countries in this field have thus assumed increasing importance.

One of the major challenges for the region in the area of ICT lies in implementing the outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society, set out in the 2003 Geneva Plan of Action²² and the 2005 Tunis Agenda for the Information Society.²³ These documents constitute guiding plans for countries to formulate and implement regional plans in line with the global plans, tailored to meet the specific needs of each region. The plans of action for the ESCWA region are the Regional Plan of Action for Building the Information

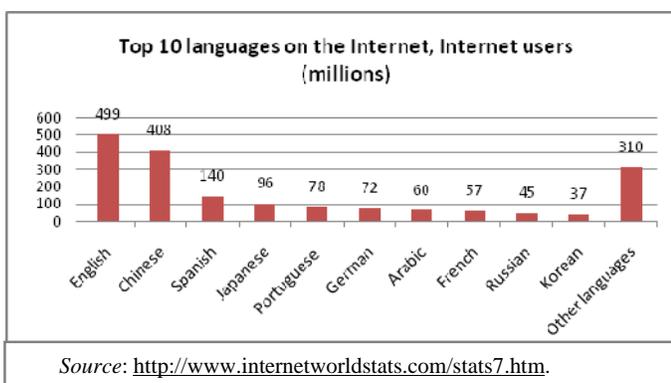
²² Available at: <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/poa.html>.

²³ Available at: <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html>.

Society (RPoA),²⁴ and the Arab ICT Strategy – Building the Information Society 2007-2012.²⁵ Implementing these plans requires wide-ranging regional cooperation and partnerships between stakeholders at all levels. The RPoA, updated in 2009, is a dynamic plan, comprising programmes and regional projects implemented through partnerships. The Arab ICT Strategy includes a five-year plan of action and regularly-updated regional projects. It aims to establish a competitive market to enable the development of an inclusive information society, enhance the quality of service delivery through the use of ICT, develop the sector in the region and ensure ICT access for all.

The process of developing the information society is complex. The ICT sector requires substantial development, access to digital content needs to be enhanced through advanced ICT infrastructure, and additional support is necessary at all levels if knowledge sharing is to be extensive and effective. Building national capacity in the development and adoption of ICT indicators forms the basis for profiling, measuring and monitoring progress towards developing the information society. The production of reliable ICT indicators and national statistical reports is essential to support decision-making and identify priorities for policy action, which will in turn contribute to optimizing development initiatives and reducing the digital divide.

The promotion of digital Arabic content (DAC) on the Internet represents a major challenge to the ICT sector in the region. In recent years, the steadily increasing number of Arabic language users has propelled Arabic into the top ten languages on the Internet in terms of the number of users, with some 60 million users in 2009, representing 18 per cent of Internet penetration by language.²⁶ The Internet has become an increasingly important source of information and a vital tool for knowledge sharing, yet levels of DAC remain disproportionately low. Developing and promoting DAC thus represents a considerable investment opportunity for the ESCWA region.



Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) are major contributors to the development process. To harness their full potential requires the establishment of national and regional STI observatories, and capacity-building in the development and analysis of STI indicators. STI observatories collect data, develop and analyse STI indicators, and make them available to policymakers and strategic analysts. Such indicators are essential in evaluating performance, monitoring scientific and technological development, identifying areas for investment, and formulating STI policies and strategies.

Acknowledging the importance of STI in accelerating development, building more competitive knowledge-based economies, achieving sustainable development at the national and regional levels, and generating new opportunities for employment, ESCWA has worked closely with a number of member countries to formulate plans towards the establishment of national STI observatories. The Commission has also continued the process towards the establishment of the ESCWA regional Technology Centre, mandated by ESCWA resolution,²⁷ with the selection of Jordan as host country for the Centre.

²⁴ E/ESCWA/ICTD/2004/4.

²⁵ Available at: <http://www.atim.org.eg/upload/ICTJuly2008.doc>.

²⁶ Internet World Stats, Internet Users by Language. Available at: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>.

²⁷ ESCWA resolution, 284 (XXV) of 29 May 2008.

For decades, social development in the ESCWA region has been undermined by conflict, lack of integration between economic and social policies, and insufficient understanding of the linkage between social equity parameters and overall development. The notable economic growth witnessed in the region in recent years has not always been mirrored by equal progress in social development, particularly in the least developed countries and countries in conflict. The average human development indicators in the region mask deep pockets of poverty and social exclusion, and do not reflect intraregional and interregional levels of deprivation. Women, disadvantaged youth, persons with disabilities, older persons, migrant workers and the unemployed all face considerable barriers to accessing opportunities and services.

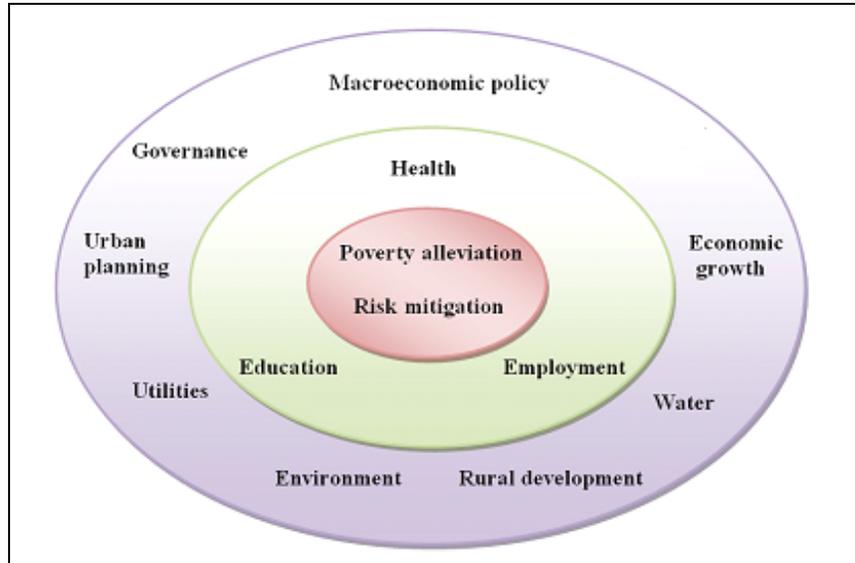
The socio-economic situation becomes even more difficult as countries in the region continue to struggle in the aftermath of the global financial and economic crisis. The surge in unemployment levels is expected to trigger an increase in the informal economy and unprotected work, and may contribute to exacerbating social inequalities at a time when many countries are already facing challenges related to national debt, social exclusion and lack of participation.

In times of economic crisis, social policy is often regarded as a luxury²⁸ and countries may reduce expenditure on social welfare in an attempt to ward off economic fall-out. However, cutbacks in public investment in health, education and pensions have an adverse effect on the sustainability of poverty reduction efforts and the overall social fabric. Many people live on incomes that are barely above poverty lines, have no social security and are highly dependent on traditional solidarity systems. In most countries, there is a lack of civic engagement to monitor and assess the impact of policy interventions on low income groups and raise public debate at policymaking level.

A further challenge facing many ESCWA member countries is the inadequacy of their social security systems. Most countries in the region have established social protection systems that aim to mitigate risks and alleviate poverty. The main weakness of such schemes lies in the fact that they are, for the most part, tied to formal sector employment and thus hardly reach beyond the urban middle class. In failing to cater for the unemployed or informal workers, such schemes leave a large sector of the population with no protection against income insecurity.

ESCWA has risen to such challenges through the continued promotion of the integrated social policy concept, while exploring new fields and partnerships for its application. Through normative analysis, advisory services and national projects, it has reoriented its efforts to build a body of knowledge on social development visions and approaches, and implemented activities on such emerging issues as the social impact of the economic crisis, social protection, youth development, mapping the access of persons with disabilities to social services, and the role of urban observatories in the provision of policy advice on urban social development.

²⁸ ESCWA, 2009, *Social Policy and Social Protection: Challenges in the ESCWA Region*. Social Development Bulletin Volume 2, Number 8 (E/ESCWA/SDD/2009/Technical Paper.10).



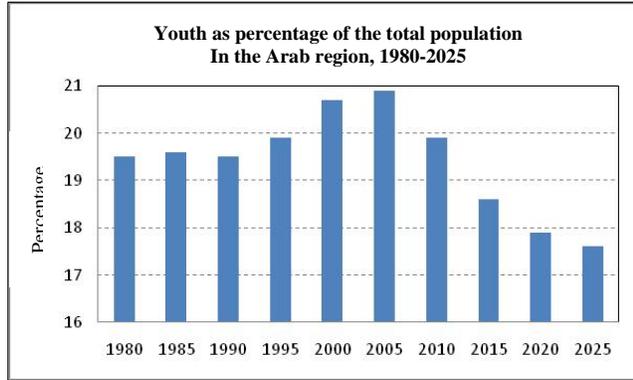
Source: ESCWA, 2009, *Integrated Social Policy: Visions and Strategies in the ESCWA Region*.

As part of this work, ESCWA has published a comprehensive overview of the way in which social policy is envisioned in the region and how it is integrated into the broader context of economic and social development. The report, *Integrated Social Policy: Visions and Strategies in the ESCWA Region*,²⁹ considers a number of important questions relating to the current development trajectories in the region, including the way in which national development strategies address fundamental concerns with regard to equity, equality and balanced development; and how such strategies tackle issues relating to poverty reduction and risk mitigation. The analysis revisits the way social and economic structures shape the institutions which govern social policy, as well as the importance of values and traditions in the manner in which societies organize roles and responsibilities across societal actors.

ESCWA has spearheaded work to secure the commitment of all actors to the social contract and to develop mechanisms capable of fostering the inclusion and participation of all segments of society. Working towards that goal, ESCWA has developed a comprehensive participatory social development approach and integrated it into its capacity-building programmes, advisory services and partnership networks. From Palestine to Saudi Arabia, ESCWA has been actively involved in broadening the framework of social policy dialogue by enhancing partnerships with Government institutions and civil society organizations with the aim of responding to the challenges of inclusive participatory development.

²⁹ E/ESCWA/SDD/2009/4.

Young people aged 15-24 are considered a distinct socio-demographic group having special needs and facing specific challenges. This requires national youth policies that not only seek to improve their skills, but also aim to provide them with the opportunities necessary to reach their full potential in education, health and employment, and to participate fully in public and political life.



The Social Development Division considers youth development one of its main priority themes. It monitors the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (WPAY) in ESCWA member countries and strengthens their capacity in formulating national youth policies and plans of action.

*“The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to **participate in**, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.”*

United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, 1986, article 1, paragraph 1 (emphasis added).

Respect for human rights and the integration of social concerns and social groups into mainstream development is imperative for the achievement of peace and social cohesion, particularly now, just five years before the target year for achieving the MDGs. These basic premises guide the assistance provided by ESCWA to member countries and the tailoring of social development activities according to national specificities and needs. The impact of ESCWA assistance in supporting national institutional frameworks and mechanisms depends on close partnership with Governments to realign their social priorities in the face of political and economic pressures. Member countries are also encouraged to ensure the implementation and monitoring of socially-responsible policies by levelling the ground for broad-based

participation and consultation, especially by the poor and other marginalized groups.

