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Foreword

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is publishing, as usual, its annual report that reviews the accomplishments and developments of the previous year. 2006 was an unusual year for Lebanon, the host country of ESCWA, because of the war Israel launched against Lebanon in July. Given the impact of the situation on both the host State and the region, the Commission believed that this *Report* should reflect the influence of that war, which had considerable negative repercussions at various economic, social, environmental, cultural and human levels.

The war waged by Israel against Lebanon in summer 2006 confirmed ESCWA warnings about the region's continued vulnerability to wars and security and political turmoil, and the need for different approaches to development issues, based on the concept of development under conditions of conflict and instability. The establishment by ESCWA in early 2006 of the Unit for Emerging and Conflict Related Issues (ECRI) could have been in preparation for that war and similar conflicts in the region. ESCWA therefore quickly became involved in efforts to alleviate the impact of the war and carry out reconstruction and regeneration projects, despite the fact that it had been obliged during the war to evacuate most of its staff outside Lebanon for more than two months. Against that background ESCWA staff must be congratulated on overcoming the disruption to their work that was caused by the war, and the unstable security and political situation prevailing in Lebanon before and after the war, especially in the immediate vicinity of United Nations premises in Beirut. Notwithstanding the situation, ESCWA pursued its activities in implementation of the work programme and all additional activities imposed by the war and the need for reconstruction and rebuilding. Because of the concept of development under conditions of conflict and instability, which ESCWA had promoted earlier and strived to implement through its activities and work, the war had a limited impact on the work of the Commission.

Albeit the war had forced ESCWA to move out of Lebanon for a short period, it was determined to resume work at its headquarters in downtown Beirut as soon as possible regardless of the pervasive security and political tensions. Furthermore, since Israel launched its hostile war against Lebanon, ESCWA contributed, and continues to contribute to Lebanon's reconstruction and regeneration.

The permanent headquarters of ESCWA are in Beirut: the Lebanese Government has supported ESCWA since the idea of establishing it was first mooted in 1973. ESCWA therefore is eager to exert every possible effort to assist Lebanon in confronting the enormous challenge of achieving the reconstruction and rebuilding stability, in the face of the terrible devastation inflicted upon Lebanon and its people. In that regard, ESCWA efforts have included various areas and issues that will be addressed in this report, including the following:

(a) It has contributed to the elaboration of a comprehensive national vision that links the reconstruction process with national recovery and long-term sustainable, comprehensive and balanced development, in consultation with the various relevant Lebanese parties and institutions. That vision aims to take into consideration the reality of Lebanese society and the various problems it faces;

(b) To the extent possible, it has affirmed the role of the international community in protecting Lebanon from another war and contributing to the national reconstruction and regeneration process;

(c) On the basis of its central role in Arab cooperation and regional integration, ESCWA has focused its efforts on upholding Arab-Lebanese partnerships in various fields and aspects of development work.

To date, ESCWA has developed and implemented a number of initiatives that are addressed later in this report. The most significant are the following:

(a) The formulation of a project for the establishment of a fund to support micro enterprises, comprising financial assistance, technical and administrative consultation and short-term micro credit, in collaboration with the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development;

(b) The establishment, in collaboration with the Union of Arab Banks, of a private cooperative fund to support small productive enterprises in Lebanon, especially those most inflicted by the war, and provide them with the tools necessary to resume their economic activity and build their technical and administrative capacities;

(c) The resumption and expansion of ESCWA projects in South Lebanon, which were also adversely affected by the war;

(d) The rehabilitation of the e-caravan for information technology training, in collaboration with Fondation Saradar.

We hope, in particular, that effective Arab initiatives will lead to the establishment of the above-mentioned cooperative fund, that would assume the debts of Lebanese small and micro enterprises in the trade, services and production sectors, provide technical and administrative assistance in facing the repercussions of the devastating war and the subsequent difficult economic conditions, constitute a new point of departure and contribute to the recovery of the devastated Lebanese economy.

Finally, this report reflects the ESCWA vision of reconstruction, the roles of the international and Arab communities, and, in particular, the role of ESCWA in the noble country which hosts the Commission and many other Arab and international organizations. It also shows how ESCWA owes its success to the efforts and commitment of its staff in overcoming the impact of the war and accomplishing the work programme, as well as exerting all possible efforts to reconstruct and regenerate Lebanon.

Mervat Tallawy
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
Executive Secretary of ESCWA

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Introduction

This report reviews the most significant developments and achievements of ESCWA in 2006, during which a devastating war of aggression was unleashed against Lebanon that impelled ESCWA to evacuate its staff outside the country, as a result it was unable to completely resume its work for nearly two months. The war had serious political and security consequences that have obliged ESCWA to take additional security precautions with respect to both the surroundings of its premises in downtown Beirut, where the security situation is delicate, and the work procedures and hours of its staff. Nevertheless, the Commission has efficiently continued to deliver its services to member countries, and was able to implement the work programme, realizing various achievements that have contributed to development efforts in the region and, in particular, reconstruction efforts in Lebanon.

In 2006, the most significant event for ESCWA was the convening in May in Beirut of its twenty-fourth session. That session is naturally the subject of chapter I of this Report, while chapter II is dedicated to a review of governmental, intergovernmental and advisory meetings held in 2006.

As a reminder that ESCWA publishes a series of comprehensive development-related printed materials, chapter III reviews major publications and provides summaries of the contents, which deal with major economic and social achievements in the various economic and social dimensions of regional sustainable development activities.

Chapter IV reviews the main development issues in the work of the Commission in 2006, including the establishment of ECRI, which reflects the belief of the United Nations and ESCWA that sustainable development is the best way to reduce the causes of conflicts and, consequently, their impacts. The Unit contributes to rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in conflict areas, including Iraq, despite the difficult security situation prevailing there.

Chapters V and VI address the achievements of the substantive divisions in implementing the work programme, including advisory services provided by the Commission to its member countries and services provided in the field of public administration.

Chapter VII reviews the Commission's information-related activities, which were of particular note in 2006, in view of the numerous tasks that Ms. Mervat Tallawy, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, continued to undertake, regardless of the war against Lebanon and the enforced evacuation from Beirut, thereby exceeding the regular duties of the post and firmly establishing the work, role and influence of ESCWA in the region. The Executive Secretary has been commended on several occasions for her efforts during that period.

It is hoped that this Report will provide a faithful image of the work and achievements of ESCWA in various areas of concern to member countries included in the Commission's multidisciplinary work programme, which aims to provide support to member countries in their endeavours to implement development projects and programmes.

I. THE TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

The twenty-fourth ESCWA session was held in May 2006 in United Nations House in Beirut, under the auspices of the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of Lebanon, Mr. Nabih Berri. Participants included high-ranking ministerial delegations representing ESCWA member countries: ministers included Mr. Khaled Bin Mouhammad Al-Kosseiby, Chairman of the session and Minister of Economy and Planning of Saudi Arabia; Mr. Ali Al-Msailhi, Minister of Social Solidarity of Egypt; and Mr. Samir Abu Aisheh, Minister of Planning of Palestine, and representatives from United Nations Member States non members of ESCWA and representatives of United Nations organizations, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and donor institutions.

In the first stages of the session, senior officials considered the Report of the Executive Secretary on the activities of the Commission for the biennium 2004-2005. They also considered senior management issues, including streamlining the work of the Commission through a consideration of the Statistics Programme and ESCWA intergovernmental machinery, and proposed amendments to the programme of work for the biennium 2006-2007 and the draft strategic framework for the biennium 2008-2009.

The Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of Lebanon, Mr. Nabih Berri, made the opening statement of the ministerial segment of the session. He thanked the Executive Secretary for her support for Lebanon and her concern for the reconstruction and redevelopment process of the country, especially in the south, and her support for the nomination of Mr. Rafic Hariri, former Prime Minister of Lebanon for a Special Citation of the UN-HABITAT Scroll of Honour.

The meetings of the ministerial segment focused on general policy issues in the ESCWA region and took the form of three round tables at which the following issues were addressed: new challenges in the region and their impact on the work of ESCWA, youth unemployment problems, and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the region.

During the round table on ways of confronting new challenges in the region, discussions were based on the recommendations made in the report of the High-Level Expert Group Meeting on the Role of ESCWA in Serving its Member Countries to 2010. Emphasis was placed on the need to prepare an attractive investment environment for capital by providing the necessary political and economic stability and infrastructure, adopting legislation to protect investment, and carrying out studies on possible fields for investment in each country and requirements for improving the investment climate. Similarly, delegates stressed that the role of Governments should be to generate an environment that would encourage businessmen to attract investment. They stressed the importance of political support for social strategies and policies and the involvement of the private sector in formulating such. They called upon ESCWA to establish an observatory to measure social and economic indicators, and to avoid generalizations when putting forward outcomes and proposed solutions in reports, because problems in Arab countries vary in accordance with their social and economic systems. They recommended that a plan for the activation of Arab economic integration should be adopted, and that the working mechanisms necessary for that purpose should be devised.

One round table discussed a study on Arab youth employment (E/ESCWA/24/4(Part II)) that sheds light on unemployment in Arab countries and ways of dealing with it. The report indicated that the problem manifests itself differently in the various Arab economies. In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the problem lies in the fact that the quality of education and training system graduates does not match the needs of the private and public sectors. In countries with more diversified economies, the problem is the inability of the economy to generate sufficient numbers of employment opportunities, while in the least-developed countries, the problem is the lack of an organized labour market and the inappropriate nature of the education and training system. In the course of the discussion, delegates noted that the way in which the problem of unemployment and its causes is addressed varies from one Arab country to another. They

called for steps to be taken and policies adopted that would prompt employment institutions to develop technology. Similarly, they called for the establishment of institutions responsible for the orientation of vocational training programmes and the establishment of labour-intensive productive industries, thereby increasing a congruity of education output and the needs of the labour market.

In a round table on the achievement of MDGs in the ESCWA region, the secretariat presented an evaluation of the progress made towards achieving the Goals in the ESCWA region and a comparison between the countries of the Arab region and between the Arab region and other regions. During the discussion, delegates referred to the link between MDGs and poverty, unemployment and youth problems, all of which are the outcome of low levels of development and require an integrated vision of comprehensive development that enjoys the requisite political support. Reference was made to the fact that work to improve MDG indicators in the region and move them forward to the implementation stage would require the putting in place of a detailed framework for execution. Delegates called upon ESCWA, as the regional arm of the United Nations, to provide technical assistance towards achieving MDGs in countries that are unable to realize them. They stressed the importance, in measuring MDGs, of obtaining information from official sources in the countries concerned. They were of the view that the empowerment of women, by removing all the obstacles to their progress and providing them with education, was a major factor in achieving MDGs.

The session concluded with a call for the establishment of a technical committee comprising the focal points of member countries, which would meet once every six months in order to follow up implementation of the ESCWA programme of work and assist in requesting funding for proposed projects. Delegates also adopted a number of recommendations that included a call to member countries to work towards the achievement of the goals and objectives endorsed in the 2005 World Summit Outcome as an integral part of their national plans and strategies.

With regard to social development policies, the session made recommendations urging member countries to adopt an integrated social policy approach and requesting ESCWA to organize an Arab forum for social policies, with the aim of increasing interest in integrated and effective social policies. Participants urged member countries to increase the representation, participation and empowerment of women at all levels of decision-making and in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes.

As regards addressing the impact of conflict and instability on social and economic development, the session called upon member countries to intensify their efforts to attain peace, security and stability at the regional and international levels and urged the ESCWA secretariat to intensify its endeavours to enhance the capacity of member countries to assess, predict and respond to socio-economic and political challenges.

At the session a Memorandum of Understanding was concluded between ESCWA, represented by the Executive Secretary, Ms. Mervat Tallawy, and the Arab Women Organization, represented by its General Director, Ms. Wadouda Badran, with a view to the interchange of data and expertise and organization of training programmes for the advancement of Arab women.

In parallel to the session, three remarkable cultural events were organized, namely, a concert for graduates of the television programme “Star Academy 2006”, an art exhibition for talented young Lebanese from the Lebanese American University and an exhibition of ESCWA publications.

II. THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND OTHER COMMITTEES

A. THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

With a view to increasing cooperation and the exchange of views on national and regional development issues and priorities, ESCWA holds periodic meetings of the Advisory Committee, which comprises the accredited ambassadors of member countries to Lebanon, the host country. In 2006, ESCWA held two meetings of that Committee, in February and September.

In February, the ambassadors discussed ongoing preparations for the twenty-fourth ESCWA session in May 2006. They considered the main subjects to be addressed by the session, including youth unemployment in the Arab world and ways of dealing with it, international and regional challenges and their repercussions on ESCWA's role in the region, and progress towards the achievement of MDGs. The meeting also discussed the establishment of the ESCWA technology centre. ESCWA had drafted a document defining the centre's general context, objectives, range of activities, and regulatory and financial frameworks. Consideration was also given to a regional mechanism for building capacities for shared water resource management. ESCWA has devised the terms of reference for a preliminary study on the feasibility of creating a regional mechanism. The first draft of that study has been written, revised and amended.

In September, the Advisory Committee was convened for the first time since the summer 2006 war against Lebanon. The Executive Secretary praised the efforts exerted by Arab States to support Lebanon during the war by their supportive political stances and material, financial and humanitarian aid.

