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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION****TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

Activities funded by the United Nations Development Account

Summary

This report provides an overview of the technical cooperation activities carried out in 2006-2007 by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) that were funded by the United Nations Development Account (DA). All activities covered by the programme and results achieved are highlighted in the report on the financial status of the Commission E/ESCWA/25/5(Part V).

This document highlights the major DA-funded activities and summarizes lessons learned. The aim is to note the outcome of activities carried out in response to member country requests, in line with ESCWA areas of expertise, work programme and expected accomplishments.

Good practices and lessons learned from implementation of DA-funded activities are discussed with a view to strengthening knowledge sharing and collaborative work between ESCWA and member countries and between member countries themselves.

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Introduction

1. The Development Account (DA) was introduced into the United Nations programme budget pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/15 of 29 October 1999. The Account is a special, multi-year account designed to supplement development activities and analytical and normative work on the basis of the priority objectives of the ESCWA strategic framework.
2. Of particular interest to DA are projects that involve the following capacities: (a) ability to demonstrate the benefits accruing from capacity-building; (b) ability to utilize the technical, human and other resources available in developing countries; (c) ability to manifest a multiplier effect coupled with capacity-building in developing countries; (d) ability to promote both intra- and interregional economic and technical cooperation between developing countries; (e) ability to initiate self-sustaining processes that manifest synergies with other development interventions; and (f) ability to implement approved activities within four years.
3. DA is monitored by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) under the supervision of the Under-Secretary-General of that Department, who functions as the DA Programme Manager. Overall guidance on its use, however, is provided by the General Assembly. In addition to the criteria set by that body, projects are usually implemented in conformity with a biennium-specific theme, referred to in this context as a tranche.
4. Participation of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in DA began in the 2001-2002 biennium or second tranche. At that time DESA, as lead agency, formed a partnership with ESCWA and the other regional commissions which focused on the promotion of capacity-building in water management and investment in the water sector.
5. The 2006-2007 biennium represents the fifth tranche, the theme of which has been "Supporting progress towards the internationally agreed development goals through knowledge-management, networking and partnerships". In the 2006-2007 biennium, there has been increased emphasis on the selection and promotion of multiregional and interregional projects, in accordance with regional commission efforts to collaborate and coordinate on issues of common interest and increase/enhance synergies between the various entities of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs.
6. Since its initial involvement, ESCWA has increased its participation in DA-funded projects. In the 2006-2007 biennium, ESCWA was involved in 11 such projects, six of which were carried over from the fourth tranche (2004-2005), while the remainder were initiated in the fifth tranche. During each of those tranches, ESCWA served as the lead agency for three projects with total allotted funds in the order of \$1,970,000 and \$2,032,000 for the fourth and fifth tranches respectively. For the current tranche (2008-2009 biennium), ESCWA has received \$506,000 to cover the only approved ESCWA-implemented project. A further description of the 11 DA-funded projects that are implemented solely or jointly by ESCWA is presented in the section below. Projects concentrated on the following four subprogrammes: 1. Integrated policies for the management of regional resources for sustainable development; 4. Regional integration and responding to globalization; 5. Information and communications technology for regional integration; and 6. Comparable statistics for improved planning and decision-making.¹

¹ See E/ESCWA/25/6(Part III) for revised subprogrammes.

I. PROJECTS BY SUBPROGRAMME

SUBPROGRAMME 1. INTEGRATED POLICIES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF REGIONAL RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

7. Under this subprogramme, ESCWA undertook one project, "Capacity-building for sustainable utilization, management and protection of internationally shared groundwater in the Mediterranean region" (fourth tranche).

8. Increased emphasis is being placed on the role of internationally shared aquifers in meeting growing water demand in the ESCWA region, given the fact that as much as 80 per cent of water resources in the Mediterranean region are shared, with groundwater constituting more than 60 per cent of total available freshwater resources. There is increased competition for those fragile resources. Cooperative arrangements to jointly develop, manage and protect shared aquifers are therefore essential, not only in order to avoid conflict but also to optimize utilization and achieve water security. ESCWA has been involved in various aspects of inter-State cooperation in the management of shared aquifers, and is planning to introduce a framework convention for groundwater management in the Western Asia region in the context of above-mentioned project.