In recent years, concerns have been raised by the statistical community about the production of the MDG indicators and the ability of countries to undertake their own national monitoring for policymaking purposes. Discrepancies between national and international data sources, and the role played by the quality and availability of data in such discrepancies also constitute major issues on the regional and international statistical agenda.

In response to such concerns, and following the recommendations set out in ESCWA resolution 287 (XXV) concerning Strengthening statistical capacities for evidence-based policymaking, specifically requesting the secretariat to assist member countries in building their capacity to unify statistical concepts and definitions, the Statistics Division has developed a set of building blocks and complementary activities related to the MDG framework, based on the ESCWA report *Millennium Development Goals: Monitoring Framework and Proposals for Improvement*,³⁰ presented to the eighth session of the Statistical Committee (Beirut, 14-16 October 2008).

Building block 1: improving quality and availability of national data for MDG monitoring

To resolve inconsistencies between national and international data sets and address data gaps at the national level, the Statistics Division is conducting a comprehensive, in-depth review of MDG data series since 1990. The review starts with extensive desk research to compile national data, make comparisons and track inconsistencies. On completion of this stage, the Division provides technical advice and support to disseminate final data sets and make them centrally accessible through a unified system. In 2009, data quality checks were initiated for seven member countries (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Oman, Qatar and Yemen), leading to a significant improvement in the quality and availability of data.

Building block 2: capacity-building efforts to strengthen national data production for MDG monitoring

A central element of the work of the Statistics Division is defining strategies and coordinating activities to improve the capacity of member countries to produce indicators and conduct national monitoring. Such activities have included providing improved access not only to metadata, but also to practical guidelines for the production of MDG indicators, including *Indicators for Monitoring the Millennium Development Goals*³¹ and *Guide to the New Millennium Development Goals Employment Indicators, Including the Full Set of Decent Work Indicators*.³² In order to provide easy access to information on standards and methods, an MDG Virtual Library³³ has been developed. Available on free subscription, its membership is global and continuing to grow (see membership *ClustrMap*), facilitating the dissemination of relevant, up-to-date priority information and data via the Virtual Library catalogue.



³⁰ E/ESCWA/SD/2008/IG.1/4.

³¹ United Nations Development Group, 2003 (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/95). Available at http://devdata.worldbank.org/gmis/mdg/UNDG%20document_final.pdf.

³² ILO, 2009. Available at: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_110511.pdf.

³³ Available at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/scu/themes/index.asp>.

Building block 3: training on MDG indicators to reconcile discrepancies between national and international data



As a member of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators, established by the Secretary-General, ESCWA coordinates with other United Nations entities on the organization of regional training activities. In 2009, this included a workshop on MDG monitoring for Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa, jointly organized with the United Nations Statistics Division (Beirut, 7-12 December 2009). The workshop brought together national statisticians and representatives of line ministries from 13 countries, experts from several international agencies, and the DevInfo group, which is responsible for the compilation of international data series for global monitoring. In a practical training session, participants reviewed data gaps and differences between national and international data sets, identified the underlying causes and recommended actions to remedy the situation.



The Inter-agency and Expert Group Meeting on Gender Statistics in the Arab Countries (Beirut, 12-14 October 2009) was organized to discuss the metadata for the “GISIn” framework, a measurement tool which contains a list of priority areas and corresponding gender-sensitive indicators for the region. Organized in collaboration with 12 United Nations agencies, the meeting was attended by participants from 14 Arab national statistical offices, six women’s national machineries, and representatives from the Center for Arab Women Training and Research and the League of Arab States.



Building block 4: enhancing coordination and data dissemination to improve data coverage for MDG monitoring

The establishment of national MDG databases as official repositories for all MDG data encourages coordination between national data producers, facilitating data dissemination and harmonization of definitions and methodologies at the subnational level. During 2009, the Statistics Division intensified its capacity-building efforts towards the development of national databases in the Arab countries by arranging three training workshops, including a training of trainer’s workshop to establish a specialist training team.

The dissemination of comparable data at the regional level encourages the development and refinement of indicators, including improvement in their accessibility to stakeholders. As part of its efforts to support such work, in 2009 ESCWA launched its first gender statistical database, Arab GenInfo_09 which is outlined in greater detail in Part II.

ESCWA also provides countries with technical support to develop national customized MDG databases. In 2009, six Arab countries launched new national applications: Iraq (IAU Info), Palestine (CensusInfo), the Sudan (SudanInfo), Tunisia (ChildInfo), the United Arab Emirates (DubaiInfo) and Yemen (DevInfo), bringing the total number of regional adaptations to 26.



One of the principal concerns of the ESCWA Centre for Women (ECW) and ESCWA member countries in 2009 was the effect of the global economic crisis on the daily lives of women in the region. In order to analyse in detail the ways in which women have been affected, and provide essential background research and analysis on their situation in the light of the crisis, ECW has undertaken a number of activities, including studies,³⁴ an expert group meeting (EGM),³⁵ the production and dissemination of public information material³⁶ and the fostering of discussions with policymakers across the region.³⁷

While the economic crisis clearly affects both men and women, women tend to be affected in a different way from men and all too frequently carry a disproportionate share of the burden. The reasons for this are structural and complex, reflecting cultural factors that prevented women from fully contributing to and benefiting from social and economic development even before the crisis struck. Hardest hit were those who were already struggling for their daily subsistence: poor women, migrant women and women in minority groups within society.

A major compounding factor for women in their attempts to find coping mechanisms to mitigate the impact of the crisis is their limited access to financial and economic resources. Obtaining and retaining paid employment, acquiring bank loans and owning land are all significantly more problematic for women than for men. Women still earn appreciably less than men for comparable work and, in many cases, cannot open bank accounts on their own. Banks tend to demand more collateral from women applying for credit and loans than from men, despite numerous studies showing that women are more conscientious in repaying such debts and thus constitute a lower risk to lending institutions than men.³⁸

Across the ESCWA region, a higher percentage of women than men are employed in the informal sector, thus tending to work under conditions that are neither regulated by legislation, nor controlled by the authorities. Consequently, they all too often suffer from a lack of protection against dangerous or health-damaging working conditions, have neither medical nor social insurance and have little job security. In cooperation with member countries, ECW works to find ways to improve access for women, not only to formalized working conditions, but also to financial and economic resources in order to enable them to fully participate in and contribute to the overall development of the society in which they live.

An essential factor in increasing opportunities for women to play an equal role in society is to encourage their participation in the political arena. The ESCWA region has the lowest level of female parliamentary representation globally.³⁹ Recognizing that such inequality is a waste of human potential, the

³⁴ Including *The Impact of the Global Financial Crisis on Women in the Arab Region* (E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/IG.1/4); *Women's Control Over Economic Resources and Access to Financial Resources: Arab Women and Development Series*, Number 36 (E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/2/Rev.1); and *Economic and Social Situation of Palestinian Women 2006-2009* (E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/Technical Paper.1).

³⁵ Expert Group Meeting on the Economic Participation of Women (Beirut, 18-19 August 2009).

³⁶ Two DVDs: *The Economic Empowerment of Women in the Arab Region and Palestinian Women Living in Nahr el-Bared Camp: Aspirations and Challenges*.

³⁷ Fourth session of the Committee on Women (Beirut, 21-23 October 2009).

³⁸ See, for example, International Labour Office (ILO), 2008, *Small Change, Big Changes: Women and Microfinance*. Geneva: ILO and United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2005, *Progress of the World's Women*. New York: United Nations, p. 95.

³⁹ Available at: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.

countries of the region have adopted a variety of approaches to dealing with the situation, with a view to achieving greater participation by women in political life. As an interim measure until gender equality has been achieved in public representation in parliamentary and other public bodies, certain countries have introduced a quota system. Where such quotas have been established, they have been successful and there has been an increase in the number of women representatives at all political levels, including in decision-making positions. In order for such initiatives not only to pay lip-service to equal representation, however, these measures must be accompanied by others that improve the overall access of women to all spheres of society and aim for complete equality.

An ongoing issue of particular concern in the region is the social and economic situation of Palestinian women. Due to a complex set of internal and external factors, the population in Palestine faces a number of unique challenges. Consistently high levels of physical and emotional stress at the personal level are matched at the societal level by limited economic development and political participation. The enduring situation of occupation and conflict means continued and increasing dependency of the population on external assistance for such basic requirements as food and education. The division of the West Bank and Gaza, and conditioned funding by donors means that the developmental gap between the two is growing, further intensifying the stress of the population and bringing particular consequences for women.

The group of greatest concern is that of female-headed households. The structural and social obstacles outlined above, which limit their ability to acquire credit or own land without a male partner, compounded by societal expectations, mean that such women face harsh conditions and are all too frequently among the poorest in society, struggling to buy sufficient food and clothing or provide adequate shelter for their family.

Compared with other countries in the world and even in the region, female participation in the labour force and economic activities remains low. While the West Bank still faces significant challenges in this field, it is in a better position than Gaza, which continues to fall further behind. The Palestinian Authority remains the most important employer for Palestinian women, who tend to be primarily employed in the service and education sectors.

Despite these problems, there have been a number of positive and encouraging developments for Palestinian women in 2009. The number of girls and women who not only have theoretical access to education, but who actually attend school, university and other educational institutions, is rising. This in turn provides greater opportunities for women to enter the labour market in stable, regulated and remunerated positions. In the area of political participation, there have also been significant improvements for women in Palestine. More are entering the political sphere as parliamentarians, prosecutors and judges, increasing female influence at the level at which decisions are taken and rules established.

After a reduction in the activities of the Commission as a result of the unstable situation in Lebanon in recent years, ESCWA has returned to the media spotlight and its activities, which tackle major issues on the global agenda, are achieving wide coverage by news organizations.

Media attention has also grown as a result of the emergence of a number of important issues that represent priorities for the United Nations in general and ESCWA in particular. It is in trying times, such as these, that the work of the United Nations system, including its regional commissions, assumes even greater importance. In 2009, the focus of local, regional and international media has revolved primarily around the global financial crisis, with its ensuing economic and social challenges; the food crisis, with its impact on the developing world; climate change, with its regional and global implications; youth issues; and peace and security concerns. Such issues are at the forefront of the work of the United Nations and, in its capacity as the economic and social arm of the United Nations in Western Asia, ESCWA brings together a host of experts to identify, research and analyse priority themes, seeking practical solutions to the challenges facing the region.

For their part, media outlets have continued to deal with everyday issues while prioritizing coverage of new global concerns as they emerge. The United Nations Information Centre (UNIC), the ESCWA-based information service, continues to play an essential bridging role between the Commission and the media, highlighting issues of mutual interest. It organizes press conferences and media briefings, and invites media professionals to debate selected reports and publications on priority themes with ESCWA experts. As part of its efforts to retain media engagement and keep the activities of the Commission in the forefront of the public mind, UNIC also issues press releases and media advisories to draw the attention of news outlets to the work undertaken by ESCWA in tackling emerging issues. The subscriber base for the ESCWA Weekly News bulletin has grown to more than 3,000 individuals and organizations, ensuring constant visibility for the work of the Commission.

