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PRIORITY ISSUES IN THE WESTERN ASIA REGION*Social policies in ESCWA member countries***Summary**

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) bases its concern with integrated social policies on the many international instruments that have been dedicated thereto. The Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are the two main references for ESCWA interest in social policies that target the priorities of all sectors of society. One of the purposes and principles of the United Nations, as stated in article 1, paragraph 3, of its Charter, is to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all, while article 55, paragraph (a) states that the United Nations shall promote higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights deals with social issues in many of its articles, including article 25, which states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Furthermore, the recommendations and resolutions adopted by a large number of global conferences on development have provided steady impetus for the mainstreaming in policies of the concepts of fundamental freedoms and social justice. The commitments made as the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD), which was held in Copenhagen in 1995, require integrated policies for their implementation; and General Assembly resolution 58/130 dated 22 December 2003, concerning implementation of the outcome of that Summit and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, emphasizes the importance of integrating economic and social policies in promoting human resources development.

The principle undertaking made by the aforementioned Summit, namely, the eradication of poverty, contributed, through national programmes and international cooperation, to the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which aim to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development. Those Goals may be considered the international framework for concentrating efforts and measuring success in respect of the application of the values of fundamental freedoms and social justice. The Goals are sub-divided into targets and indicators for the measurement of success and, naturally, require comprehensive and integrated policy at the local, national, regional and international levels.

On the basis of the foregoing, ESCWA devotes particular attention to integrated social policies. This report reviews the outcome of the activities that it has undertaken as part of the first and second phases of the integrated social policies project.

CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction.....	1-3	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. MEETINGS AND WORKING SESSIONS HELD AS PART OF THE INTEGRATED SOCIAL POLICIES PROJECT.....	4-46	3
A. The role of decision makers in social policy.....	5-33	3
B. Orientation of the Regional Report on Integrated Social Policies	34-40	10
C. Discussion of the Regional Report on Integrated Social Policies	41-43	12
D. Consideration of the Regional Report on Integrated Social Policies	44-46	13
II. STUDIES AND OUTPUTS.....	47-51	14
A. On social policies	48	14
B. Issues that impact on social policies	49	15
C. Democracy and information.....	50	15
D. Participation in local development policies	51	16
<i>Annex</i>		17

Introduction

1. Social policies in ESCWA member countries are characterized by lack of integration. In some cases that is because programmes and projects are implemented by institutions between which there is no communication, there being no coordination between the ministries involved in social fields or between those ministries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. Those programmes and projects have not been incorporated into a single framework comprising an integrated social vision. Where such a vision exists, it has not been linked to the general economic and social framework. As a result of that situation, human and financial resources are wasted and the problems of marginalization, unemployment and poverty are exacerbated. It is not expected that those social problems will soon be resolved, given that that would entail the privatization of certain basic services and the reduction of social expenditure. ESCWA has therefore given special attention to the issue of social policies and is considering their linkage to their cultural, ecological, economic and political environment with respect to their ultimate goal of improving the quality of life for all people. It is also promoting integration between social and economic policies, one of the most important conditions for which is a comprehensive and integrated vision comprising clear goals, the appropriate mechanisms for coordination, appropriate legislation, sufficient funding, democratic institutions, the strengthening of human rights and upholding of fundamental freedoms, and the active participation of civil society.

2. The ESCWA Committee on Social Development recommended at its third session that ESCWA should study the feasibility of carrying out a comprehensive survey of social policies in the region.¹ That recommendation was submitted to the twenty-first ESCWA session, which was held in May 2001, in the context of resolution 227 (XXI) dated 11 May 2001, concerning adoption of the final reports of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission,² and was adopted. Pursuant to the aforementioned recommendation, ESCWA prepared a project document entitled "Towards Integrated Social Development Policies in ESCWA Countries: Part I". The long-term goals of that project include the formulation of an integrated social vision of all sectors of social fields, including education, health, employment and social security; the consideration of the process of drawing up and implementing various social policies; and familiarity with the processes of coordinating between the basic actors in the social field, namely, ministries and other Government institutions, NGOs and specialized research centres.

3. The two parts of the integrated social policies project include such varied activities as the convening of meetings and working sessions; the carrying out of studies; and the surveying of selected national situations.

I. MEETINGS AND WORKING SESSIONS HELD AS PART OF THE INTEGRATED SOCIAL POLICIES PROJECT

4. As part of the integrated social policies project, a series of meetings and sessions were held that focused on many issues and produced important outcomes. This part of the report contains a brief review of those meetings and their outcomes.

A. THE ROLE OF DECISION MAKERS IN SOCIAL POLICY

5. From 10 to 12 December 2002, ESCWA, in cooperation with the Institute of National Planning in Egypt, the Safadi Foundation and the Parliamentary Centre of Canada, held in Cairo the Policy Makers Meeting on Social Policies in the ESCWA Region. That was an important meeting because of the pressing need for a critical stand to be taken by policy makers in ESCWA member countries towards social policies, in order to end the deterioration in the social situation and confront the social crises and tensions that are deepening as a result of the failure to alleviate the social impact of the economic reform policies and structural readjustment that have been made necessary by globalization.

¹ ESCWA, *Report of the Committee on Social Development on its third session*, para. 21(b), (E/ESCWA/SD/2001/2).

² ESCWA, *Report on the twenty-first session*, para. 84, (E/ESCWA/21/10).

6. Taking part in the Meeting were a number of representatives of Governments, NGOs, the League of Arab States, United Nations organizations and the Institute of Social Studies; experts; academic researchers; and the media. The aim of the Meeting was to assist ESCWA member countries in formulating a vision of integrated social policy, to be incorporated into the economic and social framework of each country.