Action taken by ESCWA during the war with a view to carrying on its activities were raised at the meeting. In order to brief participants on ESCWA's main accomplishments, the Executive Secretary gave a PowerPoint presentation that covered work programme activities recently completed by the secretariat, including activities accomplished during the war against Lebanon.

The ambassadors discussed subjects of interest to the Arab countries that were included on the agenda of the General Assembly which opened in 12 September 2006. The League of Arab States intends to raise the Middle East issue in the General Assembly in an attempt to alleviate the situation in the region and arrive at a just and lasting solution to the issue.

The Executive Secretary referred to the ESCWA report 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 (A/61/67 - E/2006/13) which was submitted to the General Assembly. That report states that, as a result of the military operations which the Israeli army continues to carry out in Palestine, in addition to arbitrary detention, home demolition and closure policies, some 35,000 children under five are suffering from malnutrition, while unemployment and poverty rates were estimated at 23 and 62 per cent respectively.

B. INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEES

1. The Statistical Committee Seventh Session, Beirut, November 2006

The Statistical Committee held its seventh session under the auspices of Mr. Jean Oghasabian, Minister of State for Administrative Development Affairs of Lebanon. The agenda for the session covered MDGs, statistical knowledge, the strengthening of statistical capacities for evidence-based policymaking, and issues related to information and communications technology (ICT) indicators. The Statistical Committee also discussed the follow-up to implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee

at its sixth session, the progress made in implementing statistics-related activities in the period between the sixth and seventh sessions, including those concerning the International Comparison Programme.

In her opening statement, Ms. Mervat Tallawy, Executive Secretary of ESCWA, likened statistics and general politics to strong, interdependent partners, in that statistics measure and monitor what general politics achieve in development, and because statistical indicators reflect the progress made by peoples in realizing the economic and social aims and goals to which they aspire.

In his own statement, Mr. Oghasabian emphasized the importance of statistics: reliable and precise statistics form the basis of sustainable economic, demographic, social and environmental development and democratic decision-making.

The Statistical Committee concluded its work by formulating a draft resolution to be submitted to the twenty-fifth ministerial ESCWA session concerning the strengthening of statistical capacities for evidence-based policymaking. The draft resolution called upon member countries to strengthen the independence of national statistical offices and urged those offices to interchange expertise. It urged member countries to accelerate implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts and adopt the common list of Core ICT Indicators issued by the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, in order to produce evidence-based national development policies. The draft resolution also requested ESCWA to intensify its continuous efforts to build the statistical capacities of member countries, seek to standardize statistical concepts and definitions, and support the activities of the Regional Taskforce on Population and Housing Censuses for the 2010 round.

Mr. Ali Bin Mahboob Ben Hassan, Director General of Social Statistics at the Ministry of National Economy in Oman announced the allocation of US\$ 50,000 to support implementation of the 2010 of round housing censuses in the ESCWA region.

2. Committee on Transport Seventh Session, Beirut, April 2006

At its seventh session, the Committee on Transport recommended the adoption of a draft resolution on follow-up of the implementation of components of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM). ESCWA adopted that resolution at its twenty-fourth session.

In that resolution, member countries noted that the main components for ITSAM include the improvement of infrastructure, the facilitation of goods and passenger flows through border crossings, the provision of safe transport, an information system, and a methodological framework for the formulation and analysis of policies. They noted with satisfaction the steps that have been taken by some member countries towards applying the plan of action for implementation of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq, particularly on routes M40 (Iraq - Jordan - Palestine - Southern Mediterranean Coast) and M45 (Syrian Arab Republic - Jordan - Saudi Arabia - Yemen), and the steps that have been taken with a view to facilitating the passage of goods through borders and, in particular, the formation of national committees for the facilitation of transport and trade. The resolution included, inter alia, a request to the ESCWA secretariat to submit regular reports to the Committee on Transport on follow-up to implementation of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq and, in particular, with respect to priority routes M40 and M45; the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq; the Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Transport Cooperation in the Arab Mashreq; national committees for the facilitation of transport and trade; and road safety.

It emerged during the session that the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq is being implemented in an exemplary and rapid manner, especially in Saudi Arabia, which is expected to complete implementation by the end of 2006, namely, 13 years before the planned date. Some states have begun to prepare economic feasibility studies on the development of links still needed for the railway network,

especially the GCC States and Yemen. Progress was also noted in the work of the national committees for the facilitation of transport and trade. The Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Transport Cooperation entered into force in September 2006. Local committees were formed in Iraq, Lebanon, Oman and the Syrian Arab Republic in order to prepare national activities for the first United Nations Global Road Safety Week.

*3. The Consultative Committee on Scientific and Technological
Development and Technological Innovation
Third session, Beirut, March 2006*

The slogan for this session was Technology for Development in Western Asia. Consideration was given to the pre-feasibility study for the establishment of the ESCWA technology centre. The Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD) work programme for the biennium 2006-2007 was adopted, as was the strategic framework of the ICTD work programme for the biennium 2008-2009, and activities in follow-up to implementation in the ESCWA region of decisions made by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which was held in Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005. The outcome of the session was the preparation for submission to the twenty-fourth ESCWA session of two draft resolutions, the first being related to the establishment of the ESCWA technology centre and the second to follow-up in the region of the outcomes of WSIS.

III. MAJOR PUBLICATIONS

A. ANNUAL REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS IN GLOBALIZATION AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN THE ARAB STATES, 2006

This issue considered major developments in the performance in 2005 of Arab States with respect to joining the globalization process and regional economic integration. In a departure from previous practices, this issue covered not only ESCWA member countries but all the Arab States.

As regards globalization, the issue included an analysis of the progress made by Arab states in their relations with the global economy, their contribution to world domestic product, international trade, foreign direct investment (FDI), and oil and gas production and reserves. The indicators reflect the extent to which the Arab States contribute to the global economy and are linked to the integrated world productive economic process. A review of Arab State performance in attracting FDI was also included.

Also covered in this issue was the progress made in world trade negotiations between the Doha and Hong Kong Conferences. Consideration was given to both achievements and obstacles to reaching agreement on Doha Agenda issues.

Furthermore, the issue included an analysis of the progress made by Arab States towards regional integration, regional cooperation and integration in the fields of trade, investment, tourism and the transference of workers' remittances between Arab countries. In 2006, a regional indicator was added that reflects the extent of Arab countries' economic integration. The indicator was based on a number of such variables as Arab intraregional trade, Arab intraregional investment, Arab intraregional tourism and workers' intraregional remittances. Arab States were categorized as to their contribution to regional economic integration in light of those four variables. The issue also included an evaluation of the progress made by Arab States in implementing the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement (GAFTA) and the obstacles thereto.

The review also touched on regional sectoral integration in the spheres of energy, water, environment, communications and transport and, in particular, progress towards the implementation of components of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM).

B. ARAB WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE AND DECISION-MAKING

This brochure includes a review supported by statistics on the participation of Arab women in public life and decision-making, as part of follow-up on progress made towards achievement of MDG 3 relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women. It comprises seven parts covering women's electoral rights, the participation of women in parliamentary and ministerial councils; women's membership of political parties; women in the judiciary; women's appointment to high-ranking and official posts; the role of women in the media, and in NGOs and social organizations.

The study notes that the participation of women in public life in Arab States remains below the desired level and reflects a gender-based gap in rights and freedoms. Substantial difficulties hinder women's access to opportunities in every aspect of public life. The root cause of gender inequality in the region and the patriarchal control of women's rights and freedoms can be attributed to the perception that a woman's role is to be a mother and reproduce, and the prevailing harshness of enforced morality, all of which constitute serious obstacles to the full and effective participation of women in public life in Arab countries.

The study indicates that, according to the gender empowerment measure (GEM), which was introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) a decade ago, Arab States rank lower than any other region in the world, with the exception of sub-Saharan Africa. Across the world, women continue to face obstacles to the full realization of their rights as equal participants in society. However, resistance to gender equality has been stiffest in the Arab region, regardless of the adoption by some Arab

States in recent years of constitutional reforms aimed at reaffirming the equality of all citizens before the law in respect of the rights and responsibilities. However, enacting laws that, in theory guarantee equal rights for women and men can have only a modest impact in the absence of clear enforcement mechanisms. In effect, Arab States have demonstrated their commitment to the advancement of women by instituting reform mechanisms at the highest levels, in line with the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action, and most have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and enacted new or revised existing legislation.

The study concludes that women's organizations should coordinate efforts and overcome their differences, in order to form a powerful front through which to lobby their Governments into drafting laws that benefit societies and encourage men and women to work together as equal partners. Arab States must adopt radical strategies in order to provide a platform that fosters a certain level of representation of women in national decision-making. Finally, Arab States are encouraged to take a number of steps, the most important of which are the following:

- (a) Ensure high-level political commitment towards the increased participation of women in political and public life and decision-making;
- (b) Encourage the adoption of quota systems that promote the participation of women in national decision-making, public institutions, local councils and municipalities, political parties and trade unions;
- (c) Recognize the achievements and contributions of women in the Arab media and adopt mechanisms that promote their participation therein.

C. SURVEY OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ESCWA REGION, 2005-2006

This annual publication analyses the forces behind economic and social developments in ESCWA member countries on the basis of a group of systems appropriate to the region. This *Survey* (E/ESCWA/EAD/2006/2) deals explicitly with economic and social developments in the ESCWA region, through the outcomes of various analytical resources upon which policy-related suggestions and recommendations are made. The survey outlines a set of general economic policy principles that were formulated with a view to devising development strategies in the region that are employment-intensive, pro-poor and based on human rights.

According to the *Survey*, the region could benefit from the support of external factors. The high level of growth in global liquidity frees most ESCWA member countries from the pressures of foreign currencies, and permits the rapid growth of national consumption and investment demand. Furthermore, the rise in the price of raw materials, including oil, has swelled the budgets of oil-exporting countries and, in particular, the GCC countries. GDP growth rates in the region in constant prices have therefore been high, exceeding growth rates in other regions.

However, regional conflicts and pressures continue to affect economic development. Recent growth rates have not been sufficient to increase work opportunities. Poor economic performance in the ESCWA region over a prolonged period has resulted in high rates of unemployment and income inequality. The recent good economic performance is a real opportunity for dealing with structural issues.

The objectives of this year's *Survey* are unconventional in the sense that they do not consider macroeconomic stability as the main factor in growth and poverty reduction. The *Survey* highlights approaches to poverty reduction that constitute the basis of national economic policymaking and the development strategy of the ESCWA region. The *Survey* recommended that resources should be redistributed as part of economic policies that are pro-poor and targeted towards employment generation and

growth, with the aim of achieving the MDG of reducing by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day.

D. REPORT ON THE CONDITION OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

An annual report on the above issue is submitted by ESCWA to the General Assembly. The 2006 report entitled: "Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan" (A/61/67 - E/2006/13) may be summarized as follows:

The occupation by Israel of Palestinian territory continues to deepen the economic and social hardship of Palestinians. Citing the right to self-defence, the Israeli army continues to mount military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory, frequently employing arbitrary detention, the disproportionate use of force, home demolition, severe mobility restrictions and closure policies.

The Israeli closure system remains a primary cause of poverty and humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory, and restricts Palestinians' access to health and education services, employment opportunities, markets and social and religious networks. Israeli restrictions also impede humanitarian services to the occupied territory. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East alone incurred over \$10 million in losses in 2005.

While Palestinian gross domestic product grew in 2005 by some 6 per cent, economic indicators continue to show negative trends. Unemployment and poverty rates remain high, estimated at 23 and 62 per cent respectively.

E. BROADBAND FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE ESCWA REGION: ENHANCING ACCESS TO ICT SERVICES IN A GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

In the field of information and technology, broadband is considered an efficient way to achieve economic and social development, being a service through which it is possible to expand digital content, develop new services, and enhance the use of development applications in the fields of education, health, trade and e-government. Such services provide considerable benefits to individuals and local communities in the public and private sectors.

The publication is the outcome of joint efforts exerted by ESCWA and Alcatel-Lucent throughout most of 2006. It aims to build a regional framework for the dissemination of broadband service in the ESCWA region, as a contribution to implementation of the decisions made by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and in compliance with the 2003 ESCWA Regional Plan of Action for Building an Information Society. The study provides guidelines for the development of information and communications infrastructure, at the national and regional levels. It is based on a three-dimensional approach that comprises: (a) an analysis of the current status of broadband in the ESCWA region based on country-specific case studies; (b) an evaluation of lessons learned from international experience, with the focus on factors that contributed to the dissemination of broadband service in other countries; (c) an evaluation of the technologies and work patterns that contribute to enhance use of broadband in support of the economic and social development process in the region.

F. POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT REPORT: THE DEMOGRAPHIC WINDOW: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB COUNTRIES

The population variable is of crucial importance when development programmes and plans are being developed, because of the close correlation between population growth and socio-economic growth, and in light of the structural changes accompanying the population age structure. ESCWA has striven to generate awareness in advance of the challenges presented by population dynamics, and the importance of forward

planning and preparedness in that regard. Changes in the population age structure are one of the most serious challenges that must be faced by Arab States. Action must be taken in order to alleviate the negative effects thereof and benefit from the opportunities they afford. Structural change in age groups has positive effects that are manifested as the so-called demographic window or gift.