Media interest was particularly active in 2009, as ESCWA organized a number of cultural events in celebration of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Commission. Events included an oriental chamber music concert, a folk music concert, an art exhibition devoted to pioneering Lebanese artists and an exhibition featuring artistic creations by United Nations staff and their families. Such events highlighted the diverse cultural facets of the Commission, drawing attention to its history and the efforts it has exerted since its inception – and continues to exert – to serve the region.

In dealing with the special events surrounding the anniversary of the Commission, as in its more traditional professional communications role, UNIC is firmly focused on promoting the work of the Commission and its Executive Secretary, ensuring the highest possible visibility for ESCWA events, activities and meetings, and guiding the media in handling emerging challenges in the region. Adopting a client-oriented policy in dealing with traditional media outlets, the communications team has broadened its scope to provide additional focus on new media and other less conventional forms of communication, which are attracting ever-increasing news-seeking traffic. As part of these efforts and in coordination with the webmaster and the Web Committee, UNIC is in the process of revamping the website of the Commission, making it easier to browse and more user-friendly, with a view to optimizing the online presence of ESCWA and further enhancing its outreach activity.

Part II

Making a Difference

Climate change mitigation and regional cooperation on shared water resources

In response to the challenges posed by climate change to water resources, ESCWA, in collaboration with the League of Arab States, held an EGM entitled *Towards Assessing the Vulnerability of Water Resources to Climate Change in the Arab Region* (Beirut, 26-28 October 2009), which aimed to reach a consensus between member countries and regional partners on the purpose, scope and methods to be adopted for the preparation of a regional vulnerability assessment of the impact of climate change on water resources. Work on climate change was also initiated under the Arab Integrated Water Resources Management Network (AWARENET), through the establishment of a working group to prepare a literature review on climate change and water resource vulnerability, a policy brief on the outcome of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (Copenhagen, 7-19 December 2009) and a roster of Arab experts working in the field of climate change.

Towards the achievement of MDG goal 7, target 7.C (“Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation”), a regional assessment survey was conducted to analyse the performance of the water supply and sanitation (WSS) sectors in the ESCWA region in the light of both current and planned WSS strategies, review the role of public-private partnership in service delivery, and assess the integration of WSS planning and policies within national plans for integrated water resource management. The resulting report was presented at the Technical Consultative Committee to the Arab Ministerial Water Council (AMWC) at its first session (Algiers, 29-30 June 2009). The AMWC passed a resolution commending the report and requesting ESCWA to establish a regional mechanism to follow up on the achievement of WSS targets, taking into account the specificities of the sector in the Arab region. Other activities in this field included a joint project with the German Agency for Technical Cooperation, under which support was provided to the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association to improve the performance of water utilities in the region.

A paper prepared by ESCWA entitled *Status of Cooperation Among Developing Countries in the Field of Water Within the Purview of ESCWA*⁴⁰ was presented at the Ministerial Forum on Water organized by the Group of 77 and the People's Republic of China (Oman, 23-25 February 2009). The meeting provided a forum for member countries to share expertise, disseminated information on water resources and established knowledge transfer mechanisms for Governments and decision makers. At the first session of the AMWC, ESCWA was also mandated to support member countries in improving their management of shared water resources, with a view to protecting their water rights. In pursuit of this mandate, ESCWA has held expert discussions on regional cooperative frameworks for the management of shared surface and groundwater resources, and has provided technical support to the Center of Water and Arab Water Security Studies of the League of Arab States by reviewing the United Nations General Assembly resolution on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers.⁴¹

Enhancing sustainable management of energy resources

Throughout 2009, the Sustainable Development and Productivity Division at ESCWA continued to focus on assisting member countries in the formulation of policies and the adoption of measures to improve the sustainable use and management of energy. To this end, a study⁴² was prepared on the role of regional

⁴⁰ Available at: www.g77.org/water/INFO-4_ESCWA.

⁴¹ United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/63/124 on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers.

⁴² *Enhancing Regional Cooperation on Energy Issues Towards Achieving Sustainable Development and the Millennium Development Goals in ESCWA Member Countries* (E/ESCWA/SDPD/2009/6). (Document available only in Arabic.)

cooperation on energy issues, with a view to achieving sustainable development and the MDGs. The study highlights the importance of enhancing regional cooperation mechanisms on energy, in particular in the field of electrical interconnections and gas networks. In further support of this area, ESCWA also held an EGM entitled *The Role of Energy Networks in Regional Integration* (Beirut, 22-23 December 2009), in which discussion centred on the role of energy networks in regional integration and the progress achieved in this field in the ESCWA region, with particular focus on electricity and gas networks. The meeting also examined the role of such networks in climate change mitigation and related legislative frameworks.

Furthering its efforts in the field of sustainable management, ESCWA prepared a report entitled *Transport for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region: Measures, Progress Achieved, Challenges and Policy Framework*,⁴³ which was submitted to the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and proved instrumental in galvanizing the Arab position regarding sustainable transport issues. The EGM on Transport for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region and its Relation to Climate Change Issues,⁴⁴ organized by ESCWA in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the Regional Office for West Asia of the United Nations Environment Programme (Cairo, 29 September – 1 October 2009), highlighted the ways in which sustainable transport can be promoted, examined related legislative frameworks and recommended the implementation of policies on transport sustainability. In preparation for the EGM, ESCWA also prepared a report on core thematic issues for the twenty-first session of CAMRE (Cairo, 10-11 November 2009), the themes of which included transport and climate change negotiation.

Enhancing sustainable rural development

To promote the adoption of sustainable land management (SLM) practices for fostering the conservation of natural resources for sustainable use in agriculture, ESCWA held an EGM on Sustainable Land Management as a Best Practice to Enhance Rural Development in the ESCWA Region (Beirut, 25-27 March 2009). The meeting offered participants the opportunity to debate the issue and provided guidance on ways in which the productivity of land resources in the region could be sustained and improved, emphasizing the role of SLM as a critical factor in enhancing rural development.

In order to assist member countries on their path to achieving MDG goals 1 (“Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”) and 7 (“Ensure environmental sustainability”), ESCWA held an EGM on Adopting the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach for Promoting Rural Development in the ESCWA Region (Beirut, 21-22 December 2009), enabling member countries to reach a comprehensive understanding of the various factors which affect rural communities in their decision-making on livelihood strategies and the use of natural resources.

Preparations for the eighteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

ESCWA is mandated by the Secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) to coordinate Arab regional preparations for CSD cycles and lead Arab regional discussion sessions at CSD meetings. In 2009, in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the Regional Office for West Asia of the United Nations Environment Programme, ESCWA prepared a study on each of the five thematic areas of CSD-18 (transport, chemicals, mining, waste management, and a ten year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns), led the organization of an EGM on Transport for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region and Its Relationship With Climate Change Issues, and organized the Western Asia Regional Implementation Meeting (Cairo, 4-6 October 2009), at which the regional implementation report⁴⁵ prepared by ESCWA to assess the challenges, priority actions and progress achieved in each of the five thematic areas by the countries of the region was discussed.

⁴³ E/ESCWA/SDPD/2009/WP.1.

⁴⁴ E/ESCWA/SDPD/2009/3. (Document available only in Arabic).

⁴⁵ Report of the Regional Implementation Meeting on the Five Areas Presented to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development on its Eighteenth Session, E/ESCWA/SDPD/2009/WP.2.

Promoting social development

The Social Development Division (SDD) advocates a social policy vision based on social justice and equal opportunity for all. It provides channels for the promotion of policy dialogue, knowledge-sharing and consensus building, with a view to guiding public policymaking to achieve inclusive, mutually-enforcing social and economic dividends, including the MDGs. During 2009, SDD has focused on strengthening the capacity of member countries in formulating and implementing comprehensive social policies that integrate such priority issues as social exclusion, social protection, youth, international migration, crisis mitigation, participatory development and urban poverty into their national development strategies and programmes. SDD has also striven to forge new partnerships for social development, while cementing existing ones at the national and regional level.

Strengthening social dialogue and shared social responsibility

ESCWA continues to facilitate forums for strengthening social dialogue and increasing civil society participation in all public policy processes. To that end, an expert group meeting entitled Enhancing Government-Civil Society Participation in Public Policy Processes (Beirut, 29-30 April 2009) was held to promote the importance of adopting a participatory approach to social development and to discuss the opportunities offered and challenges generated by such an approach. The meeting, which received favourable feedback from participants and the League of Arab States, outlined the legal frameworks regulating civic engagement in decision-making, discussed the tools and mechanisms required to achieve active and dynamic public-civic participation, and examined the role of the media in mobilizing public opinion on social issues.

“The ‘intrinsic’ merit of participation is now widely recognized. It refers to the idea that the act of participation is valuable in itself, quite apart from any value it may have in helping to reach other desirable goals.”

United Nations, 2008, *People Matter: Civic Engagement in Public Governance*, DESA World Public Sector Report 2008.

Strengthening national capacity to deal with international migration: maximizing development benefits and minimizing negative impact

In July 2009, ESCWA embarked upon a new, two-year interregional project, run jointly with the four other United Nations regional commissions, entitled Strengthening National Capacities to Deal with International Migration: Maximizing Development Benefits and Minimizing Negative Impact. The project endeavours to improve the quality and availability of data on international migration, increase institutional and human capacity to design and implement migration policies and programmes, and promote cooperation through an effective intraregional and interregional network for the exchange of information, experience and best practice. During 2009, SDD held consultative meetings with potential partners, established national focal points and initiated research on such key issues as institutional arrangements, national migration policies, labour mobility, remittances, transnational communities, brain drain and circular migration. The outcome of the research is expected to feed into a regional study on international migration and development. SDD also identified the components for a regional information system on migration and development in the ESCWA region.

Mitigating the social impact of the global financial and economic crisis

In response to General Assembly resolution A/RES/63/277, calling for regional consultations on the impact of the global financial and economic crisis, ESCWA convened an expert group meeting (Beirut, 8 December 2009) to discuss the social impact of the crisis on labour, migration, poverty, gender and social protection.

The meeting opened with a keynote address by the President of the Third World Institute, giving a global civil society perspective on the adverse effects of the crisis on the most vulnerable groups, and concluded with a round-table discussion in which participants agreed on a set of recommendations aimed at mitigating the effects of the crisis on poor and marginalized groups in the region.⁴⁶ The meeting provided a further illustration of the important role played by ESCWA in fostering open discussion between policymakers, regional and international development practitioners, and United Nations experts, and in creating forums for exploring viable policy and programme responses.

“Governments need to take advantage of the small window of opportunity presented by the crisis to reshape and refocus economic and social policy towards a more development-centered and people-centered platform that integrates social concerns into economic planning.”