1. *The focuses of the Meeting*

7. Meeting discussions focused principally on (a) the development of the concept of social policy; (b) a review of certain successful experiences of devising such policy; and (c) clearer understanding of the salient characteristics and substance of social policies in Arab countries.

(a) *Development of the concept of social policy*

8. In this regard, a study was presented on the conceptual framework of integrated social policies. The study concentrated on a review of the historical development of the concept of social policy, based on the emergence of the welfare state and the social impact of structural readjustment programmes on the role played by the State. The study also presented an analysis of the standing of social policy in the light of globalization, increased social polarization and unequal wealth distribution. The study concluded by stressing the importance of rights-based development, as adopted by the European Union and the United Nations. Emphasis was placed on the link between the economic and social dimensions that makes human development a central goal of integrated social development policies.

9. The discussion of the study raised the following main points: (a) the importance of ensuring that social policies are not limited to welfare, and the need to expand the concept of such policies to cover comprehensive development, which demands exposure to such new issues as the social organization of production, the class structure of society, and wealth distribution in society; (b) greater study should be made of the international anti-globalization movement and the goals that it could achieve, foremost among which is the finding of some more humanitarian and just alternatives; (c) the feasibility of the United Nations being involved in the formulation of national social policies, through the provision of consultancy and expertise; (d) the feasibility of making use of religious heritage in respect of such values as satisfaction with the minimum and social solidarity, and such mechanisms as alms-giving and religious endowment, on the basis that they are, basically, social policies.

(b) *Review of certain successful experiences of devising social policy*

10. With respect to successful experiences, five studies were presented at the Meeting on social policy formulation, implementation and coordination. Set forth below is a brief review of the findings of those studies, in alphabetical order of country. The annexed tables summarize those experiences with respect to the conditions for success of social policies in the countries involved; positions with regard to conditions for effective implementation of those policies; and ways of supporting such policies.

(i) *The experience of Tunisia*

11. The experience of Tunisia is characterized by its adoption of a model for social and economic development that is in constant search of a third way, balancing economic liberalism with social integration and reconciling the economic and social dimensions of the development process. As a result, there has been a perceptible increase in indicators of the competitiveness of the Tunisian economy and in human development indicators, including a rise in the level of per capita income and a fall in poverty levels; a rise in life expectancy at birth and a fall in peri-natal mortality; and reduced illiteracy rates coupled with more widespread education among both sexes. The importance of this study lies in its reassessment of social policies in the light of the new givens thrown up by the globalization movement. Such reassessment by Governments is not optional, but indispensable, if social stability and cohesion are to be assured. There follow some interesting aspects of the Tunisian experience: (a) positive economic and social outcomes have been achieved by significant investment in human resources development and continuing Government involvement in social affairs through an economic reform policy that is characterized by respect for

humanitarian concerns and determination to maintain public expenditure on social services; (b) negotiations with international financial institutions have been successful in guaranteeing independence and confronting the administrative standards, values and orientations of those institutions, which impose their own conditions for providing assistance; (c) care has been taken to ensure the independence of local decision-making, to the benefit of national equilibrium and social cohesion; (d) reformist ideas are being continued, affirming the importance of the historical and cultural dimension of social security and resistance to imported models. Despite its success, the type of social policy applied in Tunisia has its limits and faces huge challenges, with particular respect to integration into the global economy and the rapprochement with the European Union, which will have an enormous effect on the Tunisian social and economic fabric that will impact on unemployment, poverty and social marginalization.

12. The discussion of the Tunisian experience focused on a set of issues, of which the most significant were: (a) the contradiction between the social successes demonstrated by that experience and, in particular, the fall in unemployment, and the increase in the numbers of Tunisian youth migrating abroad; (b) the development of social policies in Tunisia may be explained by a comparison with the development of such policies in Korea, where the aim has been to gain political legitimacy for a totalitarian system. It may also explain the lack of any real partnership along democratic lines that would make social policies more effective; (c) it is not feasible to rely on quantitative indicators and focus solely on the procedural and descriptive dimensions, ignoring qualitative indicators, despite their importance, in measuring social development: the Arab Human Development Report noted the disregard for such indicators related to citizenship, social justice and human rights; (d) it is important to highlight how social policy in Tunisia interacts with values, traditions and customs and, similarly, to consider the impact of the relationship with the European Union, whether that relationship is considered a type of annexation or a true partnership, and how it affects the Tunisian economy.

(ii) *The experience of Korea*

13. Korea has undertaken vigorous social policy initiatives since the economic crisis of 1997. The most important of those initiatives include reform of the public assistance and State pensions programmes and the national health service. In order to answer the question of whether the Korean welfare state had become something more than that, a study had to be made of those three programmes. The desire to gain greater legitimacy for the political authorities explains features of the Korean welfare state, in which the decision-making elite considers economic growth as the ultimate goal that follows a successful and precise strategy. Social policies in that case are simply a means of achieving an end. Three lacunae may be noted in these programmes, namely: (a) the lion's share of the redistribution process went to the highest earners; (b) a very small number of officials were involved in formulating social policy; (c) that policy is primarily directed towards waged and salaried workers, which is a system that does not work when unemployment increases. That was why the aforementioned set of reform policies and programmes were adopted in 1997. The economic crisis led to a rapid expansion in the welfare system, after a series of economic reforms. However, those vigorous policies threw up a number of challenges, of which the most significant were; (a) the need to strengthen welfare programmes that had been introduced or expanded during the crisis, particularly in the light of the non-participation of large sectors or their failure to pay contributions regularly; (b) the need to ensure the sustainability of those programmes and, in particular, health services and pensions, because of the shortfall in funding caused by the expansion of the project, the increased benefit periods and the greater number of services provided; (c) tax evasion is practised on a large scale: self-employed workers and professionals conceal their true incomes, while the contributions of employed persons are taken directly from their salaries.