The demographic window may be defined as the period of time needed for the development of the demographic process in a given country to the point where the largest sector of the population is of working age and dependency ratios are at their lowest. That period covers two generations, namely, those aged between 30 and 40 years. The appearance of the demographic window, when development circumstances and social policies permit, generates an increase in economic growth rates and achievement of MDGs. Because of the importance of that opportunity at the local and regional levels, ESCWA published the second issue of the Population and Development Report: "The Demographic window: An Opportunity for Development in the Arab Countries (E/ESCWA/SDD/2005/5)". The Report focused on one of the basic means of access to the demographic gift, namely, the study of demographic transition indicators in conjunction with a study of Arab labour markets and their capacity to absorb the economically active population, the aim being to incite decision-makers to adopt rational economic and social policies that will balance increased employment opportunities and enhanced investment in human resources.

IV. SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

A. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNIT FOR EMERGING AND CONFLICT RELATED ISSUES

Israel's hostile war against Lebanon in summer 2006 confirmed the warnings given by ESCWA about the region's continued vulnerability to wars and political and security-related upheaval. A different approach is therefore needed to deal with development issues, based on the concept of development under conditions of conflict and instability. The establishment by ESCWA of ECRI in early 2006 could have been in preparation for that war and similar conflicts in the region.

In response to the political tensions and conflicts facing the region, the most recent of which was the July 2006 war in Lebanon, ESCWA has been active in recent years in the main conflict and post-conflict areas of Iraq, the occupied Palestinian territory and South Lebanon, through ad-hoc task forces established within the Commission. Based on accumulated expertise, and on the instructions of the Executive Secretary, ESCWA established ECRI in January 2006 in order to consolidate the efforts of the task forces, develop further the activities of the Commission in that regard and confirm the concept of development conditions of conflict and instability within the ESCWA programme of work that was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

The 2005 World Summit Outcome document asserts the linkage between peace and security and development and human rights. On that basis, ECRI aims to contribute to addressing the causes of tension and conflict in the region and reduce their negative impact on socio-economic and political development, as well as to promote the concept of development that has become essential, namely, that of development under conditions of conflict and instability.

1. *Approaches to the concept of development under conditions of conflict and instability*

Through ECRI, ESCWA adopts the following approaches to the concept of development under conditions of conflict and instability:

- *Analysis and policy formulation for conflict prevention and mitigation:* monitoring unfolding socio-economic and political developments, analysing regional trends that constitute potential threats, recommending alternative policies and steps to address the identified challenges and providing early warning;
- *Capacity-building:* by improving the quality of governance in public and civic institutions in conflict-afflicted and post-conflict areas, including enhancing public administration and consolidating the rule of law;
- *Forging partnerships:* between local and regional civic organizations, with a view to enhancing networks, cooperation and coordination: such partnerships play a major role in the reintegration of conflict-afflicted societies in the region;
- *Mainstreaming conflict prevention into main activities:* through cooperation between ECRI and the various divisions within ESCWA, with a view to formulating and implementing policies and programmes that cater to the needs of conflict-stricken countries, thereby alleviating the effects of such conflicts and the instability resulting therefrom.

2. *Main activities*

The activities of ECRI can be divided into the following categories:

- *Elaboration and implementation of development projects:* based on needs assessments in conflict-afflicted areas and countries, or in response to emerging threats and potential conflicts. Such

projects are so formulated as to involve a variety of partners, thereby ensuring that partnership-building becomes a fundamental aspect of implementation strategies;

- *Training*: in addition to the training entailed in the projects, ESCWA conducts various technical training courses for senior civil servants and staff of civil institutions, especially in conflict-afflicted regions, thereby enhancing their capacities and, consequently, the capacities of their respective entities;
- *Reports and expert group meetings*: aimed at monitoring regional trends and potential crises in the region. ECRI carries out situation forecasting and analysis with a view to proposing measures, policies and programmes that can serve to reduce the causes of conflicts and mitigate the repercussions of instability. Such activities include organizing expert group meetings on development under crisis conditions and producing and publishing periodic reports;
- *Partnerships*: ESCWA undertakes its activities in partnership with other related United Nations entities; local, regional and international organizations; and government and civil institutions and networks.

Another section of this report covers the main accomplishments of ECRI in 2006. However, mention should be made here of ESCWA efforts to contribute to the reconstruction and regeneration of Lebanon.

3. *Contribution to the reconstruction and regeneration of Lebanon*

During the war waged by Israel against Lebanon in summer 2006, ECRI organized a series of consultative meetings that brought together a large number of Lebanese multidisciplinary experts to discuss the repercussions of the war and necessary steps in the prospective reconstruction and rebuilding process. The paper entitled “Lebanon’s Rebuilding and Revival: A Policy Paper with Initiatives” is the outcome of those meetings.

Experts who participated in the preparation of that paper agreed that the reconstruction process should be based on a comprehensive national vision that takes into consideration the reality of Lebanese society and the various problems it is facing, as well as accumulated expertise and lessons learned from reconstruction and rebuilding efforts exerted after periods of conflict in the twentieth century. Experts also agreed on the central role that the Lebanese Government can play in orchestrating efforts to formulate and implement the national vision, through an all-inclusive participatory process.

In order to formulate the national vision, ESCWA summarized the problems that must be tackled as part of the national reconstruction and regeneration process, of which the most significant are set forth below:

- The rebuilding and regeneration process must be balanced, with respect to both the regions of Lebanon and the various groups of the Lebanese society; and must be formulated through an all-inclusive participatory and consultative approach;
- The suggested reconstruction and regeneration plans must be mainstreamed into the various national programmes and plans that have already been adopted;
- The issue of unemployment which was aggravated by the war, must be resolved; practical but ambitious programmes must be instituted in order to fight and alleviate poverty, including solving the problem of the “new poor” who were created by damage inflicted by the recent war;
- The complete economic cycle of Lebanese productive enterprises must be revitalized, especially in the areas most affected by the war, through direct and effective practical initiatives.

The paper concluded that addressing all those issues as part of the comprehensive national vision is not a luxury at the current time, but a basic necessity for the success of the comprehensive national process for the rebuilding and regeneration of Lebanon and the formulation of a modern social contract that would be based on citizenship and the equality of all, and reduce internal social tensions.

A number of suggestions were put forward in the paper, including the following:

- A laboratory should be established for analysing and validating existing and future studies and strategies;
- A reference hub for NGOs and donors should be established with the aim of consolidating their activities on the basis of focused feedback from beneficiaries;
- A “National Forum for the Regeneration of Lebanon” should be launched;
- Regional networks to support the rebuilding of Lebanon should be established.

*4. Implementation of a number of initiatives put forward
with respect to Lebanon*

In the light of the foregoing, ECRI determined to formulate a number of practical projects, including the following:

- A project for a fund to support microenterprises that would include financial aid, technical and administrative consulting and short-term microcredit, in collaboration with the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment Development, which allocated US\$ 250,000 to the funding of that project, of which implementation will begin in 2007;
- A private mutual aid fund, to be established in cooperation with the Union of Arab Banks, with a view to empowering small productive institutions in Lebanon and, in particular, those most affected by the war, and providing them with the tools necessary for their economic reactivation, including the building of their technical and administrative capacities. The Union of Arab Banks adopted the project at its annual conference, which was held in November 2006 and attended by ESCWA;
- ESCWA projects in South Lebanon that were damaged during the war, including the project for such alternative crops as *zaatar* and honey, should be reactivated and expanded. Those projects are part of a wider trend aiming at reactivating the full economic cycle in areas damaged by the war, and include the rehabilitation in partnership with Fondation Saradar, of the E-caravan for Information Technology training.

**B. ROLE OF ESCWA IN SERVING ITS MEMBER COUNTRIES TO 2010
(HIGH-LEVEL EXPERT GROUP MEETING, BEIRUT, JANUARY 2006)**

The Meeting considered the challenges facing and opportunities available to the countries of the region and the role of ESCWA in confronting and exploiting those challenges and opportunities in the light of current regional and global trends, with a view to developing a practical and theoretical vision of the issues on which it is possible for the Commission to concentrate by including them in its programme of work or developing new mechanisms for dealing with issues and priorities.

Discussions focused on the organizational and programme restructuring of ESCWA; the implications of the resolutions adopted by the 2005 World Summit; and the needs of the countries of the region and the role of ESCWA to the year 2010 in respect of Arab regional integration, water, energy, technology, globalization (commercial and economic issues) and social policies. The Meeting made several basic general recommendations and others on social and economic policies. Further recommendations concerned

the activation of regional integration plans, the establishment of State and civil society institutions and the role of the Arab media. Set forth below are the most important recommendations:

1. General recommendations

- Emphasis should be placed on the correlation between the major issues currently facing the world, namely, development, security and human rights, and ESCWA should be requested to reflect that correlation in its programmes of work by establishing an Arab regional observatory with the task of monitoring events, amassing data and devising comparative indicators for the above-mentioned issues in the Arab region;
- ESCWA should be requested to pursue its efforts to devise effective and appropriate approaches to planning for comprehensive development and institute practical programmes that take into consideration the uncertain and unstable conditions that prevail in the region, which are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

2. Economic recommendations

- ESCWA should be requested to prepare comprehensive studies on economic development in the region and cooperate with the relevant parties to translate such studies into practical programmes, with a view to making effective use of the opportunity offered by the significant increase in oil and gas revenues and the accumulation of large amounts of Arab capital from those revenues that would be available for investment in both the public and private sectors in the region, rather than depending on foreign investment;
- ESCWA should be requested to prepare the necessary technological and economic studies on investment in establishing Arab information and communication networks, in order to enable every Arab citizen to have access to such networks and benefit from the opportunities they provide for economic, social and cultural development, and strengthen the links between Arab markets. Stress must be placed on the great economic value of Arabic language-related digital technologies and industries, which must be accorded due importance by private Arab investors.

3. Recommendations on social policies

- ESCWA should be requested to assist Arab States in formulating integrated social policies, to be translated into practical programmes that can be implemented and show measurable results, by adopting modern social science views and methodologies, including legal social sciences and, in particular, the methodology of prospective studies that give specific estimates of the consequences of the alternative social policies proposed;
- ESCWA should be requested to carry out an in-depth study that illustrates the socio-economic dimension of technological development, given that technology is, above all, a social order that comprises a direct link between curriculums and the culture that they can generate in youth which encourages scientific and technological curiosity, invention and innovation.

4. Recommendations related to regional integration

- ESCWA should be requested to prepare in-depth academic studies on previous experiences of regional integration in the region, both successful and unsuccessful, in order to identify the elements of political, economic and social success and failure, at the national, regional and international levels, in a manner that will help to understand the factors that affect the progress of Arab regional integration. Such studies must include, inter alia, such bilateral integration experiences as that between Egypt and the Syrian Arab Republic and such semi-regional experiments as the GCC, in order to identify alternative approaches to integration that might be more successful in bringing together their disparate elements.

5. Recommendations on building State and community institutions

- ESCWA should be requested to prepare institutional capacity-building programmes for Government and civil society institutions, including practical training courses and the transfer of successful global experiences.

6. Recommendations respecting the media

- ESCWA should be requested to prepare, in cooperation with Arab media in the public and private sectors, scientific and field studies on the role of the Arab media in all its forms in the various fields of sustainable development, with a view to raising awareness among Arab citizens of development issues that affect the advancement of society, the concept of citizenship and the right to participate in decision-making.

C. DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES IN THE ESCWA REGION

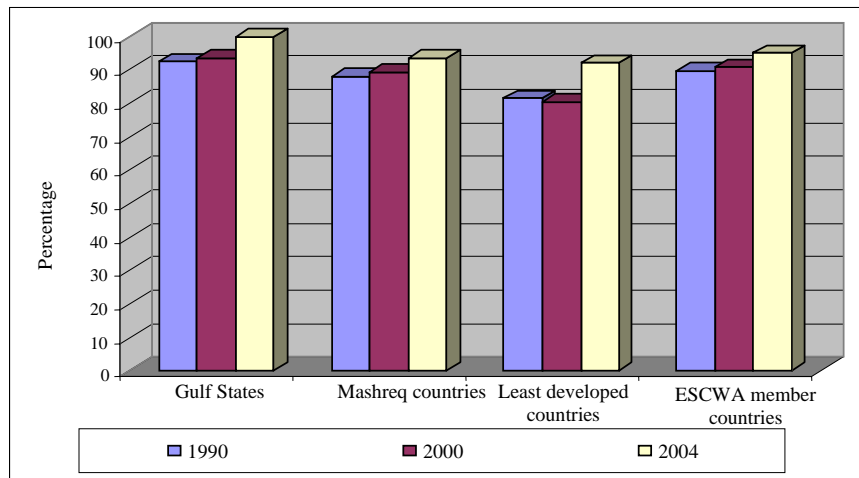
1. Current situation

Many ESCWA member countries face major challenges with respect to the provision of drinking water and sanitation services. Principle challenges include the scarcity of fresh water, the degradation of water quality, lack of policy integration, and the lack of coordination and cooperation between relevant sectors. The increase in water demand, caused by steady population growth, has led to a considerable increase in demand for investment and financial resources. In collaboration with many regional and international organizations, ESCWA prepared a detailed report on progress made towards MDGs, including recommendations on achieving those Goals and the relevant targets.