Meeting participant

Towards an integrated approach for social policy in Palestine

ESCWA has continued in its efforts to encourage decision makers in member countries to adopt an integrated approach to social policy. To this end, the Commission has supported Palestine in hosting a number of national meetings on the need to develop a vision for a social policy in Palestine based on social justice and equal opportunities, in order to move from the current discourse, based on relief assistance, to one of broad development.

The consultative meetings culminated with a national multi-stakeholder conference entitled Towards Integrated Social Policy in Palestine (Ramallah, 9 June 2009). During the conference, ESCWA and the Palestinian Ministry of Planning and Administrative Development launched the results of the National Report on Integrated Social Policy in Palestine, which sets out the current status of social policy in the country and highlights the political, social and economic impediments that have affected social policy development, implementation and monitoring. The conference concluded with proposals for the establishment of an economic and social council in Palestine to play an advisory role in social policy planning.

Other major SDD publications and activities in 2009

- *Enhancing Participation of Government and Civil Society in Public Policy Processes (E/ESCWA/SDD/2009/Technical Paper.4)*
- *Age-structural Transitions in Arab Countries: Policy Implications for Development (E/ESCWA/SDD/2009/Technical Paper.1)*
- *Mapping Inequity: Persons with Physical Disabilities in Jordan (E/ESCWA/SDD/2009/7)*
- *Arab Conference on Population and Development: Current Situation and Future Prospects (Doha. 18-20 May 2009). co-organized with the United*

⁴⁶ Further information can be found at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1162E>.

Activities in response to the international financial crisis

The economies of ESCWA member countries have suffered major losses as a direct result of the international financial crisis that hit world economies in the last quarter of 2008. To equip its member countries to respond effectively to the challenges created by such rapidly changing conditions, ESCWA prepared three working papers on the impact of the crisis on the region, with particular focus on capital markets and oil.⁴⁷ In cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), ESCWA prepared a paper entitled *The Impacts of the International Financial and Economic Crisis on ESCWA Member Countries: Challenges and Opportunities*,⁴⁸ evaluating the economic and social impact of the crisis, and providing decision makers with a set of recommendations on ways in which the impact might be mitigated.

ESCWA also organized a regional high-level consultative forum entitled *The Impact of the International Financial Crisis on ESCWA Member Countries: the Way Forward* (Damascus, 5-7 May 2009) to prepare member countries for the United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development (New York, 24-26 June 2009). The outcome of the regional forum was the formulation of the Damascus Declaration, which was revised and adopted during the sixth session of the Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development in the Countries of the ESCWA Region (Beirut, 6-7 July 2009).⁴⁹ ESCWA also contributed to a study prepared jointly by the five United Nations regional commissions entitled *The Global Economic and Financial Crisis: Regional Impacts, Responses and Solutions*.⁵⁰

Initiation of the work of the Committee on Transport and Trade Facilitation with the League of Arab States

In preparation for the consultative meeting of Arab transport ministers on transport and trade facilitation (Amman, 2 July 2009), ESCWA supported the Ministry of Transport in Jordan, contributing to the preparation of a draft paper on the establishment of a committee on transport and trade facilitation among Arab countries (TTF). In addition, a technical committee headed by Jordan and comprising ESCWA, the League of Arab States, Kuwait, Palestine, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates, was established to revise the draft paper and present it to the Executive Office of the Council of Arab Transportation Ministers for review and submission to the Council for final adoption. ESCWA participated in the meeting of the technical committee (Damascus, 17 August 2009), at which a final draft was agreed, recommending that a joint secretariat for the TTF committee be established at ESCWA and the League of Arab States.

Arab MDG Report 2010 and related activities

The ESCWA interdivisional task force on the production of the Arab MDG Report and related activities is coordinated by the Economic Development and Globalization Division (EDGD). At its twelfth

⁴⁷ *The Impact of the Global Financial Crisis on the World Oil Market and its Implications for the GCC Countries* (E/ESCWA/EDGD/2009/WP.1), *Impact of the International Financial Crisis on ESCWA Member Countries* (E/ESCWA/EDGD/2009/WP.2) and *The Impacts of the Financial Crisis on ESCWA Member Countries: Challenges and Opportunities* (E/ESCWA/EDGD/2009/WP.3).

⁴⁸ E/ESCWA/EDGD/2009/Technical Paper.3.

⁴⁹ E/ESCWA/EDGD/2009/IG.2/7.

⁵⁰ Available at: <http://www.un.org/regionalcommissions/09archives.html>.

session (Beirut, 13-14 September 2008), the RCM established a thematic working group (TWG) on the MDGs, with ESCWA as its convener. ESCWA subsequently organized the first meeting of the TWG on the MDGs in the Arab Region (Beirut, 23 July 2009) to discuss global issues and their impact on the attainment of MDGs in the region. The meeting also discussed the draft terms of reference and draft action plan of the TWG, and considered the preparations for the forthcoming Arab MDG Report 2010, with a view to producing a high quality, analysis-based report, the main theme of which will be the impact of and response to the international financial crisis in the Arab region.

At the second meeting of the TWG on the MDGs in the Arab Region (Beirut, 9-11 December 2009), a timetable of actions from December 2009 until the production of the Arab MDG Report 2010 was agreed, including post-report activities in preparation for the forthcoming MDG Summit (New York, 20-22 September 2010).

Study on railways in Yemen

On 10 December 2007, Yemen ratified the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq. In anticipation of the ratification, in December 2006 the Ministry of Transport in Yemen signed an agreement with ESCWA to conduct an economic feasibility study for the construction of a railway network in Yemen comprising two routes. On 16 February 2009, the parties signed an annex to the Agreement to expand the study to include two additional routes and on 11 December 2009, ESCWA submitted the final draft report of the study (covering all four routes) to the Ministry of Transport for review and comment.

Training activities

In collaboration with the World Trade Organization (WTO), ESCWA held a three-day regional training workshop (Beirut, 24-26 February 2009), providing participants from member countries with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary for trade negotiations, including strategies and tactics. It also briefed participants on the latest developments in the Doha round of negotiations and provided them with techniques for effective participation in and monitoring of the negotiation process.

In 2009, the Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD) at ESCWA continued to work towards reducing the digital divide in the region and building an inclusive information society that is both development-oriented and firmly people-focused.

Follow-up activities to the Outcome of World Summit on the Information Society

The Conference on Regional Follow-up to the Outcome of WSIS (Damascus, 16-18 June 2009) brought together ICT officials and experts from across the ESCWA region to review the progress made towards the implementation of the eleven WSIS action lines, the execution of projects within the RPoA for building the information society and a number of related regional strategies and plans of action. Attended by 275 participants, the conference succeeded in updating the RPoA projects, launching the Global Alliance for ICT and Development Arab Region Network, and adopting the Damascus Proclamation for Strengthening the Arab Knowledge Society for Sustainable Socio-economic Development.

Also within the framework of follow-up activities, ESCWA organized a meeting entitled Developing the ICT Sector in the ESCWA Region (Beirut, 11-12 March 2009) and a workshop on Investment in the ICT Sector (Cairo, 5-7 May 2009). Promoting the use of ICT in Government services was examined in a study entitled *Building Trust in e-Services in the ESCWA Region*⁵¹ and two meetings: a workshop on Delivery of e-Services in Civil Society (Beirut, 28-29 December 2009) and an EGM on ICT Applications and e-Services in the Public Sector in the ESCWA Region (Beirut, 20-21 July 2009).

Arabic script in internet domain names

ICTD is responsible for activities related to the use of Arabic script in internationalized domain names; these are implemented within the framework of the Promotion of the Arabic Domain Name System project. In 2009, two meetings were held: the Regional Workshop on Arabic Domain Names and Internet Governance (Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, 14 November 2009) and the Fourth Meeting on the Global Harmonization of Arabic Script Use in Domain Names (Amman, 1-3 April 2009). These resulted in the Request for Comments – Linguistic Guidelines for the Use of the Arabic Language in Internet Domains⁵² and the Preliminary Feasibility Study for the Establishment of the Domain Name Registry for the “.arab” and “.arab.” Generic Top Level Domains.⁵³



Digital Arabic content

Developing and promoting the digital Arabic content (DAC) industry represents a significant opportunity for the ESCWA region. In recognition of this, between 2007 and 2009, ICTD ran a project entitled Promotion of the Digital Arabic Content Industry Through Incubation. Managed in partnership with

⁵¹ E/ESCWA/ICTD/2009/4. (Available only in Arabic).

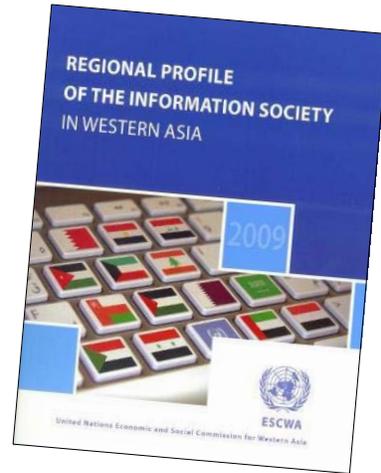
⁵² E/ESCWA/ICTD/2009/Technical Paper.1.

⁵³ E/ESCWA/ICTD/2009/Technical Paper.2.

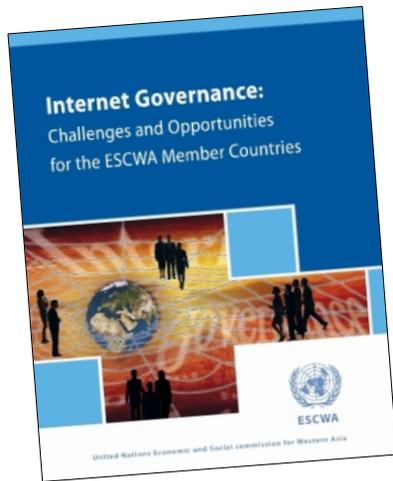
five ICT incubators in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, the project supported the development of a number of new initiatives and, by its conclusion, had developed eight incubated initiatives that were considered prospective start-up companies. The project included awareness campaigns, national competitions for the selection of initiatives, and activities aimed at creating partnerships. It also produced three studies: *A Survey on Digital Arabic Content: Software, Applications and Needs Assessment*;⁵⁴ *Models for Business Plan, Marketing and Multi-stakeholder Partnerships for the Digital Arabic Content Industry*;⁵⁵ and *Development of Digital Arabic Content: Incubation Requirements and Training Needs*.⁵⁶ The final meeting of the project (Beirut, 14-15 December 2009) concluded its activities. The closing evaluation identified the need to market the incubated initiatives at the regional and international level and, in the light of the success of the project, recommended the replication of similar activities in other member countries.