14. Discussion of the Korean experience focused on the positive outcomes, of which Arab countries could make good use, the most significant being: (a) the reform and economic crisis policies did not prompt the authorities in Korea to reduce support for social policies: rather, there was an attempt to develop them and introduce new programmes to deal with the effects of the crisis; (b) the development of social policies may be linked to the change from a totalitarian to a democratic system; (c) the Korean experience demonstrated that the adoption of long-term policy is an excellent way to achieve sustainable results that can be built on and expanded; (d) it is important to distinguish between a welfare state and a State that provides services,

because the former requires a sophisticated economic basis and a large middle class; (e) if a State is to become capitalist in the world of today, it must pay attention to the formulation of preventative social programmes, because the social sectors that are most exposed to the risks of such change are the weakest.

(iii) *The experience of Canada*

15. A review of the Canadian experience reconfirms the importance of the principles and values that have underpinned the social policy of that country in the past century, and the part played by the political parties and their ideologies, social forces and civil society organizations in formulating social policy and delivering social programmes and services. Two important features distinguish the Canadian welfare state, namely, the flexibility of the Canadian federation, which has made it possible to develop the welfare state through constitutional amendments, fiscal transfers to the provinces and the use of purchasing power; and the gradual transformation into a universalist welfare state. "Universalist" means that the social programmes and services provided are a right and a condition of Canadian citizenship, and in no way considered a grant or benefaction. Many parties are involved in implementing social policies, inter alia, federal ministries, including the Ministry of Human Resources and Skills Development, which administers most social programmes; the Ministry of Health; the Ministry responsible for the Status of Women, which seeks to promote gender equality; the provinces and municipalities, which work in partnership; the quasi-public sector, including school boards, university and hospital administrations, and health agencies in the provinces and municipalities, which determine how financial allocations shall be used; NGOs; voluntary groups; charities; churches; and local groups, all of which represent large numbers of people and spend huge sums of money every year in salaries, grants and assistance.

16. Important lessons can be learnt from the Canadian experience, including (a) comprehensive social programmes are a significant tool for social cohesion; (b) the granting of a constitutional and institutional character to minority and social rights gives them a legitimacy that is binding upon the courts; (c) while criticism of the social role of the State led to radical reductions in social programmes, it also prompted new thinking on restructuring. There is currently a preference for a move away from passive programmes to active programmes, with particular respect to support for unemployed persons; a focus on good governance based on accountability, transparency and partnership; and a move towards strengthening the relationship of the State with civil society.

17. Discussion of the Canadian experience focused on the following main points: (a) the difference between circumstances in Canada and the Arab countries, where there is no rotation of power in the Canadian sense; (b) the tax-payer in Canada is granted power by pressure and the exercise of rights, because society, rather than the State, is the base. That is not the case in the Arab region, where pressure groups should be formed in order to lobby parliaments; (c) a variety of parties are involved in the decision-making process, particularly in respect of social policy, including the media, public opinion and local parliaments; (d) some comparable institutions exist in Arab countries, but their achievements are quite different. Consideration therefore needs to be given to those differences.

(iv) *The Malaysian experience*

18. Malaysia is a model of a developing country that has devised its own way of ensuring social services and social and economic development in general. The most salient characteristics of the formula adopted in that country include the fact that sustained and genuine attention is paid to developing social services as part of the overall national development agenda; and the Government and public service institutions play a leading role in providing social services, and ensure that they benefit the rural population, poor persons and those on a restricted income. This method has resulted in many improvements being made to education, health, medical care, employment opportunities and social security and has reduced poverty levels and strengthened the part played by women and youth in national development. Further improvements will have to be made, however, in order to deal with such new challenges as globalization. Social policies in Malaysia have developed in the context of decades of political stability and sustained economic expansion, combined with widespread acceptance of the philosophy of equitable growth. Three major types of social policy are formulated within that institutional framework, namely: (a) policies that are introduced or modified in the

process of formulating national development plans (long-term policies); (b) policies that are part of Government annual budgets, which are usually one-year versions of the long-term policies in (a); and (c) policies that are formulated in order to address specific social problems in greater detail than the two previous types of policy. The parties involved in the formulation process include the people, stakeholders, NGOs, the media, political parties, federal public service institutions, the Cabinet, Parliament and the King. Social policy is implemented by the ministries of health, education, national unity and social development, human resources, rural development, housing and local government and their agencies. All the other ministries participate in implementing various programmes, the most important of which are for the eradication of poverty. Both NGOs and institutions that receive Government funding assist in implementing the general programmes. The Implementation Coordination Unit, that is part of the Prime Minister's Office, is responsible for follow-up and coordination.

19. In the course of the discussion on the Malaysian experience, many questions were asked, seeking further information on that country's expertise in dealing with specific problems. The following issues predominated: (a) how Malaysia had been able to ensure or bring about the coexistence of its many and varied cultures, and deal with the ethnic problem, which had a range of impacts on economic and social aspects; (b) the need to learn about the mechanisms adopted with a view to dealing with the ethnic problem and corruption, and promoting economic activities relating to the participation of women in the labour force, which had reached 45 per cent; (c) the need to know the impact of globalization and the liberalization of international trade on social policy; (d) the return on investment in the fields of health and education, and how that return affected the empowerment of sectors of Malaysian society to participate in making social policy and implementing its programmes.