Figures I and II show indicators relating to Goal 7, concerning sustainable access to safe drinking water in ESCWA member countries, the least developed countries, the Mashreq countries and the Gulf States. An analysis of those indicators reveals that access to sanitation services is more restricted than access to safe drinking water in most of the countries of the region. Notwithstanding the efforts that have been made, major obstacles remain to achievement of MDGs, namely, the inadequacy of institutional and administrative capacities in the water sector, lack of financial resources, failure to involve local communities, and failure to enhance partnerships with the private sector and funding institutions.

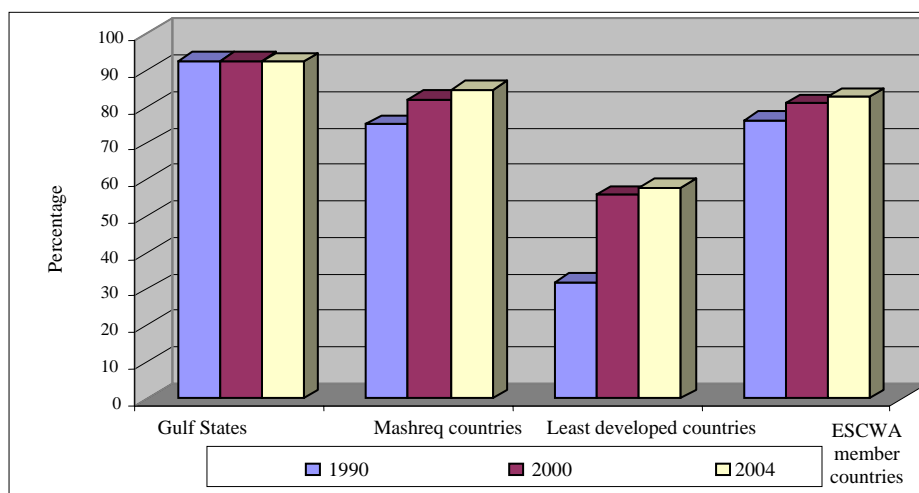
Figure II shows the disparity between regions in the proportion of population with access to basic sanitation services, which reflects national disparities in financial, technical and administrative capacities.

Figure I. Proportion of population with access to safe drinking water



Source: WHO-UNICEF, Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, 2006 which is available at: <http://www.wssinfo.org>.

Figure II. Proportion of population with access to safe sanitation



Source: WHO-UNICEF, Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, 2006 which is available at: <http://www.wssinfo.org>.

2. Establishment of the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association

The increase in water demand caused by steady population growth and urban migration has impelled certain Arab States to develop their water-related strategies and policies, with a view to streamlining management of the water supply sector and devising policies and mechanisms to optimize distribution of water to the consumer. Against that background, in 2006 ESCWA carried out many activities in order to assist member countries to achieve the MDG related to water resource sustainability by, in particular, improving drinking water and sanitation services and supporting the role of the private sector. The German Government, through the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, supports the efforts exerted by ESCWA to devise policies and mechanisms necessary for the provision and improvement of water supply and sanitation through the joint technical cooperation project. In cooperation with the German Agency for Technical Cooperation, ESCWA established the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA) with a view to facilitating and supporting communication about various water utilities between officials at the regional level.

The Association is expected to operate as an independent entity, form a strong communications network for water utilities and help member countries increase the efficiency of services and generate benefits, by setting up performance indicators, developing modern technical criteria, building capacities, and improving the management of major investment projects for the delivery of drinking water and sanitation services in the region. ACWUA is expected to operate as an efficient mechanism that enables members to exchange expertise and carry out positive consultations and constructive interaction with Governments, the private sector and international donor organizations, with a view to gaining shared benefits for all parties.

In 2006, the task force carried out exploratory visits to the pertinent water utility departments in the following cities: Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt, Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, Manama in Bahrain and Muscat in Oman, with a view to gaining familiarity with the particularities of those departments and communicating with officials regarding the establishment of ACWUA.

A consultative meeting on the establishment of ACWUA was held in Cairo in September 2006 with the aim of exchanging views about the likely success of the proposed association and ways of financing it. Participants from 10 member countries and representatives from the German Association for Water,

Wastewater and Waste and the European Water Association (EWA) attended the meeting. They concluded that there was an urgent need for such an entity and recommended that the necessary actions should be taken forth with the establishment of the association. At the end of the meeting, a 12 member steering committee was elected in order to follow up on establishment procedures. ACWUA was launched on 6 September 2006.

D. COOPERATION BETWEEN ESCWA AND BAHRAIN IN RESPECT OF INTEGRATED SOCIAL POLICIES

In order to encourage policymakers in ESCWA member countries to adopt integrated social policies based on social justice and equal opportunities for all citizens, and as part of follow up on the third phase of the integrated social policies project, in April 2006 the Ministry of Social Development of Bahrain, in cooperation with ESCWA, organized in Manama, the National Conference on Social Policies in Bahrain: Vision and Implementation. The aim of the Conference was to promote national dialogue and reach consensus on the social policy that the Government could adopt for the development of Bahraini society, and to devise a vision for the prospective formulation of integrated social policy in the country.

In implementation of the plan of action set forth in the Memorandum of Understanding, ESCWA, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development of Bahrain, organized an orientation training workshop for the Social Policy Unit, that was held in Manama in December 2006. It included a review of all dimensions of the concept of social policy, including the various social relationship, groups and objectives, which are closely linked to social policy, and the impact on social welfare in general and on certain social groups in particular. Also reviewed were techniques used in the preparation of scientific research and social survey methodologies, and the various follow-up and evaluation systems related to social policies, programmes and projects.

Against that background, the Social Policy Unit was established within the Ministry of Social Development. Its tasks are to collect and coordinate information from all the relevant sources; propose social policies for the country; support and empower human and financial capacities in the Ministry for the management and implementation of its integrated social policies in Bahrain; establish information and databases about social development and policy, with a view to improving decision-making; enhance coordination and evaluation mechanisms between control mechanisms and the relevant parties, including ministries and departments concerned with social policy; and prepare and submit to the Government periodic reports on the implementation of social policies.

V. ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2006

A. THE REGULAR PROGRAMME

1. *Sustainable Development and Productivity Division*

(a) *Water and Environment Team*

In 2006, the activities undertaken by ESCWA in the area of water and environment focused on integrated water resource management and shared water resource management issues. ESCWA carried out a comprehensive survey in order to assess the progress made by the countries of the region in devising plans and programmes related to integrated water resource management, monitor challenges and shortcomings, and suggest the necessary implementation mechanisms.

The survey conducted by ESCWA revealed that member countries had taken many measures aimed at institutional reform and development. They had also established legislative and legal frameworks to distribute tasks, define the organizational relations of water institutions, encourage the participation of private sector institutions and users in water management, regulate water use within the limits of the available resources, and allocate responsibilities and competencies to the relevant parties.

ESCWA has attached great importance to enhancing cooperation between member countries in respect of shared surface and groundwater resource management. Most ESCWA member countries share such water resources as rivers and aquifers with other countries inside and outside the region. However, given the difficulty of dialogue between riparian countries or countries sharing rivers and aquifers, ESCWA had to work, in cooperation with the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation, on building the capacities of experts in those countries, in order to form a competent actor, able to assist in dialogue, consultations and negotiations aimed at achieving integrated shared water resources management.

Publications

- (i) *Instruction manual for development of the institutional and legal framework necessary in order to achieve integrated shared water resource management at the country level in the ESCWA region*

The manual aims to provide member countries with instructions on how to develop the institutional and legal frameworks necessary for the management of the water resource sector. It includes proposals on the required institutional structures and legislative amendments, as well as the steps needed to implement those proposals, including the establishment of the appropriate legal framework for enactment in accordance with the needs and particularities of each country in the region.

- (ii) *The environment in the transboundary context in the ESCWA region: situation and recommendations*¹

This study is the first of its kind, because it puts environmental issues in the ESCWA region into a transboundary context. Its objective is to review the management policies adopted by member countries and consider their effectiveness in the context of the regional and international conventions in force. The study contains recommendations that highlight the importance of formulating a regional strategic structure and appropriate implementation mechanism; cooperating in the area of shared and transboundary environmental management and accession to the pertinent conventions; enhancing regional understanding; and encouraging the settlement of conflicts in order to achieve the sustainable management of shared natural resources.

¹ E/ESCWA/SDPD/2005/5.

Projects

- (i) *Capacity-building project to achieve the sustainable use, management and protection of shared groundwater in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership region*

This field project aims to strengthen the capacities of institutions concerned with water resource management in the Mediterranean region to manage and protect common groundwater resource and to achieve sustainability in available water resource use. The project is related to MDGs and, in particular, Goal 7. ESCWA is implementing the project in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other regional and international organizations. In 2006, the following two workshops were organized as part of the project:

- (ii) *Workshop on Formulation of a Policy Framework to Support the Establishment of Mechanisms for Inter-State Cooperation on Shared Groundwater Aquifers*

The Workshop was held in Beirut in April 2006. It included presentation of a draft study on the formulation of a policy framework for the establishment of a cooperation mechanism in shared groundwater resource management. The Workshop put forward guidelines for developing tools for the sound management of renewable and non-renewable shared groundwater resources. It also made recommendations with regard to awareness-raising, the application of international standards in the sustainable management of shared groundwater resources, and strengthening the capacities of the countries in the region to cooperate in water sharing.

- (iii) *First Training Workshop on Groundwater Modelling and Data Analysis*

The workshop was held in Cairo in December 2006. It was organized by ESCWA in cooperation with the Groundwater Resource Institute in Cairo, and was attended by 12 trainees from Arab countries. The workshop contained material related to training, computer-assisted modelling, and the use of sophisticated techniques and systems in the management of groundwater.

- (b) *Energy for Sustainable Development Team*

Main activities

- (i) *Preparations for the meetings of the fourteenth and fifteenth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development*

In the biennium 2006-2007, the focus of Commission work is on four important issues, namely, energy for sustainable development, air pollution, climate change and industrial development. With Arab countries and in cooperation with the League of Arab States, ESCWA has contributed effectively to preparations for both sessions of the Commission.

During the fourteenth session, ESCWA organized a regional seminar to discuss the Arab regional report on progress made in the above-mentioned areas, which ESCWA prepared in coordination with the Joint Committee for Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR).

In the light of the outcomes of the fourteenth session, ESCWA proposed a policy package on those few issues for adoption by Arab countries at the fifteenth session of the Commission. The policy package was presented to JCEDAR at its eighth meeting in November 2006, where it was approved. It was decided to submit it to the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment.

- (ii) *The Third Middle East and North Africa Renewable Energy Conference*

The Conference was held in Cairo in June 2006, organized by ESCWA in collaboration with the Ministry of Electricity and Energy of Egypt and the United Nations Environment Programme-Regional Office for Western Asia, with the support of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation

and Nuclear Safety of Germany. The objective of the Conference, which was attended by experts from 20 countries and representatives of regional and international organizations, was to enhance cooperation between the countries of the Middle East and North Africa on the one hand, and the European Union countries on the other hand in order to disseminate renewable energy applications in the region, assess the current situation and define issues that should be tackled in the area. At the end of the conference, ministers and participants issued the Cairo Declaration, which urges countries to develop strategies and policies to enhance the participation of the energy sector and, in particular, renewable energy, in achieving sustainable development.

(iii) *Regional Workshop on the Clean Development Mechanism Project Document Preparation in ESCWA Member Countries*

The Workshop was held in Amman in December 2006. It was an opportunity for representatives of the member countries concerned in the preparation of Clean Development Mechanism projects to meet experts and specialists and prepare documents related to those projects.

(c) *Technology and Enterprise Development Team*

Major activities

(i) *Joint ESCWA/ILO project to create employment and increase income through the development of small agricultural businesses in South Lebanon*

As part of a project financed by ILO, ESCWA established a small farmers' cooperative, comprising women and young men, which cultivates thyme. Activities carried out in 2006 included equipping the project with a drip irrigation system; providing water and greenhouses to increase the number of plants; providing training and technical assistance in respect of farming, processing and packing methods in order to improve productivity and product quality; and organizing training sessions on food safety in cooperation with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Some 500 kg of dried thyme was produced in the first season, but most crops in Debel village, Bint Jbeil district, were burnt during the summer 2006 war.

Throughout and in the aftermath of the war, ESCWA monitored the needs of project participants. An assessment of the project, which was conducted after the war, revealed the resilience of the thyme plant and the eagerness of participants to rebuild the damaged parts of the project. Additional funds were accordingly provided for the rehabilitation of project infrastructure and dissemination lessons learnt from the model project to other villages in South Lebanon. Participants benefited from assistance in the area of marketing, including the design and printing of labels for the thyme packages, and production of a film about project activities.



Thyme cultivation in Bint Jbeil, South Lebanon



A thyme plant grown by the model project implemented in Bint Jbeil, South Lebanon

(ii) *Regional programme for capacity-building in trade and environment in the Arab region*

In 2006, ESCWA implemented a number of activities as a part of this programme with a view to identifying regional priorities in respect of trade and the environment. Activities implemented included the following:

a. A workshop in Sana'a in May 2006, which targeted members of the National Commission for Trade and Environment. The Commission was established with the technical support of ESCWA, which drafted two studies to support the programme of work of the Commission for 2006. The first study deals with the legislative framework of trade and environment in Yemen, while the second deals with the fishing sector and ways of improving its competitiveness and sustainability;



Members of the National Commission for Trade and Environment of Yemen and ESCWA consultants who contributed to its establishment

b. Three meetings on trade and environment were held in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic in December 2006. They aimed to enhance dialogue between representatives of the private and public sectors with regard to the liberalization of trade in environmental goods and services, compliance with standards that constitute non-customs barriers to trade, and the effect of industrial policies on small and medium-sized enterprises.