Regional profiling of the information society

Biennial profiling of the information society at the national and regional level started in 2003; the 2009 edition of the *Regional Profile of the Information Society in Western Asia*⁵⁷ is the fourth in the series. ESCWA works in partnership with focal point institutions in member countries to prepare the national profiles of the information society on which the report is based. In accordance with WSIS action lines, it addresses various aspects of the information society and highlights particular focus areas for the region. Its recommendations are broad, but detailed, covering themes including the role of Governments and stakeholders; ICT infrastructure; access to information and knowledge; ICT capacity-building; building confidence and security in the use of ICT; the enabling environment; ICT applications; cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content; media; regional and international cooperation; the MDGs; and building the ICT sector.



and building the ICT sector.



Internet governance

Offering an overview of the Internet governance debate, the 2009 study *Internet Governance: Challenges and Opportunities for the ESCWA Member Countries*⁵⁸ tackles priority issues related to critical Internet resources, access and diversity. It aims to provide member countries with a better understanding of common challenges in the field of Internet governance from a regional perspective; build national capacity in order to respond optimally to such challenges; and promote the role of member countries as effective players in the global Internet society. The study concludes with recommendations on key initiatives to enable ESCWA member countries to play an active role in helping to shape a global policy structure for Internet governance.

⁵⁴ E/ESCWA/ICTD/2010/Technical Paper.1.

⁵⁵ E/ESCWA/ICTD/2010/Technical Paper.2.

⁵⁶ E/ESCWA/ICTD/2010/Technical Paper.3.

⁵⁷ E/ESCWA/ICTD/2009/12.

⁵⁸ E/ESCWA/ICTD/2009/7.

Knowledge networks through ICT access points for disadvantaged communities

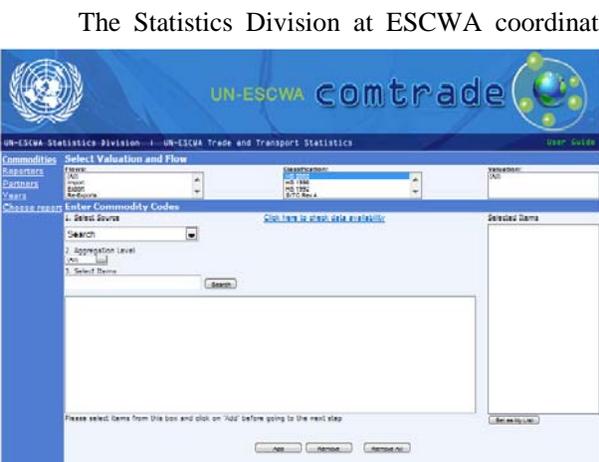
The Knowledge Networks Through ICT Access Points for Disadvantaged Communities project has had a direct impact on community development worldwide. Jointly implemented by the five United Nations regional commissions, ESCWA acts as the lead agency globally. Started in 2006, the project will be completed in 2010, and its primary goal is to empower disadvantaged communities through transforming existing ICT access points into networked knowledge hubs. Inclusive in nature, it seeks to involve those who will benefit from such networks in their creation and provides a forum for the sharing of knowledge related to such areas of sustainable development as employment, education, gender and health. In 2009, a regional knowledge networks portal⁵⁹ was established as part of the project and ESCWA joined with a number of regional partners in organizing a Telecentre Leaders' Forum for the countries of the Arab Mashreq (Amman, 15-16 July 2009), which aimed to connect and build capacity between current and potential partners in the regional knowledge network.

⁵⁹ The portal can be accessed at: <http://www.knowledgenets.net/>.

Towards greater sharing of knowledge and information

At the heart of the work carried out by ESCWA in the statistical field are its efforts to enhance the capacity of member countries to produce and disseminate high quality, comparable socio-economic indicators and act as a central repository of sound, transparent data, capturing key development issues in the region. To achieve these objectives, ESCWA has developed a number of tools for the sharing of knowledge and information. These tools, which can be accessed via the home page of the Statistics Division,⁶⁰ include the following:

Comtrade database



The Statistics Division at ESCWA coordinates and hosts the Comtrade database on international merchandise trade statistics for the use of Arab trade statisticians. The database, the primary source of which is the United Nations Statistics Division, is designed to enhance communication and cooperation between professionals working in institutions which produce or use international trade statistics. The associated website⁶¹ provides a link to the ESCWA Comtrade database, which enables statisticians and researchers to find specific data on external trade in Arab countries.

Arab gender statistics database

Pursuant to ESCWA resolution 286 (XXV) on Gender statistics for equality and empowerment of women, and in view of the need to improve the situation of women in the region by addressing the lack of timely, reliable, comparable and sex-disaggregated data to inform policy and programme decisions, at the second inter-agency and expert group meeting on Gender Statistics in Arab Countries (Beirut, 12-14 October 2009) the Statistics Division launched the Arab Gender Statistics Database: Arab GenInfo_09.⁶² Developed using the DevInfo database software, which promotes the use of data to advocate for human development, Arab GenInfo_09 fulfils the commitment of the Commission to develop a detailed gender database to act as a cross-sectoral gender mainstreaming observatory. The database includes sex-disaggregated data and indicators with spatial distribution, compiled from socio-economic data recorded by various United Nations agencies. Arab GenInfo_09 provides a starting point for Arab countries in



⁶⁰ The home page can be found at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/main.asp?division=sd>.

⁶¹ The database can be accessed at: <http://comtrade.escwa.org.lb/>.

⁶² The database can be accessed at: <http://genderinfo.escwa.org.lb/>.

compiling national data, disseminating gender statistics and including a gender perspective in formulating, implementing and monitoring policy.

Arab DevInfo Training Team Net

In view of the importance of disseminating theoretical, practical and technical training on DevInfo as widely as possible, ESCWA, in collaboration with the United Nations Children’s Fund Middle East and North Africa Regional Office and the United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office, organized the Regional Training of Trainers Workshop on DevInfo v.6.0 (Beirut, 20-24 July 2009). The workshop established an Arab DevInfo Training Team (ADITT) with the technical knowledge and practical ability to conduct training courses on DevInfo in their home countries with a view to qualifying as master trainers. As further support, and available exclusively to Training Team members, ESCWA has also developed the ADITT Net website,⁶³ which provides a platform for discussion of DevInfo activities and the sharing of plans, resources and experience.

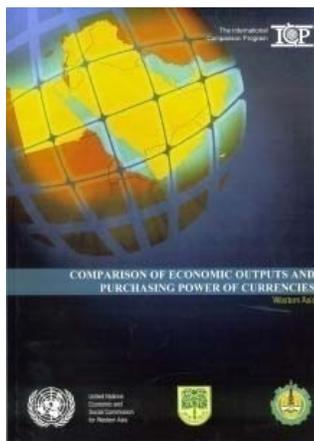
e-Publication of Arab MDG progress charts

In a departure from its traditional publishing formats, in 2009 ESCWA launched its first statistical electronic publication. The e-publication is a monitoring tool for charting the progress of Arab countries towards achieving the MDGs by 2015. Providing users with up-to-date, comparative data in a “green” environment, details of the progress made on each indicator by every member country can be easily accessed and downloaded in the form of Microsoft Excel charts and tables. The entire publication or excerpts from it can also be printed in .pdf format.

⁶³ The database can be accessed by ADITT members at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/forums/devinfo/>.

Comparison of Economic Outputs and Purchasing Power of Currencies for Western Asia

In 2009, ESCWA, in partnership with the national statistical offices of 11 member countries, regional agencies, international organizations, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, the Islamic Development Bank and the World Bank, successfully completed the 2005 round of the International Comparison Program (ICP). The ICP represents a global effort to establish a method for comparing per capita and total GDP (or its sub-aggregates) in real terms between countries in order to understand intercountry variations in standards of living, levels of investment, Government expenditure and the purchasing power of currencies.

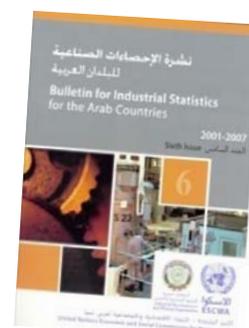


The Program has developed an alternative rate of exchange, “purchasing power parity” (PPP), which, by adjusting price differences, facilitates the comparison of economic aggregates and market size based on real output. Including the use of PPP data in poverty analysis, in particular in the estimation of the incidence of poverty on internationally-comparable lines, will be pivotal in assessing poverty in the region. In addition to generating PPP-related economic data, the ICP serves as a catalyst in regional and global statistical capacity-building.

The work of the 2005 round of the ICP concluded with the production of a final report on the purchasing power of currencies. The results contained in the report open up new research opportunities and will yield substantial dividends for policy and business decision-making.

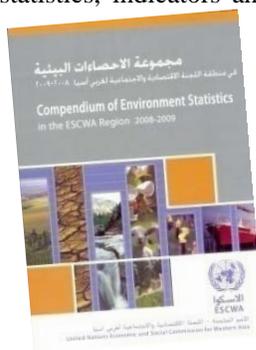
Bulletin of Industrial Statistics for the Arab Countries – 2001-2007, Sixth Issue

The Bulletin of Industrial Statistics for the Arab Countries brings together detailed industrial data from 2001 to 2007. It provides an overview of industrial trends, including output, labour productivity, industrial production index figures, the contribution made by industry to GDP and average wages in the Arab countries.



Compendium of Environment Statistics in the ESCWA Region

Since 2004, the Statistics Division has been assisting member countries to develop their environment statistics, indicators and accounts. Published in 2009, the Compendium sets out comprehensive data and indicators on such environmental elements as freshwater resources, water accounts and environmental protection expenditure, waste management, energy consumption and air pollution. Data and metadata of selected indicators can be accessed via the ESCWA Statistics Information System.⁶⁴



⁶⁴ Available at: <http://esis.escwa.org.lb/>.

Compendium of Social Statistics and Indicators: International Migration Statistics in the ESCWA Region

The ninth issue of the Compendium brings together information on international migration statistics in the fourteen ESCWA member countries in response to the growing, but largely unmet, demand for accurate, up-to-date and policy-relevant international migration data. Although data on migration in ESCWA member countries are scarce and not generally disseminated, the Compendium provides a regional perspective by compiling data from various sources, including national data and estimates produced by international bodies.



In 2009, the ESCWA Centre for Women (ECW) organized the fourth session of the Committee on Women (Beirut, 21-23 October 2009) under the theme “Promoting economic participation of Arab women”. The Committee discussed the ways in which member countries and regional and international organizations can contribute to creating a more supportive environment to enable women to access economic and financial resources, and be involved in economic activity. As the specialized intergovernmental body on issues related to women and gender equality, the Committee also reviewed and approved the proposed programme of work for ECW for the 2010-2011 biennium and adopted a resolution on the follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the Arab region,⁶⁵ which will be submitted to the twenty-sixth ESCWA session in 2010, and which calls, inter alia, for the Commission to establish an index on gender and development, study the feasibility of a gender observatory for the Arab region and upgrade ECW from a section to a division in order to better support member countries in the empowerment of women.