(v) *The experience of Norway*

20. The presentation on this experience focused on the main features of the welfare system in Norway, which is the northern European, or social-democrat welfare state type. The main characteristics of that approach resemble the perspective of social development adopted by the United Nations, and represent the view that economic development and social advancement go hand in hand and are not mutually incompatible. This model has a universal scope, aiming to promote the welfare of the whole population, and is based on two parts being played by the State, one interventionist and the other regulatory. The approach favours investment in people and local communities rather than in consumption, economic subsidies and income protection. The model underlines the fact that any effective system of social security must cover those who are not capable of income-generating employment for health or other reasons. Social security projects must therefore be designed on the understanding that work is the first choice for all the parties affected, and the unnecessary exclusion of vulnerable groups from the labour market must be prevented. The review of the Norwegian experience included a consideration of the role played by ministries, the legislature, Parliament and NGOs, and explains the extensive network of administrative institutions that implement social policies and programmes. It also clearly sets out the respective roles, responsibilities and powers of the central Government, the municipalities and local government in the social policy process. Albeit the organizational structure in itself comprises the constituents of effective performance, there is a degree of dissension with respect to the allocation of resources. Most of the anomalies in the Norwegian system undoubtedly spring from the traditional conflict between the desire to centralize and thereby standardize policies, and the ideal of local autonomy.

21. The discussion of the Norwegian experience focused on the following main points: (a) the importance of the ideological aspect in the political system, which allocates more resources to welfare than to arms or security; (b) the continued intervention of the State, regardless of market economy conditions and State neutrality, with the understanding that social expenditure is an investment in the human component of development; (c) the reasons for the worsening of such social problems as alcoholism, high suicide rates, psychological problems, low wages in certain fields, and the lack of a good relationship between the State and the local communities; (d) the high rates of employment among women is related to the low general unemployment rate, which conflicts with the prevalent view in Arab countries that larger numbers of working women will increase general unemployment, a view which fails to take into account their positive contribution to economic growth; (e) the focus in Norway is on providing work rather than services or

welfare, because the provision of employment increases income and thereby improves well-being and increases tax revenues; (f) the concept of the welfare state as a social choice does not originate with the Government, but with the political parties, NGOs and the interaction of all the actors in the community. That is reflected in the legislation. Such a situation is not possible in the Arab region while participation is so restricted.

(c) *The main characteristics of social policies in Arab countries*

22. In this context, a study was presented on social policies in Arab countries analysed from a historical perspective. The study stresses that in those countries, there has been a failure to realize the importance of social policies and their value in habilitating human resources, promoting participation and using their projects and programmes to expand people's options, or to appreciate the importance of the sustainability of such policies. Social policies are dealt with piecemeal, with no recognition of their interaction with other social policies, general or sectoral, or, in particular, economic policies. There is a further failure to realize their relationship with such strategic social issues as social rights, citizenship, and the role of civil society and, consequently, their impact on all social issues. The study reviewed social policies in selected Arab countries, namely, Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon and Yemen.

(i) *Bahrain*

23. Since the 1990s, the concept of social policy has changed, and such policies are considered a mechanism for achieving comprehensive development and greater coordination between the various ministries involved in sectoral social policies is encouraged. Nevertheless, the social dimension is secondary to the economic, and their respective inputs and outputs are not integrated, as is demonstrated by the problem of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, the aversion to certain professions, and the dependence on foreign labour.

(ii) *Lebanon*

24. The institutional and organizational frameworks for social activity were established in the 1960s, when Government expenditure on basic social services increased. However, the social divisions in Lebanon have not greatly changed. The country has suffered from occupation and civil war, which ruined much of the basic infrastructure and caused immense social damage. With respect to economic growth policies, the Lebanese economic climate has not laid the foundations for social development based on equitable economic development for all sectors of society, economic sectors and disparate regions. Notwithstanding the perceptible successes with regard to health and education services, the yields of official social activity in Lebanon have not been commensurate in either quality or quantity with the problems, particularly those of unemployment, discrepancies in income distribution and poverty alleviation.

(iii) *Egypt*

25. There have been three phases in the development of social policies in Egypt. At first, they took the form of welfare, then of direct Government intervention, and finally became part of the economic liberalization and implementation of restructuring programmes. Such policies have also developed in the context of institutional development, and changes in the role of NGOs and in legislation aiming to bring about palpable change in the distribution of wealth and income in Egyptian society. Further changes brought about by the liberalization policy have impacted on the social, economic and political situations, and the resultant crisis remains serious in the economic field, with inflation, unemployment, budget deficits and currency exchange fluctuations. In addition, the relationship between education, health and employment policies appears to have disintegrated. The social welfare policy was a direct response aimed at alleviating some of the burdens and consequences of economic reform.

(iv) *Yemen*

26. After the revolution, the State devised a programme aimed at modernizing the society by focusing on education and increasing Government expenditure on social services. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was established and its duties specified as the adoption of programmes aimed at providing social care for poor sectors. However, the 1990s saw the outbreak of the second Gulf War, the civil war, the return of expatriate workers from abroad and consequent loss of monetary transfers, the implementation of the economic reform programme and structural adjustment, all of which increased unemployment and poverty. Certain human development indicators were lowered as a result of the reduction in social services and fall in per capita share of gross domestic product.

27. The study concludes with a general review of social policies in the Arab world, based on the United Nations Development Programme Arab Human Development Report 2002. Evaluative notes were drawn on social policy, which included (a) that NGOs focus on providing services prompted by a community of interests, and are dependent on grants, endowments and voluntary work; (b) that State intervention in social affairs began by focusing on specific sectors, including the poor and the ill, before encompassing wider goals in the 1950s and 1960s and aiming to change society by means of social policy; (c) that social concerns remain secondary to economic issues and it is social services that are being provided, rather than social policy being pursued; and (d) there is a discrepancy between the inputs and outputs of social policies that creates more problems than those policies resolve.