Commissioned by the technical secretariat of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, ESCWA undertook preparation of a paper on environmental considerations in trade, which was submitted to the Council at its eighteenth session, which was held in Algeria in December 2006. The Council adopted a resolution in which it commended ESCWA efforts and called for an extended meeting on trade and environment issues in the Arab region to be held in 2007.

The above-mentioned activities were carried out with funds provided by the interregional project of the United Nations Development Account on capacity-building in trade and environment issues. The website of the project is available at www.un-trade-environment.org. Further funds were provided by the SIA/EMFTA project, which ESCWA implements in cooperation with the University of Manchester and other partners. Project website: <http://www.sia-trade.org/emfta/ar/> or <http://www.sia-trade.org/emfta/en>.

2. The ESCWA Centre for Women

In 2006, despite the unstable security situation and the war launched against Lebanon, the ESCWA Centre for Women (ECW) was able to carry on its activities, which aim to empower women and achieve gender equality.

Publications

(i) *Discrimination against women*

ESCWA published a summary of the concluding observations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which had considered the periodic reports of 10 Arab countries; namely; Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen. By publishing the summary, ESCWA helped to clarify requirements for implementation of CEDAW and urge countries to withdraw their reservations to certain articles and, in particular, those related to family and nationality laws.

(ii) *Citizenship, gender and the role of non-governmental organizations*

ESCWA issued a study about Egypt which is of particular importance because it deals with three basic concerns related to the advancement of women, namely, citizenship, gender and the role of NGOs. Gender is an important factor with respect to citizenship, because of the chronic disparities between the access of men and women to rights and performance of responsibilities in all civil, political, social, economic, cultural and legal areas. The study is divided into two parts: part I covers the theoretical framework, while part II includes a field study, which is based on a questionnaire that targeted a selected sample of NGOs working in the areas of citizenship, human rights and the empowerment of women.

(iii) *Status of Arab women in the context of international instruments*

ESCWA submitted a paper on the status of Arab women in the context of international instruments to the meeting of the Arab Women Organization, which was held in Bahrain in November 2006.

Other activities

ESCWA actively assisted member countries in adopting gender-sensitive policies, elaborating national strategies to empower women, and establishing institutional frameworks for implementation. A number of activities were carried out in that regard, including training workshops; consultative services on the preparation of national reports on progress made in the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); capacity-building of national commissions and Government centres concerned with women's issues; strategic planning to formulate a shared vision of the work of national mechanisms and define clear targets that are based on specific work plans and programmes; raising awareness of the gender perspective and member country capacity-building to mainstream that perspective in national strategies and policies; and the political participation of women.

As part of the support provided to member countries in monitoring progress made in implementation of the Beirut Declaration on Arab Women Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace, issued in Beirut in July 2004, and in order to satisfy the needs of those countries in that regard, ESCWA prepared a questionnaire for member countries, with the aim of monitoring their efforts at the practical and strategic levels and the programmes they are preparing for the future. Further aims are to monitor and assess past achievements and give member countries the necessary incentives to devise a plan for proceeding with implementation of the Beirut Declaration in the future.

3. Globalization and Regional Integration Division

(a) *Regional Integration and Financing for Development Team*

Publications

(i) *Report on foreign direct investment inflows in the ESCWA region²*

The study is divided into two parts. Part I deals with the legislative framework that regulates foreign direct investment (FDI) activities in member countries. It includes an assessment of the investment climate, an overview of the major obstacles to FDI flows to member countries, and the major factors that investors take into consideration when they decide to invest. Part II contains FDI statistics and analyses FDI inflows in member countries during the period 2001-2005. ESCWA assisted eight member countries in building an FDI database. Those countries were Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Syrian Arab Republic, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

² E/ESCWA/GRID/2006/Technical Material.2.

(ii) *Country studies on the role of money markets in economic development in selected countries*

Those studies cover Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and the GCC countries. They deal with the role of money markets in mobilizing local savings and converting them to support economic development. Consideration was given to the major companies that are involved in those markets and the various sectors in which they invest. The studies also considered the major obstacles that face those markets and put forward a number of recommendations for overcoming those obstacles.

Meetings

(i) *Expert Group Meeting on the Role of Arab Capital Markets in the Economic Development of the ESCWA Member Countries*

The Meeting was held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, in September 2006. ESCWA organized the Meeting in collaboration with the Arab Planning Institute in Kuwait, the Securities and Commodities Authority in the United Arab Emirates and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The meeting aimed to facilitate the exchange of points of view on ways to strengthen the contribution of regional capital in enhancing financing for development, as well as reducing poverty and unemployment in Arab countries. It also aimed to examine the role of money markets in economic development in member countries, by analysing the outcomes of studies on that subject.

(ii) *Training session for collectors of FDI data*

ESCWA organized the session at the request of the State Planning Commission of the Syrian Arab Republic. The session was held in Damascus in March 2007, and involved the training of some 25 persons on ways of collecting and calculating FDI data in accordance with the internationally recognized standards.

(b) *Trade and WTO Issues Team*

Major activities

(i) *Expert Group Meeting on the Sixth WTO Ministerial Conference*

The Meeting was held in Beirut in April 2006. It was organized by ESCWA as part of the continuous assistance it extends to Arab countries in respect of multilateral trade system issues. Its objective was to consider the outcomes of the sixth WTO ministerial conference, which was held in Hong Kong in December 2005, and their repercussions on Arab member countries. The meeting was attended by 67 participants from 16 Arab countries, experts from regional and international organizations and representatives of chambers of trade and industry in Arab countries.

(ii) *Interregional partnership for promoting trade as an engine of growth through knowledge management and taking advantage of information and communication technology*

The project constitutes part of United Nations endeavours to build capacities in the area of trade facilitation, and is financed by the United Nations Development Account. The project was launched in early 2005, is implemented in cooperation with the other four United Nations regional commissions, and will continue until the end of 2007. The project is mainly concerned with trade facilitation, which is an item on the Doha Development Agenda. It aims to assist member countries in formulating trade facilitation objectives and strategies, and enhancing their competitiveness and negotiation capacities.

Set forth below are some of the activities that ESCWA carried out as part of the project:

a. *Regional seminar on trade facilitation for national negotiators*

The seminar was held in Beirut in June 2006. The aim was to assist Government negotiators from Arab countries in becoming familiar with various aspects of trade facilitation negotiations and prerequisites for trade facilitation at the national and international levels, and improving trade performance, thereby increasing economic growth levels. The ultimate goal has to increase the participation of those countries in the current multilateral round of WTO negotiations. The meeting was attended by 45 participants from 13 Arab countries and experts from international organizations.

b. *Regional seminar on Trade facilitation for small and medium-sized enterprises in the ESCWA region*

The seminar was held in Beirut in November 2006, with the aim of addressing the private sector on the above-mentioned matter and taking note of its major needs. A number of private sector representatives and private institution owners participated in the seminar, as well as Government representatives of a number of ministries and other public authorities from ESCWA member countries. The seminar was attended by 42 participants from 10 Arab countries, in addition to experts from international organizations.

c. *Contribution to the development of a compact disc for goal-oriented e-learning*

ESCWA developed the Arab version of a compact disc (CD) that contains learning material on trade facilitation tools for the international supply chain for workers in imports and exports. The disc contains data and models to which countries and individuals may refer when preparing customs data models, and other essential data for commercial transactions. ESCWA distributed some 1,000 CDs in every member country, to private and public sector parties concerned with trade facilitation and other interested parties.

d. *Study on developments in WTO negotiations between Doha and Hong Kong and beyond*

The study includes a brief overview of the progress made in negotiations on the basis of the Doha Development Agenda, and of the stages through which negotiations passed. Also included is an overview of the major outcomes of the ministerial conferences that were held between those of Doha and Hong Kong and the major achievements in areas of the Doha Development Round since it was launched in November 2001. The study also considers future prospects for that round, and the action that Arab countries could take in the forthcoming period.

(c) *Transport Team*

ESCWA carried out all the activities in its programme of work for 2006 in the field of transport.

Major activities

(i) *Plan of action for implementation of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq*

ESCWA has completed much of the plan of action for implementation of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq, which was adopted in 2004, in certain countries of the region, including Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. The implementation rate was very high in 2006, especially in Saudi Arabia, which will have implemented almost all the provisions of the Agreement by 2019, 13 years before the deadline. In December 2006, ESCWA and the Ministry of Transport of Yemen signed a cooperation agreement on the preparation of an economic feasibility study for the establishment of an international network of railways in Yemen. The study will cost some \$134,000, of which \$80,000 will be provided by the Yemeni Government, while the remaining cost will be borne by ESCWA.

(ii) *Capacity-building in developing land and land-sea transport links*

As part of the project coordinated by ESCWA and financed by the United Nations Development Account, which aims to build capacities in developing interregional land and land-sea transport links, ESCWA, in collaboration with the countries concerned, organized six national workshops on the facilitation of the international transport of goods in Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The workshops adopted several recommendations that were addressed to the relevant parties in the public and private sectors in the six countries, including the following: trade and transport facilitation should be considered part of the general trade policy of the country; policies related to transport facilitation should be implemented as one package, in coordination with all the parties concerned; national trade and transport facilitation committee in those countries should be fully established and activated in order to facilitate transport according to a comprehensive work plan to be applied in a harmonized, balanced, integrated and systematic manner.

(iii) *National trade and transport facilitation committees*

Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen have established national trade and transport facilitation committees guided by the relevant manual, which ESCWA prepared in 2003. Other countries, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Palestine and the United Arab Emirates, are taking the necessary steps to establish such national committees in the near future.

(iv) *Maritime transport*

As part of the development of the integrated transport system, the Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Transport Cooperation in the Arab Mashreq was ratified in February 2006 by the Syrian Arab Republic and by Saudi Arabia in June 2006. The Memorandum entered into force in September 2006.

(v) *Road Safety*

As regional coordinator of preparations for the United Nations Global Road Safety Week, ESCWA, in collaboration with the World Health Organization and the Global Road Safety Partnership, organized a workshop to build national capacities to prepare for the first Global Road Safety Week, in December 2006. The workshop was attended by representatives of focal points from 13 countries in the region. This workshop aimed to build capacities in the use and application of the guidance manual on activities which are scheduled to be implemented during the above-mentioned Week, and to introduce the instruction manual on the establishment of national road safety committees. A further objective of the workshop was to reach an agreement on the activities that member countries will carry out jointly during that Week.

(vi) *Multimodal transport law*

As part of the preparations for a multimodal transport law in the countries of the ESCWA region, a draft multimodal international transport law was prepared in Jordan and discussed with the relevant parties at a national workshop, which was held in Amman in March 2006. During the workshop, ESCWA made a detailed presentation on the draft law, and an exhaustive discussion was held on its various clauses. The Ministry of Transport of Jordan then established a small national committee to review the draft. ESCWA is currently reviewing the observations and preparing the second draft of the law for discussion with that committee, before Jordan adopts the final version and promulgates the law.

In appreciation of ESCWA's role in achieving regional integration in the area of transport, the Council of Arab Ministers of Transport, at its nineteenth session, held in November 2006, adopted a resolution, pursuant to which the secretariat of the League of Arab States asked ESCWA to cooperate in preparing detailed terms of reference for studying completion of land links by road and rail between Arab countries. ESCWA agreed to that request.

4. Economic Analysis Division

In 2006, the activities of the Division involved increased partnership between ESCWA, the regional parties concerned, United Nations organizations and the League of Arab States. That participatory approach was adopted in order to permit the regional parties concerned to express their views on macroeconomic, economic and social issues.

Major activities

(i) *Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in the ESCWA region: the Damascus Declaration*

ESCWA adopted the Damascus Declaration on achievement of MDGs in the ESCWA region at its twenty-third session, which was held in Damascus in May 2005. The Declaration was a reaffirmation of the follow-up by ESCWA in that regard. It stressed the importance of economic growth, poverty alleviation, unemployment reduction and social inclusion, and the need for coordination and cooperation at the regional level in order to achieve the Goals.

Against that background, *The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2005* report was issued. In light of the continuing instability in the region and its adverse impact on the achievement of MDGs, especially in Iraq and Palestine, the report highlighted the progress made towards achieving MDGs in those two areas of conflict. The report also includes a policy framework, which is oriented towards achieving the Goals in Arab countries, particularly with regard to developing comprehensive and integrated economic and social development strategies, in addition to pro-poor and pro-women policies that are in line with the Goals at the local, national and regional levels.

(ii) *Economic Trends and Impacts, issue No. 4: Foreign Aid and Development in the Arab Region*³

The study deals with the role of foreign aid in the development of the region over the past three decades, and focuses mainly on Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Yemen.

It provides policymakers in Governments and international development organizations with an in-depth macroeconomic analysis of the major characteristics and trends of foreign aid flows to the Arab region and their effects on economic growth and indicators. It also defines a number of issues that must be dealt with in order to make aid flows to the Arab region more effective in reducing poverty and enhancing development. The effect of aid on economic growth and social indicators is estimated through the sequential analysis of low and middle-income countries, an analysis which encompasses a number of new approaches.