Through continuous communication and cooperation with national women’s machineries (NWM) across the region, ECW has supported member countries to improve their reporting to international organizations, with particular focus on the national reports that are required to be submitted to the Committee on the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the progress reports in follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action. This has been achieved through a variety of activities, primarily by means of advisory missions to member countries within the technical cooperation framework, and has contributed to strengthening the capacity of NWM to fulfil their mandate and role in their respective countries more effectively by promoting gender equality and working towards increased empowerment of women at the governmental level. Following requests from member countries, ECW has undertaken a substantial number of advisory missions, including training workshops on gender mainstreaming national development plans, support for report-writing for international organizations, and training on leadership and decision-making. The activities of ECW have continued to raise member country awareness of the importance of internationally-agreed conventions; the fact that in 2009 Qatar ratified CEDAW and Jordan lifted its reservation on the movement of persons is a clear reflection of the success of these efforts.

A particular concern for ECW is the ongoing presence of conflict in the region, and within the context of the tenth anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000),⁶⁶ ECW produced an in-depth study⁶⁷ and organized an expert group meeting with participants from countries faced with ongoing conflict⁶⁸ to identify and explore the ways in which the role of women can be strengthened in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The study showed that the extent to which women can play a leading role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding is a key indicator for progress towards equality and empowerment of women. The United Nations Security Council has adopted a number of resolutions on this issue, most importantly

⁶⁵ Resolution on the follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the Arab countries after 15 years: Beijing+15. Available at: http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/div_editor/Download.asp?table_name=ecw_other&field_name=id&FileID=346.

⁶⁶ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) concerning women and peace and security.

⁶⁷ *The Status of Arab Women: Ways to Strengthen the Role of Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding* (E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/3). (Available only in Arabic).

⁶⁸ Peer review on the study *The Status of Arab Women: Ways to Strengthen the Role of Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding* (Beirut, 13-14 November 2009).

Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008)⁶⁹ and Security Council Resolution 1889 (2009).⁷⁰



**The global campaign of the Secretary-General of the United Nations
“UNiTE to End Violence Against Women”**

Launched in 2008 and projected to last until 2015, the campaign has five major goals:

1. Adopt and enforce national laws to address and punish all forms of violence against women and girls.
2. Adopt and implement multisectoral national action plans.
3. Strengthen data collection on the prevalence of violence against women and girls.
4. Increase public awareness and social mobilization.
5. Address sexual violence in conflict.

In addition to the United Nations Secretariat and its regional commissions, all United Nations departments, agencies and programmes concerned with gender issues are contributing to the campaign.

The main initiatives taken to date include the following:

- Virtual knowledge centre to end violence against women and girls (United Nations Development Fund for Women);
- Say No - UNiTE to End Violence Against Women (individuals, civil society, Governments and the United Nations);
- Stop Rape Now (United Nations Action Against Sexual Violence).

The United Nations Secretary-General’s database on violence against women (pursuant to United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/61/143 and based on questionnaires submitted by States members of the United Nations).

⁶⁹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008) concerning women and peace and security.

⁷⁰ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1889 (2009) concerning women and peace and security.

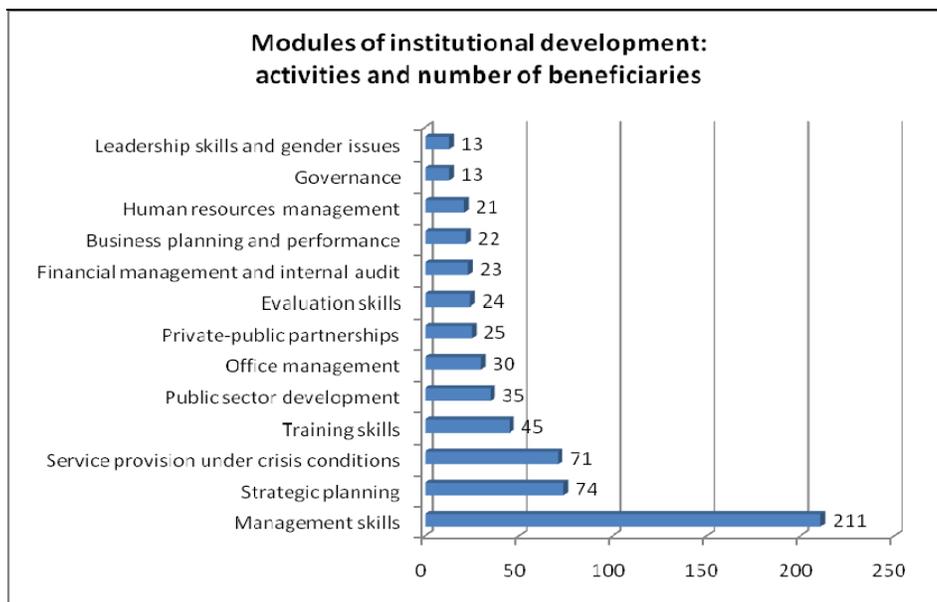
Human and institutional development for State-building

In 2009, ESCWA expanded and further focused its endeavours to strengthen State institutions in member countries, based on the founding principle that comprehensive human and institutional development strategies and programmes are direct contributors to the promotion of sustainable peace and the achievement of socio-economic development.

The human and institutional development interventions implemented by the Commission through the work of the section for Emerging and Conflict-related Issues have yielded focused policy recommendations, enhancing the skills of public sector officials in member countries and contributing to supporting locally-led management reform of those public institutions expected to play a central role in the establishment of an efficient, responsive and transparent public sector, despite, in a number of cases, a context of conflict and instability.

Within its 2008-2009 workplan, ESCWA trained 607 civil servants from member countries through its institutional development programmes, providing them with the tools needed to instigate modernization and reform strategies and processes in their respective administrations. More than 20 per cent of those trained have since become trainers, creating a cadre of experts capable of disseminating the knowledge and skills acquired, thus ensuring a multiplier effect for such interventions.

The human and institutional development toolkits developed by ESCWA are tailored to the particular needs of the public sector in member countries and feature a repository of adapted training modules on modern management and planning tools and techniques.



ESCWA has also identified and disseminated adaptive institutional development strategies promoting public sector modernization, which have included building knowledge and national capacity in strategic planning techniques and methodologies; supporting the development of a framework for management development for the Iraqi public sector, with a view to instigating improvement and reform; identifying and disseminating e-governance and public-private partnership policy recommendations and best practice; and devising an institutional development toolkit for conflict mitigation and post-conflict State-building.

Finally, during the 2008-2009 biennium, in a clear acknowledgment of the success achieved by the Commission in designing and implementing tailored interventions, training modules and programmes, ESCWA received 13 requests from member countries for technical assistance in the area of institutional development.

Introduction of new innovative planning techniques and methodologies

Through one of its institutional development projects, ESCWA has introduced the *Parmenides Eidos*® software, an innovative approach to knowledge representation and analysis that supports the thinking and reasoning processes necessary to improve strategizing and planning. The tool was provided to the Iraqi National Center for Consultancy and Management Development, which used it in the preparation of its internal strategic plan and to address major public sector planning challenges through its training and consulting services.

Unpacking the Dynamics of Communal Tensions: A Focus Group Analysis of Perceptions among Youth in Lebanon

A series of developments in recent decades has re-triggered communal tensions in Western Asia. If left unchecked, such tensions have the potential to become a formidable and potentially unstoppable force of fragmentation and disintegration across the ESCWA region and beyond, undermining reform efforts, marginalizing human rights and religious values, and flaming disorder and civil discord.

Adopting a purely qualitative approach based on the analysis of focus group discussions with young people aged 18-25, a 2009 ESCWA study, *Unpacking the Dynamics of Communal Tensions: A Focus Group Analysis of Perceptions among Youth in Lebanon*,⁷¹ examined the dynamics of communal tension, animosity and conflict, using Lebanon as a case study. The study explored the four principal building blocks identified as the root-cause of current communal tensions, namely the reproduction of communal identity, the compartmentalization of intercommunal social relations, the exclusionary spaces of social relations and the clientelistic nature of the political system.

It concluded with a number of recommendations for State institutions, multilateral organizations, civil society and donors to work towards promoting civic values within the education system and good governance practices within the public sector so as to enhance capacity for development, social cohesiveness and peaceful co-existence. Given the similarities in dynamics, the study has also contributed significantly to the development of a two-year programme focusing on promoting civic values and life skills in Iraq, funded by the United Nations Development Group Iraq Trust Fund and led by ESCWA in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Population Fund.

⁷¹ Available at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/ecri-09-5.pdf>.

ESCWA technical cooperation

In addressing development issues and potential challenges in the region, ESCWA technical cooperation activities aim to strengthen the capacity of member countries to formulate and implement effective, inclusive and sustainable development policies and programmes. Within the framework of a dynamic technical cooperation strategy, ESCWA services include policy advisory, technical support and capacity-building activities in the areas in which ESCWA has particular strength. The strategy is focused on providing participatory, demand-driven and result-oriented services while ensuring both national ownership and sustainability of results. It focuses on countries most in need and in those areas to which ESCWA can bring real value.

Advisory services

As part of the technical cooperation provided by ESCWA, the services of regional advisors are available upon request to member country Governments for short-term missions. Regional advisors support member countries in their development efforts; recommend measures and policies to help them overcome specific problems; provide technical support on sectoral matters relevant to country programmes; provide training workshops or seminars at the national or regional level; assist in the preparation and formulation of project proposals and support implementation of pilot projects that can be replicated or developed. In addition to the transfer of skills and knowledge, they also disseminate knowledge and information in their field of expertise through lectures, papers and participation in national, regional and international meetings.

A particular advantage of the regional advisors is their ability to work as part of a cohesive multi-

Technical assistance in water policy

As part of its technical assistance efforts in the field of water policy, ESCWA provided support to Saudi Arabia in the framework of the review process of the Assessment and Strategic Management of the Water Sector programme, helping national experts to develop recommendations on planning the strategic management of water resources in a number of sectors. In Oman, 62 staff from the Public Authority for Electricity and Water, the Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources, and a number of other national institutions participated in a training workshop organized by ESCWA (Muscat, 10-14 October 2009) which focused on modern water quality regulations, methodologies and management options.

disciplinary team, approaching development solutions in an integrated manner. In 2009, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA led a number of integrated missions as part of official visits to member countries. These integrated technical missions offered regional advisors an opportunity to interact proactively with stakeholders, discuss priorities, identify potential for scaling-up capacity-building activities and define plans of action for capacity development. Such missions ensure coherence between different thematic areas of work and allow ESCWA to make strategic choices

in formulating technical cooperation activities.

Technical Cooperation Network

An effective technical cooperation programme requires active engagement and exchange of information between member countries, and between member countries and ESCWA. The Technical Cooperation Network, established in 2007, aims to strengthen cooperation, coordination, partnership, networking and exchange of knowledge and information. In addition, the Network aims to identify the priorities of member countries and the basic guiding principles which will optimize the benefit from technical cooperation services and contribute to improving the exchange of information and expertise, which

in turn will strengthen existing partnerships between stakeholders and create new ones at the national, regional and international levels. The active engagement of technical cooperation focal points in member countries has been instrumental in enhancing the quality of requests received for technical cooperation services.