28. The most significant issues covered in the discussions on the study of social policies in Arab countries included the following: (a) the main reason for the failure of social policies is the fact that development strategies are imported from outside, at the instigation of international institutions; (b) the social policies applied in Arab countries are a form of crisis management aimed at remedying the impact of certain policies or events; (c) it must be determined whether the reasons for failure are lack of democracy and political participation or something else; and (d) notwithstanding the challenges, there is no Arab social vision, and Arab countries lack a social contract, despite all the attempts to correct the negative effects of the policies applied.

2. The proposals and recommendations made by the Policy Makers Meeting

29. The proposals and recommendations made by the Policy Makers Meeting fell into four main categories, which are set forth below.

30. The concept and general framework of social policies:

(a) The fact should be stressed that development is a complex and interrelated process with economic, social, political and cultural dimensions;

(b) Concepts and terms must be standardized;

(c) A clear social vision must be formulated and adopted;

(d) Decision makers must have the political will to realize the overall concept of development, in all its economic, social and cultural aspects. That political will must be embodied in such specific documents as the development plan and the general State budget, and in legislation that enables implementation of the plan and makes it possible to provide the political and cultural conditions that are essential to achieving those goals;

(e) In formulating development plans and in practice, the outcomes of WSSD must be respected;

(f) Development must be approached from a variety of angles, including that of rights, and related issues must be dealt with on the basis of the reality in each country and the circumstances that prevail there.

31. The formulation and coordination of social policies at the national and regional levels:

(a) More effective roles must be devised for United Nations institutions in the implementation of social policies in developing countries in general and the ESCWA member countries in particular;

(b) Each country must ensure that the formulation, implementation and follow-up of social policy takes place in the framework of expanded partnership with NGOs, civil society organizations, the media, research centres and Government bodies. Particularly important in that respect are the Economic and Social Council, the Human Resources Development Council, and other coordinative formulas that have been devised through successful experiences of social development;

(c) Civil society must be activated and attention given to the development of democracy in the countries of the region;

(d) Trained human resources must be developed in order to competently administer the social development process;

(e) A variety of means must be explored with a view to increasing the financial resources that are essential to supporting social policies, and the role of *zakat* and *waqf* in Arab societies must be activated.

32. Follow-up and evaluation and the media:

(a) A model must be found for the evaluation in accordance with specific standards of programmes and projects that are carried out in pursuit of social policy goals;

(b) Efforts should be made to increase the contribution of scientific research to identifying the priorities of implementation and follow-up policies, programmes, projects and mechanisms and in developing social science indicators that determine and explore the social problems and risks and identify and explain successes and failures;

(c) Practical research should be carried out in partnership with the target population, in order to evaluate social policies on a sound basis;

(d) The social vision should be as widely disseminated as possible, using all the available forms of communication and the media;

(e) Strategies should be devised aimed at re-educating the masses on issues relating to current social customs and traditions.

33. Responsibility and the role of ESCWA:

(a) Support member countries through a comprehensive report on integrated social policies that will constitute a source of basic information and a basis for comparison between countries;

(b) Provide a forum for meeting and the exchange of ideas, experience and expertise on social policies;

(c) Disseminate knowledge in respect of social policies and successful examples thereof in Arabic;

(d) Establish a database on social policies for the use of Arab researchers.

B. ORIENTATION OF THE REGIONAL REPORT ON INTEGRATED SOCIAL POLICIES

34. Pursuant to the recommendations made by the Policy Makers Meeting, which demonstrated awareness of the importance of a critical review of the situation, characterized by weakness and lack of balance between

economic and social policies in the region, ESCWA instituted the second stage of the project aimed at strengthening the comprehensive and integrated formulation of social policy. To that end, a series of meetings and discussions were held, one of which concerned the orientation of the Regional Report on Integrated Social Policies.

35. That meeting was held on 27 March 2003 and was attended by ESCWA experts on social policy, a selected group of researchers and experts in various economic, social science, information and legal specializations and from research institutes, NGOs and academic institutions.

36. The issues that ESCWA put to the meeting concerned the problems and orientations that it was proposed should comprise the general framework of the Regional Report. Those problems and orientations were brought to the attention of participants as an essential input to any study on matters to be included in the first or subsequent issues of the Report.

37. With respect to the first problem, discussion focused on the vision of the society that was the aim of integrated social policy. That vision cannot be formulated or implemented without taking into account the impact of globalization on society. The following points were raised in the course of the discussion: (a) it is important to reach consensus on the concept of integrated social policy, given the diminished importance of the role of the State and general reduction in the resources available to support social policies; (b) the impact of globalization must be closely examined, including the social challenges, which include, primarily, the widening income gap, growing influence of regional blocs and economic power, capital transfers and the weakening role of trade and political unions that have supported social aspects; (c) familiarity must be acquired with international social orientations and their challenges, given that they are essential to the design and application of an integrated vision of social policy. In that light, the Regional Report is essential in confronting challenges and finding ways to develop capacities for the design and implementation of effective policies, as well as for finding grounds for strengthening international commitment.

38. Concerning the second problem, discussion focused on the aims of social policies and their relationship to economic and political changes. The following points were raised in the discussion: (a) there are few connections between the basic services, including health, education and housing, in relation to the individual they serve: they are isolated by virtue of the policy applied. This makes integrated social policy even more significant; (b) when talking of development, it is difficult to make a precise distinction between the economic and the social; (c) State priorities relating to the aims of social policy can be usefully reviewed, leading to consideration of funding for such policy in the light of deteriorating Government resources and the consequent need to involve civil society and the private sector; (d) the grounds on which to base attempts to formulate policies aimed at the priorities of all social sectors are a series of international agreements, including human rights instruments, the outcome of WSSD and MDGs.