In general, aid flows fluctuated greatly between 1970 and 2004, as the economic conditions and geopolitical considerations of the major donor countries fluctuated. Notwithstanding an increase in aid in recent years, Official Development Aid (ODA) flows to Arab countries remained below the levels they had reached in the 1970s and 1980s.

On the basis of the empirical analysis, a number of recommendations may be made, of which the most important is that increased aid flows to the Arab region could have a positive impact on economic growth and health indicators in recipient countries. In view of the significant fluctuation in the rates of aid extended to the region in general and ESCWA member countries in particular, steadier financial flows are desirable, especially to those countries of the region that rely on foreign aid. It is important that Arab and non-Arab donors grant a bigger share of ODA to the least-developed countries in the region, which cannot achieve MDGs by 2015. Some regional donors must therefore base their aid allocation decisions on developmental rather than geopolitical considerations.

³ E/ESCWA/EAD/2006/1.

The perceptible decrease in aid to economic sectors raises doubt as to the capacity of the recipient countries to reinforce their economic bases and improve their growth rates in the medium-and long-term. The situation becomes more serious in the Arab countries that suffer from high underemployment rates, especially among youth.

(iii) *Training session on theoretical developmental issues*

The session was held in June 2006 and focused on the role of the State in development; the Washington Consensus; development of industry in the developing world; and development alternatives. During session, case studies were presented on a number of developing countries in south-east Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the strategies that those countries had adopted, the benefits they had gained and the economic and social costs they had incurred. The session concluded with discussions on lessons learnt from those examples, with a view to formulating an appropriate developmental strategy for ESCWA member countries.

(iv) *International Comparison Program*

The sixth International Comparison Program (ICP)-Western Asia workshop was held in April 2006 and was attended by 40 member country participants. The objective of the workshop was to bring together the task forces of the 11 national programmes, the ICP-Western Asia Executive Board and the World Bank, in order to prepare consumer goods data for the third quarter of 2005 and to discuss national accounts statistics.

A workshop was held at the same time for member country specialists in conducting surveys of installation goods and equipment prices in order to discuss how to price construction materials and equipment according to specific characteristics and norms, and start the process of gathering data for non-consumer goods.

5. *The Unit for Emerging and Conflict Related Issues*

Major activities

In addition to contributing to reconstruction and regeneration efforts in Lebanon after the war, the Unit undertook a number of activities.

Assistance to Iraq

In 2006, ESCWA continued its activities and initiatives in support of Iraq. In addition to projects that are currently being implemented, ESCWA began to implement the gender statistics development project in Iraq. By the end of 2006, ESCWA had been able to obtain foreign funding in excess of \$10 million to finance those projects and initiatives.

(i) *Capacity-building for Iraqi public institutions*

With the participation of UNDP, ESCWA organized a number of training sessions aimed at developing managerial skills in the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works of Iraq. More than 100 employees benefited from the seven sessions held in 2006. The training sessions included, inter alia, lectures and exercises in various management topics, including strategic planning, leadership methods, project management and task force management.

(ii) *Networking technology academies*

The project aims to establish local training academies in the universities of Baghdad, Mosul and Basra and Mansour University College, in addition to the regional academies accredited by CISCO Systems.

Those academies will offer training in different subjects, including IT basics and CISCO Networking Academy programs. Since the project began, forty five sessions have been held and more than 700 students trained. The project task force is making preparations for the training of 22 trainers in Beirut. That session was scheduled for 2006 and was postponed because of the war.

(iii) *Smart Communities Project*

The Smart Communities Project aims to build and strengthen the capacities of Iraqi society by introducing traditional and modern technologies to rural areas, and enable local community members and, in particular, marginalized youth and women, to find new job opportunities through establishing small enterprises. The project also aims to alleviate poverty and duplicate successful project experiences in other parts of Iraq. The project includes two major facilities, namely, a multipurpose technology centre and a dairy product manufacturing unit, in addition to auxiliary facilities for the treatment of drinking water and heating of water by solar energy.

Notwithstanding the difficulties that Iraq and Lebanon endured in 2006, the Unit carried out the following activities:

- a. Creation of two multipurpose technology community centres in Altun Kopri, northern Iraq, and Sayid Dikhil, southern Iraq, which are equipped with two Internet systems. More than 120 civil servants, students and teachers graduated in computer use basics, Microsoft programs, and Internet use basics;
- b. Creation of two units for the manufacture of dairy products in Dibbis, northern Iraq, and Sayid Dikhil, where buffalo milk is plentiful and consumption of locally-manufactured dairy products is high;
- c. Implementation, in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), of a training programme for 15 Iraqis in agri-food manufacturing basics and dairy products, principally with respect to proper nutrition;
- d. Launching of a vocational training and capacity-building programme in coordination and partnership with local and regional parties. Training includes such diverse areas as accounting, secretarial skills, languages, dairy product manufacturing, agricultural manufacturing skills and handicrafts;
- e. Design and establishment of a website for the project, which includes detailed information about the various project facilities and the training services it provides. The ECRI website is on the main ESCWA website;
- f. Design and establishment of a database for the demographic characteristics of the sites hosting those projects, their socio-economic conditions and educational and commercial public and private institutions, and NGOs;
- g. Implement the latest phases of the technology dissemination programme, which aims to transfer acquired expertise to other regions in Iraq, in order to spread the development benefits of such projects.

Palestine-related projects

Given the sustained deterioration of the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people caused by the continuing Israeli occupation, and worsening political and security conditions, ECRI seeks to support the rehabilitation and development process in the occupied Palestinian territory and monitor the repercussions of the occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

Development projects for the occupied Palestinian territory were formulated in collaboration with Palestinian local entities and with the participation of various Arab and international parties. Such projects include a special project to support the education sector in Palestine, and another in the health sector. The Unit is also in the process of preparing a project to support the agricultural sector and Palestinian agri-industries, which is to be implemented in collaboration with the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development.

Activities at the regional level

(i) Monitoring and analysis of regional developments and patterns

ESCWA has carried out activities aimed at monitoring regional trends and potential crises in the region, analysing those trends and examining their outcomes, in order to put forward proposals with regard to the measures, policies and programmes that could help to reduce causes of conflicts and limit the impact of instability.

(ii) Fighting ethnic and sectarian tensions in western Asia

ESCWA is preparing an integrated project aimed at reducing ethnic and sectarian tension in western Asia and the Arab region in general. Such tension has dangerous implications for the future and security of the region and its development. In that regard, the Unit uses the expertise of Arab and international intellectuals and activists to contribute to the development of the project, and organizes meetings to discuss the project, its dimensions and components. One such meeting was held in October 2006.

6. Information and Communication Technology Division

Development meetings and projects

(i) Workshop on ICT Policymaking in ESCWA Member Countries

The Workshop was held in Beirut in May 2006. It was organized by ESCWA with a view to enhancing cooperation between Arab countries in respect of ICT policies, strategies and laws; providing a framework and guidelines for the design and development of national strategies on ICT use, in order to achieve an information society and a knowledge-based economy; and suggesting practical mechanisms for the implementation of those strategies and assessment of their outcomes. The workshop endorsed a number of proposals, including the following: a preliminary network of decision-makers in the field of ICT should be established in order to facilitate the exchange through an e-forum of expertise and knowledge in policy making and application; best practices in ICT policymaking should be disseminated; and ICT indicators should be harmonized.

(ii) Expert Group Meeting on Open Source Software Solutions for the Public Sector

The meeting was held in Cairo in December 2006. ESCWA organized it in cooperation with Information and Communication Technology for Development in the Arab Region and UNESCO. The aim of the meeting was to design strategic trends, methodologies and mechanisms for the adoption of free and open source software solutions (FOSS), and apply and develop them in the public sector. Participants

considered the major challenges to FOSS in developing countries; best practices for their adoption in some developed and developing countries; and needs of the Arab region which FOSS could be used to address.

Participants established a network of experts and working groups, which use an electronic portal for communication and cooperation between partners in the Arab region, with a view to increasing Government proficiency in using FOSS; studying the possibility of using FOSS rather than commercial software; building capacity in FOSS use; and enhancing initiatives aimed at adapting successful experiences for the Arab region.

(iii) *Workshop on Capacity-Building for ICT Indicators*

The Workshop was held in Amman in December 2006, in collaboration with the Arab Regional Office of the International Telecommunications Union and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics. The Workshop considered the areas in which Arab countries have made progress towards collecting information society statistics and gathering data on ICT indicators and the digital divide. Consideration was also given to the best way of harmonizing basic ICT indicators in the Arab region with global indicators, and the need for Arab countries to develop their human and technical resources in order to collect the data related to such indicators.

(iv) *Regional initiative to enhance the use of new technology for employment creation and poverty alleviation*

The project includes the creation of multipurpose technology centres and smart clusters in selected countries. In implementing the project, ESCWA is cooperating with the Safadi Foundation and the Professional Computer Association of Lebanon. Three centres have been established in Tal Abbas and Mkyaybleh in the Akkar area of northern Lebanon.

Those multipurpose centres aim to disseminate technology-related knowledge in the community, end traditional and IT illiteracy, provide education services, and increase economic activity, using a number of traditional and modern techniques, including ICT. Services provided by the centres include basic computer training, training sessions in secretarial skills, accounting, languages and Internet use, web page design, hardware and software maintenance, e-trade and e-health.

With a view to meeting the needs of marginalized societies, ESCWA established smart clusters in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen which aim to provide solutions to a number of challenges that face disadvantaged areas. Productive projects in the food industry provide job opportunities for communities and increase the value-added of local agricultural products through the manufacturing process. In Qusaybe, in the southern Syrian Arab Republic, a project is being implemented in collaboration with such local partners as the Fund for Integrated Rural Development in the Syrian Arab Republic, the State Planning Commission and the Ministry of Communications and Technology. The project in Yemen includes a unit for the processing, manufacture and packaging of local Yemeni coffee products in Hadran, near Sana'a, and two multipurpose technology community centres in Hadran and Ta'izz.

(v) *Project to build knowledge networks through centres for marginalized communities*

Implementation of the knowledge network building project began in November 2006 with the establishment of ICT access centres in marginalized communities. The project, which lasts until 2009, is being jointly administered by the five United Nations regional commissions. Project activities aim to reinforce existing knowledge clusters in selected countries around the world: establish networks between them at the regional and international levels and subsequently with the access centres; and take advantage of the regional meetings scheduled in order to establish those networks and study means to interacting with and transfer expertise within other networks. The project also aims to disseminate knowledge about the principal areas of sustainable development, namely, employment, education, gender and health.

(vi) *The Professional Computer Association ICT academy project of Lebanon*

The project was launched jointly by the Professional Computer Association of Lebanon, ESCWA and a number of international companies, Government authorities, local and international NGOs, including the Union of Arab ICT Associations, Mercy Corps International, the Ministry of Telecommunications of Lebanon, UNESCO, and the Microsoft, Intel and CISCO companies. The project involves the establishment of 10 centres in various parts of Lebanon where free training sessions for all strata of the local community will be offered. The project aims to strengthen local ICT capacities, enable every citizen to take advantage of available job opportunities, and improve living standards. ESCWA sponsored the launching ceremony for the academy centre in Nabatiyeh in September 2006, as part of its efforts to reconstruct Lebanon. Academy management employs an operational methodology whereby centre management is transferred to the local partner, thereby ensuring the centre's sustainability.

Publications

(i) *Analysing ICT Policies and Strategies in the ESCWA Region*

The study reviews various types of ICT policy and strategy in the ESCWA region, and the issues that must be resolved in order to further develop the ICT sector in the region. The study examines the mechanism necessary to review announced strategies and means of implementation, and identifies the major issues, namely, resources available to implement strategies, analyse risk, and determine the indicators necessary in order to measure progress towards goals. The study was submitted for consideration at the Workshop on ICT Policymaking in May 2006.

(ii) *A pre-feasibility study on the establishment of the ESCWA technology centre for development⁴*

Given the situation in ESCWA member countries and the Arab region, ESCWA prepared a pre-feasibility study on the establishment of the ESCWA technology centre for development. In the study, ESCWA identified major issues related to the regional need to build the centre and put forward an implementation model and a number of organizational and financing strategies. The centre aims to build capacity in science, technology and innovation, in order to enhance efforts to achieve sustainable development and improve growth, competitiveness, economic diversification, job creation and poverty reduction, in addition to tackling gender equality issues.

(iii) *Report on issues related to information and communication technology indicators⁵*

The report concerns the progress made in respect of statistics for the measurement of ICT indicators in western Asia, and includes the major activities achieved, namely, establishment of a regional technical task force that comprises representatives of national statistical offices; identification of the statistical indicators necessary to measure progress in building the information society, definition standardization and definition of data necessary to measure such indicators.

7. Social Development Division

In 2006, ESCWA undertook a series of activities that dealt with the formulation of social policy and means of implementing and following it up; issues related to civil society participation in social policy; demographic, social and economic dimensions of social policy; and social policy in the city.

⁴ E/ESCWA/ICTD/2006/WP.1.

⁵ E/ESCWA/SCU/2006/IG.1/5 (Arabic only).