9. The objective of the project is to strengthen the capacity of water management institutions in the ESCWA region to implement sustainable forms of utilization, management and protection of internationally shared groundwater resources, promote water sustainability and increase the availability of water for drinking and food production, thus contributing to the fulfillment of Millennium Development Goals concerning access to safe drinking water and poverty and hunger eradication.

10. In the 2006-2007 biennium, the project achieved the following:

(a) Increased awareness and application by Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (MEDA) countries of the international norms in the technical, legal, institutional, social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable management of shared aquifers;

(b) Strengthened capability of MEDA countries to engage in inter-State cooperation over shared aquifers;

(c) Know-how transferred and exchanged on various shared aquifer management issues, the establishment of mechanisms for inter-State cooperation over shared aquifers and the management of data on shared aquifers;

(d) Strengthened capability of member countries to plan and manage their national and international water resources, by using the tools developed by the project, including revised water visions/forecasts and the database on regional groundwater availability, uses and demands in the MEDA region;

(e) Demonstration of the value and use of the guidelines and policy framework in two case studies, one in the Eastern and one in the Western MEDA region;

(f) Transfer and exchange of know-how on modelling, data analysis and protection of shared aquifers.

11. In follow-up to the implementation of the project, the following activities were carried out during the 2006-2007 biennium:

(a) The study "Policy Framework for Supporting the Establishment of Mechanisms for Inter-State Cooperation on Shared Groundwater Aquifers in the MEDA Region" was completed and discussed with stakeholders from MEDA member States and with partner organizations. Stakeholders were very interested in such a framework;

(b) The Workshop on “Formulation of a policy framework to support the establishment of mechanisms for inter-State cooperation on shared groundwater aquifers in the Mediterranean region” was held in Beirut on 24 and 25 April 2006 in order to review and discuss the draft policy framework;

(c) A new partnership was established between ESCWA and the Research Institute for Groundwater in Egypt. The two organizations agreed to jointly organize two training seminars on modeling and data analysis and on protection of shared aquifers at the Regional Centre for Training and Water Studies in Cairo, with the aim of strengthening regional capacity for shared aquifer management;

(d) A training seminar on groundwater modeling and data analysis took place from 2 to 7 December 2006 at the Regional Centre for Training and Water Studies in Cairo. The seminar aimed to strengthen the capacity of targeted beneficiaries to plan and manage groundwater resources.

SUBPROGRAMME 4. REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND RESPONDING TO GLOBALIZATION

12. As part of this subprogramme, ESCWA continued the execution of activities of a project carried over from the third tranche, entitled, “Capacity-building in developing interregional land and land-cum-sea transport linkages”. This project was formulated as a direct response to the ongoing processes of globalization and liberalization of national economies, which have greatly enhanced the scope for intraregional and interregional trade and tourism, albeit inadequate transport infrastructure and services often make it difficult for developing countries to match growth in that field. In order to address such constraints, regional commissions are initiating actions to promote intraregional and interregional land and land-cum-sea transport linkages. It was agreed that common tools would be developed for the assessment and monitoring of current international transport policies, including transport planning methodologies, coordination and integration of transport planning within regional development strategies and harmonization of transport conditions.

13. During the 2006-2007 biennium, the main objectives of the project were the following:

(a) To assist the member countries of ESCWA and the other regional commissions in strengthening national capacities to develop interregional land and land-cum-sea transport linkages;

(b) To promote interregional cooperation to facilitate interregional trade and tourism.

14. The expected accomplishments achieved as part of the project included the following:

(a) Enabling countries to identify potential interregional transport linkages and their expected impact on regional and economic development;

(b) Strengthening the capacities of national officials in developing countries with respect to the identification of the physical and non-physical impediments to the movements of goods and passengers by road and rail, commercialization, privatization, inland container depot development, land border crossing practices and formalities, seaport operations, electronic data interchange applications and financing for road maintenance;

(c) Operationalizing an interregional network of transport linkages.