39. With respect to the third problem, discussion focused on the institution-building procedures that ensure achievement of integrated social policy goals. The following points were raised in the discussion: (a) the coordination of the duties of Government institutions and civil society organizations is not merely a matter of amalgamating the contributions of ministries and organizations, but an innovative mechanism for coordinating and integrating departments that represent quasi-independent sectors; (b) in a not insignificant number of the countries of the region, the focus of social policy is on dealing with the impact of structural organization and economic liberalization, as is shown by a review of the budgets of those countries; and (c) the role of the State is subject to changes that affect its ability to formulate social policies, particularly because globalization imposes restraints and orientations that limit political will in decision-making.

40. As for the fourth problem, concerning the roles required of Governments, NGOs and regional and international organizations, the discussion considered mechanisms for coordinating between those roles on their various levels. The main points raised during the discussion were: (a) turning social policy goals into various programmes and procedures requires action on three levels, namely, the international (the provision of resources to honour international undertakings), the national (a complete rethinking of the priorities of economic and social policies at all levels) and the local (whereby partnership and consultation in the design of the social policy framework plays an important role in guaranteeing representation of the interests of

social groups within policy programmes and related measures); (b) the strengthening of political and civil participation in designing and implementing general policies, with the concomitant increase in transparency and credibility in the funding and executive parties, and the strengthening of the democratic process between the Government bodies overseeing implementation and beneficiaries, through wider dialogue, will lead to a constructive partnership with civil society; (c) the foundations of social policy should be amended on the basis of a revision of priorities conducted by evaluating the value of available resources as compared with the goals achieved. In that respect, it is possible that human rights can play a prominent role in evaluating general performance; (d) the creation of favourable conditions for ensuring that the outcomes of overall economic policies are appropriate to the social goals sought, which requires that those policies are interlinked at the national level and coordinated with international orientations; (e) political commitment can be increased by strengthening the integration of social policies. The quickest way of achieving that is to widen equitable participation in the design and implementation of those policies through a democratic, credible mechanism for implementation and follow-up.

C. DISCUSSION OF THE REGIONAL REPORT ON INTEGRATED SOCIAL POLICIES

41. The Seminar on the Regional Report on Integrated Social Policies was held on 23 July 2004 as part of the preparations for finalizing the Regional Report on Integrated Social Policies, and in an attempt to make absolutely sure that everything required for the Report was ready. In addition to ESCWA staff concerned with social policy, a select group of researchers and experts from various fields including, inter alia, economics, social science, informatics and law, from academic institutions and NGOs, took part in the Seminar. Participants focused on putting forward proposals in respect of two fields, namely, the particularities of the region that could contribute to the success or failure of social policies, and the fulfilment of the conditions for guaranteeing the success of social policies in the region.

42. Discussion concentrated on what could be added to those particularities, as set forth below:

(a) The identification of the orientations that should be adopted when formulating social policies, whether palliative, in order to reduce the suffering of marginalized sectors and poor persons, or practical, aimed at confronting impacts, or developmental, in order to integrate policies and find the requisite balance between their various aspects;

(b) The attribution of the problem in formulating general policies, including social policies, to improvisation, isolation, lack of coordination, lack of transparency, centralized decision-making, inequitable wealth distribution and the absence of an integrated vision;

(c) Concern with providing State support and encouragement for the private sector, which is clear in all the successful modernization experiments in the world;

(d) As part of the international partnership that is necessary for social policies at the regional level, reliance should be placed on MDGs, given that all the Arab countries signed the Millennium Declaration, thereby undertaking to achieve MDGs by 2015. That political undertaking must be honoured through the implementation of social policies.

43. With respect to the conditions that must be met in order to guarantee the success of social policies in the ESCWA region, participants' suggestions focused on the following points:

(a) The media should be accorded special attention, because they play a leading role in spreading the culture of democracy and promoting fundamental freedoms in societies that suffer from archaic political structures which hinder the formulation of sound social policies;

(b) The relationship should be strengthened between United Nations and civil society organizations on the one hand and the media on the other hand, which requires the freedom of the media in dealing with social issues to be monitored from the point of view of State interest and the orientation of ruling systems. The influence of the media in promoting awareness and activating the participation of civil society must also

be monitored. Media technical and professional capacities must be developed in order to influence the orientation of pressure forces in society;

(c) The allocation of monetary credits is not merely an option or idea, but is truly essential in implementing social policies. It is therefore necessary to identify such credits and consider the extent to which people are prepared to bear the fiscal consequences;

(d) It is essential to maintain a permanent focus on the process of linking economic and social development with healthy democratic development, because the absence of democracy risks all the gains of development at the first hurdle or crisis.

D. CONSIDERATION OF THE REGIONAL REPORT ON INTEGRATED SOCIAL POLICIES

44. An expert group meeting was held in Beirut from 31 January to 2 February 2005, in order to discuss the Regional Report on Integrated Social Policies. Taking part, in addition to ESCWA staff concerned with social policies, were a selected group of researchers and experts who represented academic institutions, NGOs and research centres from various countries in the region. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the draft report on social policies, divided into the following main chapters: (a) identification of the concept of social policies; (b) the significance of social policies with respect to ideological values and structures; (c) the functions of social policies in respect of social problems and social development; (d) social policy operations, including models, facts and conditions; (e) the characteristics of social policies in the Arab countries.

45. Within the framework of the general remarks relating to the methodology of the report, it should be mentioned that the draft report prompted wide discussion as a result of the difference in the experiences and expertise of the participants with respect to the aim of social policies in the framework of the development of the countries of the region. The main points of the discussion were as follow:

(a) The various concepts, structures and processes of social policies should be used in order to provide an integrated framework for such policies. That framework should focus on identifying the import of social policies in general, without going into certain component elements of those policies, including social well-being, social services, social security network programmes and social protection;

(b) The Report includes comprehensive coverage of the participation of the manifold sections of social institutions, including the State, workers, professionals, and civil society, and the various levels of social services and concepts that uphold social protection;

(c) The Report in itself is a conceptual framework that is concerned with informing social policy makers of the logical content of social policies and the procedures that must be taken in order to design such policies;

(d) The Report does not discuss in depth the impact of globalization on economic and social policies and the system of values in Arab or other countries. Those impacts constitute a challenge and an obstacle to social policies in developing countries.