The Technical Cooperation Network web portal was launched at the second annual regional workshop of the Network in February 2009 as a tool to facilitate communication between members. This portal will play a crucial role in facilitating information sharing, communication and coordination between the ESCWA secretariat and member countries. The annual meeting also included a training workshop on strategic planning tools and approaches, tailored for the development of national technical cooperation plans.

Integrated technical cooperation framework for Jordan

Following a high-level mission to Jordan led by the Executive Secretary of ESCWA in January 2009, a team of regional advisors undertook a technical integrated mission to the country in April 2009, with a view to developing a framework for technical cooperation activities in the areas of environment, water, the application of geographic information systems, strategic planning, transport development, information and communications technology, and statistics. As a result, ESCWA has supported the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation in establishing a Department of Statistics to provide statistical support at inter-ministerial level. The services provided by the regional advisors included tracking progress in the achievement of the MDGs, poverty measurement and a framework for articulating integrated social policy, gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting. ESCWA also supported a series of strategic planning workshops for the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Agriculture. Technical cooperation activities were formulated in line with the Common Country Assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, and a number were implemented as joint initiatives between ESCWA and the United Nations Development Programme.

Regional coordination mechanism

In order to address regional development challenges and in view of the need for the United Nations

Partnerships

In order to respond optimally to such emerging issues and global challenges as climate change, the food crisis and the global economic crisis, enhanced cooperation, coordination and coherence at the country, regional and international level is essential. Strategic partnerships are central to the effective delivery of technical cooperation. The principal partners of ESCWA include the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council, other United Nations organizations and specialized agencies, other intergovernmental and international organizations, and the private sector.

system and regional organizations to play complementary roles, ESCWA is mandated by the Economic and Social Council to hold regular inter-agency meetings with a view to improving coordination between the programmes of work of the United Nations organizations in the region. The regional coordination mechanism (RCM) is convened regularly to increase cooperation and collaboration between United Nations regional entities and their development partners in addressing regional development issues. The RCM in the Arab region covers not only Western Asia, but all 22 Arab countries.

The first joint meeting of RCM and the Regional Directors' Team (RDT) (Beirut, 3-4 November 2009) brought together representatives of regional directors of United Nations agencies, the League of Arab States (a member of RCM) and the Lebanese Minister of Education and Higher Education. The meeting discussed regional priorities, addressed the challenges faced in coordinating joint activities, highlighted the lessons learned and outlined the way forward, with a view to strengthening the work and role of both RCM and RDT. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss and set the development agenda for the region, addressing strategic policy concerns around issues of climate change, the MDGs, food security and human rights.

From assistance to development: cultural and socio-economic revitalization

As a follow-up to the support previously provided to Saudi Arabia within the framework of its five-year national plan, in 2009 ESCWA undertook further work on the culture and development section of the plan. In a departure from earlier approaches, the plan redefined cultural heritage in such a way as to strengthen national identity and create a sense of civic belonging, while also considering new means by which heritage can be harnessed for socio-economic revitalization. New integrated measures were explored for using cultural development to address poverty; create jobs, particularly for young people; establish microenterprises; enhance education; and encourage the development of cultural industries.

One of the primary roles of the Office of the Executive Secretary (OES) is coordination. During 2009, under the leadership of the Executive Secretary, the OES continued its tripartite focus on coordinating relations, internally between the substantive divisions and the administration; externally within the region, between the Commission and its member countries; and externally beyond the region, with other United Nations regional commissions, the Economic and Social Council, and the General Assembly. The success of its outreach activities, characterized by a targeted, participatory approach, was reflected in increased levels of engagement in its intergovernmental meetings and the work of its subsidiary bodies, and a rise in the number of requests received for advisory services.

Coverage of ESCWA thirty-fifth anniversary activities

ESCWA celebrated its thirty-fifth anniversary in 2009 and a series of activities was held to mark the event. These started with a folk music concert, held at the opening of the Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development in the Countries of the ESCWA Region on 22 July, which was followed by a public exhibition honouring pioneering Lebanese artists (2 November), and a classical concert at the Maronite Cathedral of St. George in downtown Beirut, entitled "Orient Meets Occident: the Arabian Passion According to J.S. Bach" (12 November). The celebrations concluded with an exhibition featuring works of art by United Nations staff and their families (14 December).

Moving the development agenda forward was one of the main priorities of the OES in 2009. It was the focus of an expert group meeting on Moving the Development Agenda Forward: Opportunities and Potential Gains (Beirut, 5-6 November 2009)⁷² which brought together a number of regional and international experts to discuss current and anticipated challenges facing the ESCWA region, including climate change and the sustainable management of natural resources; the youth bulge and its likely effect on employment and investment; and the issue of regional integration for socio-economic development. The meeting concluded with participants agreeing upon a set of wide-

ranging recommendations. These emphasized the importance of undertaking assessment projects and diagnostic studies; developing evidence-based and action-oriented national policies and mechanisms; adopting an integrated development approach to youth issues, including advocating WPAY in the region; considering the impact of transport agreements developed by ESCWA on intraregional trade, which remains limited in comparison with other regions; and putting in place innovative capacity-building and training programmes at the country level, involving governmental bodies, private sector companies and civil society institutions.

The third meeting of the Technical Committee (Beirut, 21-22 July 2009)⁷³ focused on issues including the effect of the financial and economic crisis, food insecurity and climate change at the regional and global levels, and discussed the implementation of the ESCWA programme of work. The participants, representing ESCWA focal point ministries, agreed that coordinated, unified efforts were



essential for the development of practical solutions;

⁷² E/ESCWA/OES/2009/WG.1/3.

⁷³ E/ESCWA/2009/C.3/6.

mechanisms were required to minimize the effect of the food crisis at both national and regional levels through capacity-building and attracting inward investment; and that studies should be undertaken to evaluate the impact of climate change on water resources and coastal areas in the region.

The Administrative Services Division (ASD) is responsible for ensuring the implementation of all administrative, managerial and organizational issues at ESCWA. Although by its very nature, much of its work is carried out behind the scenes, it is central to the smooth functioning of the Commission. It provides advice to the Executive Secretary on policy guidelines, monitors the management reform process and coordinates central common services. It also represents the United Nations in negotiations with the host country on issues relating to the implementation of the headquarters agreement. The division is a supporter, enabler and facilitator of the work of ESCWA, underpinning the efficient implementation of its substantive mandate in the region, responding to the needs of its staff and contributing to the success of its programme of work. Its services are provided through several distinct sections and functional areas.

Human Resources

The Human Resources Management Section (HRMS) anticipates the needs of its clients by examining its work flows and implementing automation projects, with the aim of streamlining recruitment, contract administration, and benefits and entitlements. Achievements in this field in 2009 include the following:

- The first ESCWA HR Day was held in June 2009, a successful initiative to provide information and advice to staff on the work of HRMS;
- The Section hosted and participated in the third annual United Nations Dispensary Physicians meeting, held for the first time at ESCWA (9-13 November 2009), which included pre-hospital trauma life support training;
- The ESCWA electronic Compendium of Consultants and Individual Contractors was launched, with the objective of expediting the hiring of consultants, and improving transparency and accountability of the hiring process;
- The Section participated in the development of a new staff selection system, including a regulatory framework and new e-tool, Inspira;
- The Section organized a variety of substantive and technical training programmes and participated in the design team for the new United Nations Learning Management System.

General Services

The General Services Section (GSS) provides client-oriented support services in the areas of facilities management, travel, visas and shipping, property and inventory control, insurance and claims, mail, archives and records management, and coordination of operational services. The Section proactively implements and monitors energy-saving measures and recycling activities for a greener United Nations. In support of these activities, in 2009 GSS provided data and information for inclusion in the United Nations report *Moving Towards a Climate Neutral UN*.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Available at: <http://www.unep.org/publications/MovingTowardsClimateNeutralUN/>.

Conference Services

The Conference Services Section (CSS) presents the work of the Commission to member countries, Governments and civil society through the provision of documents, publications and conferences. Its professional services are wide-ranging and client-oriented, covering the practical organization of intergovernmental meetings, expert group meetings and workshops in Beirut and elsewhere in the region, and the processing of documents and publications produced by the substantive divisions. In 2009, CSS served 245 meetings and produced 72 documents and publications. It provides referencing, editing, translating, desktop publishing, reproduction and distribution services for parliamentary documentation, recurrent and non-recurrent publications, working papers, and technical and information material in order to support, promote and disseminate the work of the Commission.

The **Information and Communication Systems Section (ICSS)** supports the substantive, administrative and management processes of the Commission by providing innovative technological solutions and maintaining the ICT infrastructure of the organization. Working within the framework of the United Nations ICT policy, in 2009 ICSS accomplished the following:

- Introduction of IP telephony and a new billing system;
- Provision of wireless internet access throughout UN House, allowing easier access for delegates and staff members;
- Implementation of eRoom knowledge management technology within divisions and teams, and for collaboration with member countries and other secretariat offices;
- Action to enable all photocopiers to print more efficiently, reducing paper and toner consumption;
- Automation of workflows, leading to more efficient processing of requests;
- Revitalization of the ESCWA website, with enhancements and established sub-sites for substantive divisions.

Library

Housing a comprehensive and expanding collection in the fields of specialization of the Commission, the ESCWA library provides services and information to staff, member countries, other United Nations libraries, depository libraries and a range of other clients. Open to the public three days a week, it also caters for those who wish to access ESCWA documents via the Internet, by updating ESCWA databases and indexing Commission documents on the United Nations Official Documents System.

Security and Safety

The Safety and Security Services Section (SSS), the largest and most visible section at ESCWA, is responsible for preventive and protective measures to guarantee the safety and security of United Nations staff, and delegates and participants in conferences, meetings and other events held by the Commission and other United Nations agencies. In 2009, SSS upgraded and tightened access control to ESCWA in order to maintain the integrity of United Nations House and the safety of staff members. To achieve this and other safety and security objectives, SSS continued to pursue its strategy of ongoing training programmes for security officers to ensure that the highest standards of capability are maintained.