(a) *Social Policy Framework and Instruments Team*

Major activities

In addition to fruitful cooperation in implementing the Memorandum of Understanding with Bahrain, ESCWA carried out a variety of activities in this area.

(i) *The National Conference on Integrated Social Policy in Egypt*

The Conference was held in Cairo in February 2007 by the Ministry of Social Solidarity of Egypt and ESCWA. A model for integrated social policy formulation, based on a number of successful experiences was presented. It described the situation in Egypt, identified the assets and obstacles that must be closely examined and indicated ways of so controlling and regulating them as to serve the objectives of equality of opportunity and the provision of basic social services for all citizens on an equal footing. Representatives of various ministries, Government institutions, civil society, NGOs, United Nations organizations and agencies, experts and the media participated in the meeting.

(ii) *Completion of national reports on social policy in member countries*

The reports set out the status of the basic social services and requirements for their improvement, in addition to social policy formulation mechanisms, the financial and human resources dedicated thereto and requirements for their development. ESCWA has also prepared a report on issues related to social policy formulation and implementation. The report focuses on the concept of social policy, which is based on ensuring equality of opportunity and the provision of basic services for all citizens on an equal footing.

(b) *Social Policy and Participatory Development Team*

Major activities

(i) *Completion of the participatory capacity-building and research for community development programme*

In order to build the capacities of Governments and civil society organizations involved in local development and enable them to participate in development policy and management of the change and modernization process, ESCWA issued a manual on participatory research for community development. The manual provides useful supplementary capacity-building material for individuals and institutions involved in development, and provides a knowledge base for the choice of appropriate development policy. ESCWA also issued a trainer's manual for the Workshop on the Rehabilitation of Human Resources in Local Community Development, which constitutes technical reference material for the preparation and organization of workshops.

(ii) *Building human resource capacities in Yemen*

ESCWA held two national workshops to build the capacities of community development human resources in Sana'a and Aden in April and December 2006 respectively. The workshops were organized in coordination with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Local Administration of Yemen, and UNDP. Both workshops constituted an opportunity for participants to interact and increase their knowledge of development issues and conditions for and types of participation.

(iii) *Training projects in Saudi Arabia*

ESCWA completed a project which aimed to activate the work of women's charitable organizations as part of the second and final phase of the national capacity-building programme. The objective of the project

was to expand the number of women's associations benefiting from the training programme, and to make the benefits available in various geographical areas of the country. ESCWA also pursued the project aimed at empowering Saudi women to join the labour market by training female professional trainers. The goal is to prepare female professional trainers in rural and needy areas who represent various associations in a variety of geographical locations. It should be noted that the project is implemented with funding from Abdul Latif Jameel Co. Ltd. of Saudi Arabia.

Publications

- (i) Study on community development as a tool for formulating social policy at the local level. The study compares concepts relating to local development and social policy, and reviews obstacles to implementation. The study also considers the contribution of the local development approach in social policy formulation, based on ESCWA experience of implementing that approach;
 - (ii) Report on the ESCWA approach to community development programmes and projects;
 - (iii) Report on aid donors, the conditions attached to their support for local development projects and their organizational procedures. The report is a response to one of the obstacles to applying the expertise that participants in ESCWA programmes have gained;
 - (iv) An in-depth report on the outcomes of field research on traditional craft industries in Lebanon, which focuses on the practical aspects of those industries.
- (c) *Population and Social Policy Team*

Meetings and other projects

- (i) *International migration and development*

Conscious of the role of migration, its impact at the regional and international levels, and of the importance of the relationship between migration and development, ESCWA organized the Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region: Challenges and Opportunities, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The meeting was held in Beirut in May 2006; it included a discussion of the challenges raised and opportunities offered by international migration; and the feasibility of holding a regional dialogue in order to regulate and manage migration in the framework of regionally and internationally balanced economic and social development. ESCWA also organized a round-table session at the International Seminar on International Migration and Development, which was held in Italy in June 2006. The discussion considered major international migration-related issues, and the economic and social dimensions thereof in the Arab region. Also considered was the issue of migrant workers in general and immigrant labour to the Gulf region in particular, as well as international migration as an approach that contributes to the alleviation of social and economic disparities at the local and regional levels.

- (ii) *Integrating the demographic dimension into the development process*

ESCWA is cooperating with the United Nations Population Fund in the implementation of a project on integrating demographic transformation into the development process in the Arab region. The project aims to develop technical capacities to conduct demographic analysis and mobilize the efforts of decision-makers to integrate demographic issues into the planning process, in an attempt to assist Arab countries in preparing to take advantage and face the challenges of the demographic window opportunity.

(d) *Social Policy in the City Team*

Major activities

(i) *Good urban governance*

As part of regional follow-up to the international conferences held by the United Nations, and in implementation of the Habitat II Agenda and the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium, ESCWA adopted the priority issues in those areas in the region, in order to reinforce good urban governance practices, achieve urban development, tackle secure tenure issues, achieve a sustainable urban environment, and integrate all strata into society. The Regional Campaign on Secure Housing and Land Tenure and Good Urban Governance in the Countries of Western Asia was launched on the basis of three fundamentals, namely, enhancing partnerships, capacity-building and poverty reduction. In that regard, ESCWA prepared a study on the proposed general framework for the Campaign at the regional level. It also prepared a study on the media strategy aimed at supporting the work plan for the national initiative. ESCWA, in collaboration with the Arab Towns Organization, published a report on issues related to secure housing tenure and good urban governance in selected Arab towns, and a comparative analysis of housing and land tenure policies and good urban governance in selected countries in the ESCWA region.

(ii) *Urban observatory*

As part of the third session of the World Urban Forum, held in Vancouver, Canada, in June 2006, ESCWA organized a workshop on national and local urban observatories in the Arab countries. Participants included the national urban observatories of Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia, and the Global Urban Observatory of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, in addition to representatives of local, national, Arab and international institutions at the national and local levels, several NGOs, the private sector and the media.

(iii) *Urbanization and the changing character of the Arab city*⁶

ESCWA published a study on urbanization and the changing character of the Arab city, which considers the on-going developments in Arab cities caused by the pressure of urban migration, demographic growth, and general development-related, economic and social changes.

8. *Statistics Coordination Unit*

(a) *Regional session on statistics*

In November 2006, Amman hosted the first regional training of trainers session for the “Statistical Literacy and Capacity Building for MDG Monitoring at the Country Level” project. The session, which ESCWA held in cooperation with UNDP, was a regional initiative of the United Nations Development Group. Group activities assist in achieving MDGs at the country level by improving access to data and enhancing statistical capacity and knowledge.

The objective of the session was to train national task forces to monitor MDGs and make optimum use of the necessary data and indicators when formulating policies aimed at achieving those and other national development goals. The session was attended by participants from Jordan and Palestine, including representatives of national statistical offices and statistics users in Government services and civil society organizations.

ESCWA is the focal point for the project on statistical knowledge and capacity-building to monitor MDGs at the national level in the Arab region, which it implements in cooperation with UNDP and the Governments of the participating countries.

⁶ E/ESCWA/SDD/2005/1.

(b) *First National Workshop on Gender Statistics*

As part of the gender statistics development project in Iraq, ESCWA organized the Workshop in collaboration with the Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology of Iraq, under the aegis of the United Nations Development Group. The Workshop was held in Amman in December 2006, and was the first training workshop on developing the process of gathering, producing, disseminating and using gender statistics and indicators in Iraq.

Participants in the workshop included 24 persons involved in the production and use of statistics in various national statistics offices, the relevant ministries, academic circles, NGOs and the media.

Important issues that were presented at the workshop included the definition of gender issues and the identification, collection, analysis and presentation of data and indicators on those issues.

At the end of the Workshop, a list of priority gender issues was adopted, as well as a set of gender indicators related to measuring the topics in question. For further information, see <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/scu/events/1113Dec06.asp>.

(c) *Workshop on National Accounts*

ESCWA held a regional workshop on national accounts in Cairo in December 2006, in which participated experts from the United Nations Statistics Division, the International Monetary Fund and ESCWA, and representatives of national statistical offices and central banks in member countries. The objective of the workshop was to establish a regional forum to exchange points of view, practices and advise, and analyse current and future issues related to the application and updating in western Asia of the 1993 System of National Accounts (SNA).

The workshop focused on the theoretical and practical aspects of major issues and, in particular, amendments to 1993 SNA, ways of applying the System in the countries of the region, future challenges and quarterly national accounts. The workshop also included an overview of the expertise and experiences of member countries.

B. CONSULTANCY SERVICES AND COOPERATION ACTIVITIES

1. *Technical cooperation*

The technical cooperation activities and consultancy services provided by ESCWA are complementary to its development activities. Technical cooperation activities aim to enhance the inherent capacities of member countries. The Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Division (PPTCD) plans and monitors the regular activities of ESCWA and supervises extra-budgetary activities.

Technical cooperation activities are based on ESCWA's comparative advantages, namely:

- Regional perspective;
- Official Government status;
- Diversity of disciplines;
- Effective regional integration activities within the international context.

2. *Consultancy services*

Regional consultants provide member countries with the knowledge and expertise necessary to tackle sustainable development issues in various areas, including energy, statistics, national accounts, environment, science and technology, social policies, water resource management and WTO-related issues.

In 2006, ESCWA organized 128 consultancy missions, some 75 per cent of which were carried by full-time ESCWA consultants, while others were conducted by consultants who were commissioned to carry out specific tasks.

Those services benefited Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic (15 missions in each country), followed by Egypt, Jordan and Oman (13, 12 and 9 missions respectively). Most missions were ICT-related, while others concerned environmental, world trade and gender issues.

(a) *World trade*

Consultancy services in respect of world trade issues are an essential part of the technical cooperation programme services that ESCWA provides to member countries at their request. Member countries currently negotiating to join WTO, namely, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen, wish to prepare files on goods and services. Consultancy services were also provided to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, which is a non-ESCWA member Arab State, during the preparation of its WTO accession memorandum. The Syrian Arab Republic is interested in preparing and amending national legislation in order to bring it into line with obligations emanating from accession to WTO. Other countries are interested in consultancy services relating to the application and implementation of world trade agreements, and consideration and analysis of the negotiation topics on the Doha Development Agenda.

Training services in world trade topics ranked high among the services provided in 2006. More than one training programme was organized in collaboration with the Federation of GCC Chambers for Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, and training workshops were held on the settlement of trade disputes, the commitments of Saudi Arabia at accession to WTO and the issues of subsidy and dumping as means of protecting national production.

Areas in which technical aid was provided in 2006 include the preparation of studies on such specific issues as trade and the environment. ESCWA held two workshops in Damascus and Sana'a, and provided technical assistance on opening that issue during negotiations on accession to WTO.

ESCWA also provided a consultancy service to the League of Arab States, at its request, in the preparation of the preliminary list of environmental goods for submission to the ministers responsible for the environment.

Consultative Mission to the Sudan

In response to a request by the Government of the Sudan, which has observer status at ESCWA, the Commission provided that country with technical assistance in the organization and restructuring of the Ministry of Foreign Trade, thereby satisfying the requirement to build capacities with respect to negotiation and access to world markets, and raise awareness of WTO agreements and issues. The mission included a number of seminars on WTO agreements. Shortly after completion of the mission, ESCWA presented to the Sudanese Government the final report on restructuring requirements in the Ministry of Foreign Trade.

(b) *Management of environmental issues*

(i) *Preparation of the organizational structure of the Environmental Protection Authority of Yemen*

ESCWA provided technical support in the preparation of a strong organizational structure that enables the Environmental Protection Authority to carry out the tasks and responsibilities entrusted to it. The consultant took note of the responsibilities provided for in the Yemeni law on environmental protection, before classifying the various general departments, departments and technical sections within the administrative units. He performed a geographic demarcation, pursuant to which regional branches of the Environmental Protection Authority were created as executive arms in the various districts of Yemen, in

application of the principle of central planning and decentralized implementation to ensure the achievement of sustainable development.

(ii) *Mainstreaming of the environmental dimension into population policies in Saudi Arabia*

Saudi Arabia is undertaking a process of mainstreaming the environmental dimension into strategic planning in order to achieve sustainable development. To that end, ESCWA provided technical support to the Ministry of Economy and Planning in the preparation of a study on mainstreaming the environmental dimension into population policies. That support included a set of recommendations, that the Ministry adopted, in the areas of population distribution, architectural planning, industrial activities, clean fuel usage and three-phase treatment of sanitation water.

(iii) *Preparation of a plan to elaborate a strategy for the sustainable development of petroleum and mineral resources in the Syrian Arab Republic*

The Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources of the Syrian Arab Republic requested ESCWA to provide technical aid in the preparation of documents related to a strategy for the sustainable development of petroleum and mineral resources. The regional adviser for the environment made a field visit of six sites, during which he became familiar with the various activities undertaken in both sectors, before devising a work plan for elaboration of the strategy. The relevant Ministry teams are currently preparing the first document, in which the current situation is recorded.

(iv) *Preparation of a methodology for the mainstreaming of environmental considerations into strategic planning in Oman*

The Ministry of National Economy in Oman requested technical aid from ESCWA in the preparation of a methodology for the mainstreaming of environmental considerations into strategic planning, with a view to ensuring sustainable development. The regional adviser examined the documents related to development planning in Oman, and devised a methodology that includes establishing an institutional framework inside the Ministry to perform all tasks related to mainstreaming environmental considerations into strategic planning for various human activities, as part of the comprehensive sustainable development strategy adopted by Oman, known as "Vision 2020".