46. With regard to the recommendations related to the significance and content of the Report, the following suggestions were made:

(a) The data that is missing from certain tables in the Report should be supplied, and other data updated;

(b) The section on the characteristics of social policies in the Arab countries should be deleted or incorporated as an annex;

(c) There is an urgent need to identify the negative outcomes of the modernisation process and globalization and their impact on levels of social development and, consequently, on the design of policy for such development;

(d) With respect to the social policies described in the third part of the Report, there is a need to include the outcomes and impact of the globalization process in every sector separately, including health, education, employment and unemployment, poverty, and social security.

II. STUDIES AND OUTPUTS

47. As part of the integrated social policy project, ESCWA issued a set of studies and reports, of which this chapter contains a brief summary.

A. ON SOCIAL POLICIES

48. On this subject, ESCWA issued the following studies and reports:

(a) A series of social policy studies: this series was issued after the studies presented at the Policy Makers Meeting held in Cairo in 2002 were reformulated in the light of the comments made by participants which have already been detailed above in the summary of the discussions of those studies. The series comprised five studies that reviewed successful cases of social policy structure and methods of implementation in countries outside the ESCWA region, namely, Canada, Korea, Malaysia, Norway and Tunisia.³ The series also contained an historical overview of the concept of social policies in two studies, the first of which was entitled "Towards integrated policies for social development: the conceptual framework",⁴ and the second "Social policies in the Arab countries: a constructive historical analysis".⁵ Also issued as part of that series was a study entitled "The economic and social vision and the impact of monetary policies in Lebanon".⁶ A further study in the series was entitled "Central issues related to social policy: a comparative study and guiding principles for the formulation of social policies in the ESCWA region",⁷ which was based on the conditions for the success of such policies extrapolated from a review of the aforementioned case studies;

(b) National reports on social policies were prepared. ESCWA produced a comprehensive design that includes an analysis of social policy sectors and a review of the status of basic services and the requirements for their improvement in each ESCWA member country. In the light of that design, ESCWA prepared reports that were issued in the form of a general descriptive reading of the social situations in each ESCWA member country. The purpose of those reports was to provide essential information and realistic indicators on social policies, and to constitute a reference resource for the exchange of information and experiences that would guide researchers and decision makers in formulating and implementing national social policies. While those reports focus on the effect of social policies on such main sectors as health, education, employment and housing, it does not neglect their impact on poverty, security networks and the family, with special reference to minorities such as women, youth and the ageing. Furthermore, those national reports represent a basis or starting point for the process of updating, following-up and monitoring progress made by each country of the region with respect to social policies. With a view to facilitating that process, ESCWA is

³ ESCWA, *Social policies in Canada* (E/ESCWA/SD/2001/9), *Social policies in Norway* (E/ESCWA/SD/2001/10), *Social policies in Tunisia* (E/ESCWA/SD/2002/5), *Social policies in Malaysia* (E/ESCWA/SDD/2003/1), and *Social policies in Korea* (E/ESCWA/SDD/2003/9).

⁴ ESCWA, *Towards integrated policies for social development: the conceptual framework*, (E/ESCWA/SDD/2003/16).

⁵ ESCWA, *Social policies in the Arab countries: a constructive historical analysis*, (E/ESCWA/SDD/2003/10).

⁶ ESCWA, *The economic and social vision and the impact of monetary policies in Lebanon*, (E/ESCWA/SDD/2003/11).

⁷ ESCWA, *Central issues related to social policy: a comparative study and guiding principles for the formulation of social policies in the ESCWA region*, (E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/2).

endeavouring to include those reports on the agenda of the sessions of the Committee on Social Development;

(c) Preparation of a regional report on social studies: ESCWA prepared an executive summary on the basic orientations of the Regional Report, and an outline of suggested contents, to which a series of amendments were made in the light of an exchange of views with the parties interested in the publication of the Report. The main contents of the report were as follows: (a) definition of the concept of social policies in the framework of the knowledge available and instruments issued by United Nations agencies; (b) an explanation of the functions of social policies in meeting the needs of society; (c) the significance of such policies, or the social problems that they address and their extent and severity, leading to an explanation of the logical model for social policies, its structural particularities and a description of the various forms that it is currently adopting and the way in which they deviate from the logical model; (d) an explanation of the processes and means of follow-up applied in formulating and implementing social policies, with reference to circumstances that are helpful or otherwise, and further reference to the long- and short-term effects; and (e) the presentation of indicators of the outcome of social policies from the historical and comparative perspectives; the presentation of a set of recommendations aimed at improving conditions for the formulation and implementation of social policies in the region. Some of those recommendations were universal, in that they were applicable to all or most countries, while others were limited to specific countries.

B. ISSUES THAT IMPACT ON SOCIAL POLICIES

49. With respect to relevant issues and their impact on social policies, ESCWA prepared a set of studies and reports. Set forth below is a review of the most significant:

(a) "Social security networks and social policies".⁸ This study reviews security networks, their sphere of operation and their beneficiaries, and illustrates ways of strengthening and activating the role of those networks;

(b) "The Arab family: the integration of roles and empowerment from the perspective of social policies". This study, which is forthcoming, focused on the role of the family as central to social policy fields, and the impact of that role on economic, political and cultural changes;

(c) "The response to globalization: skill-building and unemployment reduction policies".⁹ This study was issued with the aim of giving information on certain issues raised by globalization, and in preparation for research into a set of challenges that the countries of the region are facing in response to those issues;

(d) "Education, skills acquisition and labour markets in the Gulf Cooperation Council States: the experience of the United Arab Emirates".¹⁰ This study was issued in order to throw light on the huge problems that face the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in strengthening social welfare and enabling their national work forces to acquire the necessary skills.