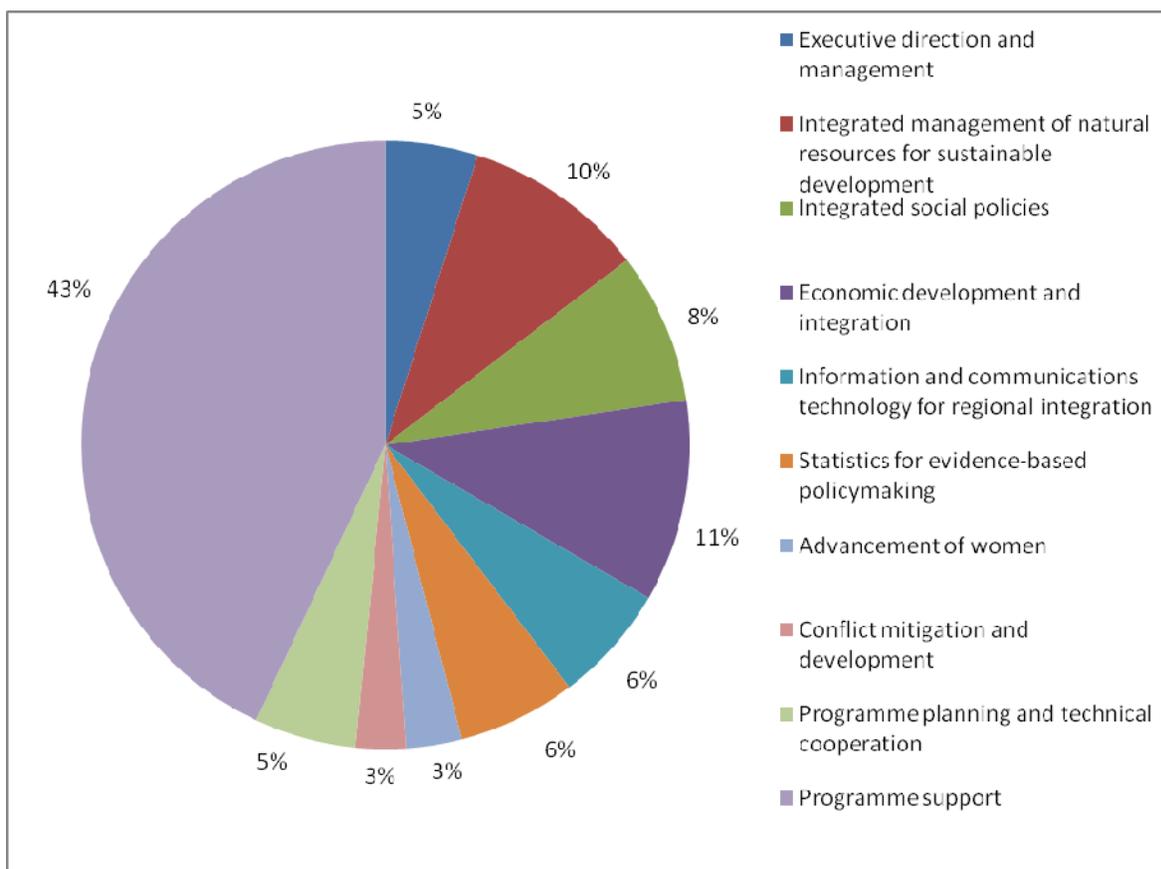
Procurement

The Procurement Unit is responsible for the purchase and rental of services, supplies and equipment. Its work covers the full spectrum of the procurement process, from the drafting of detailed specifications and the invitation of tenders and proposals, through the negotiation and contract phases to the successful provision of competitively-priced, quality products and services for the Commission.

Budget and Finance

During the biennium 2008-2009, the Budget and Finance Section was responsible for the provision of sound budgetary, financial and accounting management of regular budget resources of US\$74.7 million (including the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation and the Development Account) and extrabudgetary funds of US\$5.7 million, effectively monitoring and managing the financial assets of the Commission. The Section continued its efforts to enhance the delivery of its services to a wide array of clients, including a number of United Nations agencies in Beirut, through the introduction of automated processes to increase effectiveness and efficiency.

The expenditure by each division at ESCWA in the biennium 2008-2009 is illustrated in the following diagram, shown as a percentage of total funding.



Part III

Looking Ahead

The year 2009, in which ESCWA celebrated its thirty-fifth anniversary, was a year of major global challenges. These were reflected in the ESCWA region, as the economic and financial crisis deepened, the challenges posed by climate change continued to grow and ongoing political insecurity in many countries in the region constituted a formidable threat to development and social growth. Looking ahead to 2010 and the start of a new biennium for the Commission, ESCWA will focus on addressing those challenges and will continue to support the region in achieving its goals; work to support vulnerable groups, including the poor, women, youth, the disabled and the displaced; promote gender equality and the advancement of women; ensure that the impact of the financial and economic crisis on the region is attenuated to the greatest extent possible; and pursue the formulation and adoption of integrated social policies that balance economic and social development.

Consolidating technical support for the sustainable management of natural resources

As part of its commitment to support member countries in their efforts towards sustainable management of natural resources, ESCWA will continue to provide technical support in the field of climate change, develop instruments for integrated water resource management, and improve and expand water-related regional cooperation mechanisms. Particular focus will be placed on assisting member countries to formulate policies, and adopt measures and mechanisms to improve the sustainable use and management of energy. The provision of such assistance will in turn promote sustainable rural development, enhancing rural livelihoods and supporting small and medium-size enterprises.

Working towards sustainable social development

The events of recent years have exacerbated social inequality at a time when many countries were already facing major social challenges. A priority for the region is thus the need to strengthen national capacity to achieve inclusive, equitable and sustainable social development that is region-specific, while remaining culturally sensitive. ESCWA will therefore continue to promote its integrated social policy concept, aiming to foster integration in planning and policymaking in order to address the full spectrum of social issues, with particular emphasis on the most vulnerable groups, who often face considerable barriers to accessing opportunities and services. Securing the commitment of all actors to the social contract is vital to the achievement of social inclusion and ESCWA will therefore continue to work to broaden the framework of social policy dialogue by enhancing partnerships with Government institutions and civil society organizations.

Supporting economic development

The financial and economic crisis, food insecurity, and volatile energy and commodity prices are likely to remain limiting factors for the economic growth prospects of the ESCWA region in the coming year. Increasing unemployment and sharp falls in remittance inflows and foreign direct investment in the region have not only an immediate impact on economic development, but also a ripple effect on social development. Such conditions require carefully targeted efforts by member country Governments and other stakeholders to buffer the impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable groups in society. To support developing countries in facing such challenges, ESCWA will continue to address issues related to financing for development, including mobilizing domestic financial resources and foreign direct investment. It will extend its work on the promotion of intraregional trade and investment, the integration of the transport and communications infrastructure, the harmonization and facilitation of trade and transport, and the coordination of strategies and plans for the development of the information and communications technology sector. It will also continue to contribute to the global debate on the financial and economic crisis through research, analytical work and its convening power, in order to ensure both a coordinated regional response and full representation of the interests of the region at the global level.

Building the information society

In 2010, in addition to ongoing follow-up to the outcome of WSIS, ESCWA will continue to focus on developing the ICT sector in the region to meet the challenges of the knowledge economy; work towards regional harmonization of cyberlegislation; measure e-inclusion; develop digital Arabic content; build trust in Arabic e-services; and formulate a regional roadmap for Internet governance. Following the selection of Jordan as host country for the ESCWA regional Technology Centre, efforts will continue towards its establishment. A major contribution to the development of science and technology in the region, the Centre will develop capabilities in problem solving and policy formulation while fostering synergy and complementarity between ESCWA member countries.

Strengthening statistical capacity

Strengthening the statistical capacity of member countries is essential for the production and dissemination of timely, accurate and comparable socio-economic statistics and indicators for use in evidence-based policymaking. ESCWA will therefore continue its role as a regional repository for reliable and transparent data, capturing key socio-economic developments in the region and supporting member countries in strengthening their national institutional statistics frameworks for social, economic and census-related use. The production of reliable, comparable and gender-sensitive statistics is also central to tracking progress towards the achievement of the MDGs; the Statistics Division will therefore continue its in-depth quality review of MDG data series to assist member countries to improve their capacity to produce indicators and conduct national monitoring in order to fulfil their commitment to achieving the goals by 2015.

Empowering women

In the year ahead, the work of the ESCWA Centre for Women will remain focused on the economic development of women and the ways in which the negative impact of the global economic crisis on the lives of women in the region can be mitigated. Preparations will continue for the 2010 Annual Ministerial Review of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (New York, 28 June – 1 July 2010), which will focus on building concrete strategies for the implementation of internationally-agreed development goals and other gender equality-related commitments. As part of this process, ESCWA will work to highlight ways in which gender can be mainstreamed into the MDG goals and indicators in order to ensure that women benefit equally from activities and initiatives aimed at facilitating the achievement of the MDGs. ESCWA will also forge ahead with its contribution to UNiTE, the global campaign of the United Nations Secretary General to eliminate violence against women, through a Development Account project. The project, which has already developed indicators on measuring violence against women, will support pilot schemes in a number of member countries, collecting and analysing the resulting data. It is hoped that in 2010 the twenty-sixth session of the Commission will approve a proposal to upgrade the ESCWA Centre for Women from a section to a division.

Supporting recovery and peacebuilding policies

In view of the impact of successive conflicts in the region and the need to sustain economic and social development efforts, even under conditions of crisis and occupation, the implementation of policies and measures to address that impact through an approach that takes into account the specificities and realities of the region assumes ever-greater importance. ESCWA will therefore continue to support member countries in identifying, formulating, adopting and implementing policies, strategies and mechanisms for recovery and peacebuilding. It will monitor and analyse emerging issues and present recommendations, proposals and practical programmes to deal with them; design and implement programmes, projects and activities aimed at mitigating the repercussions of conflict and instability, and contributing to peacebuilding; define and meet institutional needs in order to achieve the MDGs; and design and implement projects and programmes for institutional development in member countries with a view to enabling them to address current and potential future crises and challenges. It is hoped that in 2010 the twenty-sixth session of the Commission will

approve a proposal to upgrade the section for Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues to the level of a division and establish a governmental committee on emerging issues and development in conflict settings, with a view to meeting the needs of member countries more fully and intensifying its activities, particularly in the areas of emerging issues, development in situations of conflict and instability, development in the least developed countries and development of public sector institutions.

Enhancing technical cooperation

In the field of technical cooperation, ESCWA will continue its efforts to sharpen the focus of its technical cooperation programme in accordance with member country priorities, with particular attention to the requirements of the least developed countries and those emerging from conflict. Capacity-building activities will be concentrated on the core areas of sustainable development, social and macroeconomic policy, ICT, statistics, MDG monitoring and the empowerment of women. In response to increasing demand for advisory assistance of a cross-cutting nature, work will continue towards the development of an integrated approach through consolidated technical assistance. This will optimize support for the formulation of national development plans with a cross-sectoral perspective, highlighting themes including strategic planning, coordination, monitoring and evaluation; gender mainstreaming; support for WTO accession; public sector reform, particularly of the social security system; public-private partnership building; and governance issues, including e-governance. Furthermore, ESCWA will continue to create such strategic and operational synergies with other United Nations entities and international organizations as may be necessary to enhance the impact and sustainability of its technical cooperation activities, ensuring United Nations system-wide coherence at the regional level.

This report has provided a necessarily brief snapshot of the work of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in the past year. The successes have been many and varied, but the challenges faced by the countries of the region continue. The road ahead will be long and the challenges considerable, but given the commitment and expertise of its staff, ESCWA is well-positioned to lead and support its member countries into the next decade and beyond. As it concludes its thirty-fifth anniversary year, the Commission can not only look back with pride on the difference that it has made in the lives of the peoples of the region, but can also look forward to continuing to work with its member countries towards a future of security, prosperity and peace for all.