(c) *Information and communications technology*

- (i) In this area, ESCWA provided consultative services to the United Arab Emirates, in examining the current status of information and its dissemination, and reviewing earlier studies, in order to advance the work of the Federal National Council and suggest a plan of action for enhancing independent capacities and building knowledge-based partnerships, with the aim of preparing the necessary reports and information for Council members;
- (ii) The regional adviser submitted a plan of action to Oman, for implementation of a central statistical data and information bank project, using data warehousing technology;
- (iii) In collaboration with the Industrial Research Institute of Lebanon, ESCWA hosted in Beirut a number of staff from the Central Organization for Standardization and Quality Control of Iraq, with a view to devising a suitable plan of action for organizing the process of benefiting from ICT in the administrative and technical work of the Organization;
- (iv) ESCWA organized two workshops on the use of the ESCWA Statistical Information System (ESIS), which was developed by ESCWA for the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting of Qatar and the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates.

ADDITIONAL ICT SERVICES

	Country	Party	Nature of mission
1	Saudi Arabia	Ministry of Economy and Planning	Examine the current situation of IT in the education sector
2	Jordan	Ministry of Information and Communications Technology	Participate in the preparation of a national ICT research and development strategy
3	Jordan	Department of Statistics	Examine current ICT activity and suggest ways of building capacities and furthering work by expanding ICT use
4	Kuwait	Ministry of Justice	Exploratory visit to the legal informatics systems in Kuwait and the GCC legal and legislative information network
5	Iraq	Ministry of Education	Prepare documents for the establishment of a development centre and centres to train teachers in ICT tools
6	GCC Countries	The Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting	Devise a plan for industrial and ICT indicators
7	United Arab Emirates	Federal National Council	Harness ICT for parliamentary work

(d) *The empowerment of women*

In this area, ESCWA provided the following consultative services:

- (i) Assistance in the drafting of national reports on application of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), through training sessions that were of benefit to the National Commission for Lebanese Women, the Ministry of Social Affairs of Palestine and the Supreme Council for Women of Yemen;
- (ii) Capacity-building of national commissions and Government centres interested in women issues. That service was provided to the Jordanian National Commission for Women;
- (iii) Strategic planning and assisting in streamlining the common vision of the work of national mechanisms; and determination of certain clear perspectives that are based on specific working plans and programmes for application, which could be measured in the future and the efficiency of which could be assessed. The Jordanian National Commission for Women and the General Union of Women in the Syrian Arab Republic benefited from such services;
- (iv) Raising awareness of the gender perspective and building capacities to mainstream gender into national strategies, policies and programmes. The General Women's Union in the United Arab Emirates and the General Union of Women in the Syrian Arab Republic benefited from such services.

(e) *Sustainable development projects*

ESCWA plays the role of regional coordinator in preparing Arab countries to meet the requirements of sustainable development and producing their contributions to the reports and meetings of the Commission on Sustainable Development. ESCWA is the regional focal point in implementation of Commission recommendations.

In 2006, ESCWA inaugurated a project that aims to strengthen the capacities of member countries in tackling sustainable development priorities, with particular emphasis on energy issues. The project included a series of workshops, meetings and studies that dealt with the priorities identified by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourteenth and fifteenth sessions, namely, energy and sustainable development, air pollution, climate change and industrial development.

As part of that project, ESCWA is taking regional initiatives in the area of clean energy. Two workshops were organized on that issue in Jordan. The first dealt with the energy efficiency labeling of domestic appliances, while the aim of the second was to train civil servants in the fundamental principles of clean development mechanisms. A set of recommendations were made concerning the design and use of such mechanisms.

(f) *Consultative services in the field of energy*

(i) United Arab Emirates: At the request of the Ministry of Energy, ESCWA organized a consultative mission in February 2006, during which a discussion was held on requirements for developing the legislative and institutional structures of the sector and, in particular, a draft energy law, the establishment of a supreme council for electricity and water, and a feasibility study for the establishment of a national renewable energy research centre. ESCWA commissioned a consultant to prepare a proposal on the required legislation;

(ii) Yemen: The Ministry of Electricity/Public Electricity Corporation of Yemen asked ESCWA for assistance in establishing a general framework for the energy consumption optimization programme in Yemeni residential, commercial and industrial sectors, and in devising a plan to build Yemeni national capacities to implement that programme. The mission was carried out by the electrical power consultant in November 2006.

(g) *Consultancy services provided at the request of member countries on issues related to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation*

At the request of the Ministry of Agriculture of Jordan, the Chief of the Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Team undertook a consultative mission to Jordan which included an assessment of the needs to build Jordanian capacities in evaluating the phenomenon of land deterioration and how to avoid it. At the end of the mission, a set of recommendations were made, which will be part of an efficient plan to build the capacities necessary to end land deterioration. During the visit, it was agreed that in 2007, the Team Chief should coordinate a number of activities in Amman aimed at building capacities in land deterioration evaluation. The Ministry evaluated the mission highly, and it was recommended that similar missions should be organized in the future.

3. Ensuring quality in technical cooperation

ESCWA conducts regular assessments of its activities through questionnaires, field evaluations, interviews and other service delivery quality-control mechanisms.

In 2006, 82 questionnaires were distributed to member countries and organizations that had benefited from consultancy services in 2005. The response rate was 70 per cent. More than 85 per cent considered that the services were good in terms of timing, quantity and quality, while 90 per cent considered that the recommendations submitted by the consultants were adequate, applicable, and could be exploited. Most replies indicated that the regional advisers had directly or indirectly contributed to the improvement of the work of those with whom they were in contact. Beneficiaries stated that the consultative services had one or more of the following benefits:

- Appropriate strategies and efficient work plans were devised;
- Current procedures and/or organizational structures were improved;
- Useful new projects were initiated;
- Specific activities were implemented and/or accurately assessed.

Replies indicated that the services offered by ESCWA were useful. Training sessions and technical support were considered more useful, followed by policy recommendations, project definition and project preparation and implementation. Some 72 per cent of replies stated that the beneficiaries had developed good to very good working ties with the regional advisers and with ESCWA staff in general.

Responses also indicated that it would be useful for ESCWA to take the following issues into consideration in future technical services:

- The establishment of a database of regional consultants;
- Direct follow-up on the recommendations made by consultancy missions;
- Increased number and duration of consultative missions;
- Involvement of a greater number of national experts in consultative missions;
- Provision of regular monitoring and assessment services;
- Extension of the scope of the dissemination of information related to ESCWA programmes and activities;
- Increased number of training workshops for ministries and other government bodies;
- An increased number of regional meetings for the exchange of expertise and knowledge between member countries;
- Arrangements for exchange and cooperation programmes between member countries;
- Dissemination of achievements and lessons learnt in a given country.

VI. ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

A. THE BUDGET AND FINANCE SECTION

The Section prepares the regular ESCWA budget and undertakes the financial administration of extrabudgetary activities. The Section also administers financial issues related to general services shared with other United Nations agencies using United Nations House. The section prepared a memorandum of understanding with those agencies, which includes the costs, inter alia, of using United Nations House, security, medical services, procurement and cleaning.

Throughout the war waged by Israel against Lebanon in summer 2006, the Section continued to carry out its duties at a temporary office that was set up in Vienna, and with a reduced number of essential staff who continued to work in Beirut.

B. CENTRAL SUPPORT SERVICES SECTION

In coordination with the Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District (Solidere), which owns the building, the Section played a major role in carrying out necessary repairs to the damage caused to United Nations House during the war. The building was fully operational when staff returned from evacuation. The Section continued to carry out all its duties throughout the war, including contacts with headquarters in New York. The Section worked with the security section in implementing the projects necessary to enhance the required security standards, including reinforcing the iron bars that protect the external parts of the building, reinforcing emergency passages and exits, and reinforcing barriers at vehicle entrances and exits. In addition, elevators connected to the parking levels were improved and enabled to reach the ground floor rather than stopping at the mezzanine level, in order to facilitate movement between the building entrance and conference service floors and rooms.

In coordination with representatives of the host country and with the participation of the security section, the Central Support Services Section has conducted a field survey of a number of buildings in Lebanon to which ESCWA could relocate temporarily or permanently as necessary, assessing their compliance with security and safety requirements.

C. THE CONFERENCE SERVICES SECTION

The Section provides organizational and administrative support to ESCWA intergovernmental and international meetings and expert group meetings, seminars and workshops. In 2006, the section served five intergovernmental meetings, five expert group meetings and thirty-two seminars and workshops. It coordinated services for more than 40 activities conducted by other United Nations agencies located in United Nations House. The Section has already issued all publications scheduled for 2006 in both Arabic and English.

D. THE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT SECTION

2006 was a year full of challenges for this Section in particular, because of the repercussions of the Israeli war on Lebanon and the urgent evacuation that ESCWA organized for a significant number of its staff.

In a climate of insecurity and political tension and an almost total suspension of work, the Section continued to care for staff safety through a group of essential staff who continued work in Beirut, in cooperation with a temporary office that was established in Vienna. All Section staff and, in particular, local staff demonstrated exceptional motivation, and achieved all the required tasks with good morale and obvious professional commitment. During the necessary evacuation, the Section employed the kind assistance of a number of United Nations offices throughout the world and, in particular, United Nations headquarters in

New York and Vienna and peacekeeping missions departments, in order to provide services for evacuated ESCWA staff.

E. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY UNIT

The Unit achieved many of the tasks it was requested to carry out during the various periods of disruption that were caused by the war, and the preceding and subsequent political and security upheavals. Services provided by the Unit include:

- Linking the United Nations building in Beirut to the services that were necessary for ESCWA in Vienna;
- Restoring full computer service to all staff after the evacuation;
- Establishing a site in Vienna to conserve information in case of emergency, in which all ESCWA electronic files were saved;
- Administering 250 voice or teleconferencing sessions for conferences that were organized by ESCWA.

VII. INFORMATION AND MEDIA ACTIVITIES

The ESCWA Information Service works in accordance with its programme of work and the strategy established in 2001 in major areas, including the following:

- To provide coverage for Commission activities, in the light of its strategic objectives, including the functions of the Executive Secretary, meetings and conferences, consultative services, field projects, studies and reports. Media coverage was provided to 83 events in 2006;
- To organize strategic media activities by using simplified media tools;
- To support the promotion of the United Nations work and focus on the priorities of its programme of work;
- To issue the weekly bulletin in Arabic and English, and distribute it to more than 2,500 individuals, as well as Government institutions and NGOs;
- To produce simplified visual media material in Arabic and English. In 2006, such material included the information folder that was updated and distributed at the twenty-fourth ESCWA session, which included three booklets entitled “ESCWA: an overview”, “Technical cooperation activities at ESCWA” and “ESCWA Trust Fund for regional activities”, eight books on the achievements of the technical departments in 2005, a booklet entitled “Together for Arab Youth, a concert for the stars of Star Academy”, and a booklet on the Memorandum of Understanding on maritime transport cooperation in the Arab Mashreq.
- To produce audio-visual media material and broadcast it on television in Lebanon and the region;
- To organize an exhibition in 2006 as a side event during the twenty-fourth ESCWA session. The exhibition included ESCWA publications from the previous few years, and posters and booklets on ESCWA and its various activities and projects;
- To organize a concert for the students of Star Academy 2006, as a side event during the twenty-fourth session, entitled: “Together for Arab Youth”. The concert was in keeping with the slogan of the session, namely, “Facing youth unemployment in the ESCWA region”.

During the war against Lebanon

During the evacuation of United Nations staff from Beirut because of the war on Lebanon in July 2006, the Information Service that was divided between Beirut and Cairo continued to issue statements and articles on the latest developments and meetings held outside the host country and the work which staff continued to perform from their places of residence.

Public relations

In addition to media activities that shed further light on the work of ESCWA, the activities of the Executive Secretary and public relations contributed to the dissemination of information about the work of the Commission. The visits paid by certain personalities to ESCWA were more than mere protocol, and constituted opportunities to explain the work of the Commission and strengthen cooperation ties with Government and NGOs. The visits that the Executive Secretary was invited to undertake greatly increased communications with ESCWA, in that the secretariat was able to take advantage of Arab media personalities in order to spread information about ESCWA.

ESCWA in Lebanon and the region

By monitoring the activities of ESCWA and the interest of the Lebanese and Arab press in the Commission, statistics prepared by the information service at the request of the secretariat show that the Commission constituted an object of interest in the Lebanese and Arab press in 2006. The activities of the Executive Secretary were also well covered in the Lebanese and Arab press. Coverage in the Lebanese and Arab media of ESCWA activities that took place at and in front of Commission headquarters, related to the studies that ESCWA carried out on the region and other activities was also excellent.

In 2006, the secretariat produced three short feature films on the assistance that ESCWA provides to Iraq which were broadcast on Lebanese and Arab satellite television channels. Ten documentary films were also produced, namely, "the mobile electronic school", "ESCWA task force for Iraq"; "The Iraqi university network"; "Training in managerial skills in Iraq"; "Preparatory Arab meeting for the World Summit for the Information Society in Western Asia"; "Integrated social policies in the Arab region"; "ESCWA and regional integration to 2010"; "ESCWA in 2005"; "In solidarity with South Lebanon"; and "The Star Academy concert".