C. DEMOCRACY AND INFORMATION

50. ESCWA published the following studies on democracy and data bases:

(a) An approach to systems of governance, democracy and economic and social development in Arab countries". This study was in two parts. The first introduced the subject and presented a factual approach to the problems of democracy and economic and social development in Arab countries, while the second

⁸ ESCWA, *Social security networks and social policies*, (E/ESCWA/SDD/2003/26).

⁹ ESCWA, *The response to globalization: skill-building and unemployment reduction policies*, (E/ESCWA/SDD/2003/5).

¹⁰ ESCWA, *Education, skills acquisition and labour markets in the Gulf Cooperation Council States: the experience of the United Arab Emirates*, (E/ESCWA/SDD/2003/6).

comprised five annexes that supported and complemented the first part. Those annexes contained an introduction to the history of the Arab region; a set of constitutional and legal texts and international resolutions, agreements and instruments relating to democracy; the agendas of Arab political systems; four documents on exploratory approaches, definitions and classifications, indicators and statistical tables; and an index of jurisprudential references;

(b) "A data base on systems of Arab governance, measurement of democracy and socio-economic development". This data base constitutes a further part of the approach detailed above and includes, in addition to the approach and its annexes, three types of data, namely, legal (texts and comparative tables), a jurisprudential review of political and democratic systems, and data on Arab and international think tanks relevant to the subject of the study;

(c) "The role of the media in social questions". ESCWA issued this report with the aim of investigating the role of the media in and its impact on social policies and the development of the various forms of the media. The report focused on the shortcomings of that role and the action necessary to remedy them;

(d) "Visible hands: taking responsibility for social development" and "Sport as a tool for development and peace". Two useful translations issued by ESCWA.

D. PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

51. Participation in local development policies is the subject of a report issued by ESCWA entitled "Local development policies and programmes in ESCWA", which reviews the fields of local community development in which ESCWA has an interest, referring to ways of implementing programmes and projects and their outcome in terms of field expertise that has been documented in a complete set of references, guides and technical materials. The aim of the report was to incorporate given facts into capacity-building and to strengthen the mechanism for participation in policy formulation, programme planning and project implementation at the local level.

Annex

TABLE 1. THE MAIN CONDITIONS AND METHODS THAT ENSURED THE SUCCESS
 OF SOCIAL POLICIES IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

Type/country	Main condition	Main method	Date implementation began
Social welfare/Canada	Heavy investment in health, education and training	High-level, comprehensive social security, particularly for women and unemployed persons	Late 1960s
Social investment/Malaysia	Eradication of poverty and social restructuring	Extending participation in decision-making by focusing on social aspects and marginalized groups	1957-1985: the Government takes a leading role in funding, administration and implementation 1995-1997: the role of the private sector and participation of NGOs increases 1997-2003: social services are provided to poor persons
Production/Norway	Increased participation by the work force and strengthening of production	High level education and skills	1945-1957: establishment of the welfare state 1958-1970: comprehensive social welfare 1970-1990: unlimited growth 1990-2004: targeted activities
Economic investment/Korea	Economic growth and industry as the driving force for development and export; followed by support for social policies	Huge investment in developing skills commensurate with industry levels	1962-1980: focus on economic growth 1980-1995: adoption of selected welfare policies 1995-2004: support for social policies
Administration and the policy vision/Tunisia	Adoption of open economic policies underpinned by social policies aimed at alleviating the burden on poor persons	Integrated planning of economic and social policies	1970: the opening up of the economy 1987: economic reforms with a strong social bias

TABLE 2. STATUS OF CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL POLICIES

Indicators and standards	Canada	Malaysia	Norway	Korea ^{a/}	Tunisia
Complete coordination between the relevant ministries	Priority	Priority	Priority	Not applied	Priority
Transparency in governance and general accountability	High priority	Priority	Priority	High priority since 1999	Priority
Equitable fiscal system	High priority	High priority	Priority	Low priority	High priority
Decentralized decision-making	Priority	Priority	Priority	High priority since 1995	High priority
Effective participation by civil society	High priority since 1995	Priority	Priority	High priority since 1999	High priority
Use of purchasing power parities	Medium priority	High priority	High priority	High priority since 1995	High priority since 1970
Gender equality	High priority	..	Priority	..	High priority
Political stability	Very stable	Very stable	Very stable	Tensions with North Korea	Very stable
Prepared for globalization	Priority	Priority	Priority	Priority	Priority

Notes: Two dots (..) indicate that data are not available.

a/ The totalitarian system of governance in Korea is similar to that of certain ESCWA member countries.

TABLE 3. METHODS OF SUPPORTING SOCIAL POLICIES

Method used	Canada	Malaysia	Norway	Korea	Tunisia
Heavy investment in education and skills development	High priority, with focus on re-training	High priority, with focus on poor persons	High priority	High priority	High priority
Protection of vulnerable sectors and investment in security networks	Priority	High priority, with focus on education for poor persons	Priority	High priority since 1988	High priority, with focus on rural areas
Effective programmes for strengthening the labour market	High priority	High priority since 1997	Priority	..	Priority since 1970
Stimulation of the unofficial economy and SMEs	Medium priority	Priority since 1997	..	Priority since 1998	Priority
Provision of precise data and regular updating of social indicators and policies	Priority given to turning negative policies into effective policies	Priority, regular monitoring and evaluation	Medium priority, updating is deeply rooted in the welfare system	Priority since 1997	Priority since 1980

Note: Two dots (..) indicate that data are not available.