SUBPROGRAMME 5. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION

15. As part of this subprogramme, ESCWA undertook the following two projects:

(a) Promoting new technologies for employment and poverty alleviation in ESCWA member countries (carried over from the fourth tranche);

(b) Knowledge networks using information and communications technology (ICT) access points in disadvantaged communities (fifth tranche).

16. The first of those two projects was a direct response to the need to integrate member country economies into the emerging global knowledge-based economy. Knowledge-based economies constitute an urgent priority in the ESCWA region. The acquisition and dissemination of new technologies that give adequate attention to local, social and environmental conditions should have direct and indirect benefits for sustainable socio-economic development. New technologies, including ICT, have been shown to enhance enterprise competitiveness and productivity and sustain enterprise and national economic growth, enabling new employment opportunities to be generated and alleviating poverty. It has been demonstrated that higher productivity and improved competitiveness may be achieved on the basis of new technology inputs through a variety of means. Benefits include improved access to information and markets, reduced material inputs and operational costs, and improved environmental impact. Traditional industries and family-based production, as well as service activity in rural and urban communities, can benefit from new technologies, including ICT, in many other ways. Thus, ICT could be used to combat illiteracy and disseminate modern educational and vocational training, leading to enhanced employability and higher earning power for poor and marginalized populations. Contributions that may be made by other new technologies which reinforce and complement the benefits of ICT include new energy technologies, new materials technologies, new environmentally sound technologies with regard to water treatment, and modern biotechnologies, particularly those with immediate and tested applications in agricultural production. The Regional Agenda for Action, the aim of which is to promote new technologies in the ESCWA member and Arab countries, was endorsed in July 2002 during the Forum on Technology, Employment and Poverty Alleviation that was held at ESCWA headquarters.

17. The Agenda aims to increase employment opportunities and alleviate poverty in ESCWA member countries through capacity-building in new technologies, including ICT. The aim is being achieved through the formulation and implementation of national technology-based initiatives, the establishment of pilot facilities and networking arrangements and the dissemination of good practices for employment creation and poverty alleviation.

18. Project accomplishments during the 2006-2007 biennium included the following:

(a) Technology-based initiatives and related implementation strategies, in well-defined national and sectoral contexts, that may readily be adopted by member countries in order to facilitate the introduction and dissemination of selected new technologies to enhance enterprise competitiveness and productivity, create skills, generate employment opportunities and alleviate poverty;

(b) A technology-based pilot facility in selected member countries, to serve as a model for the implementation of new technologies in enterprise creation, competitiveness, productivity enhancement and poverty alleviation;

(c) Incubation schemes and associated facilities and services to provide "proof-of-concept" capabilities for the evaluation and promotion of selected new technologies and testing optimal modalities;

(d) Experience in employment creation and poverty alleviation on the basis of new technology inputs and subsequent ability to evaluate and refine implementation strategies, initiatives, pilot facility and incubation schemes;

(e) Dissemination of best practices and results achieved through relevant techno-economic studies and experiences for the benefit of member countries;

(f) A regional network of institutions, directly targeting the implementation of new technologies for employment, competitiveness, productivity and poverty alleviation, in order to sustain future research and development and technology assessment activities within the same domain.

19. The following activities were carried out as part of the project during the 2006-2007 biennium:

(a) In 2006, implementation of the Smart Community Project (SCP) entered its final stages. The Qusaybeh SCP in the Syrian Arab Republic is currently fully functional and the local community is benefiting from the variety of services and products it offers;

(b) In Yemen, the Taiz SCP is operating, and work to rehabilitate and equip the Hadran SCP is underway. Both SCPs in Yemen were launched at an official ceremony in March 2007;

(c) In parallel with the establishment of those pilot facilities, the question of enterprise support schemes, including infrastructure development, financial management and networking, was raised during workshops held in Sana'a in November 2006 and in Damascus in December 2006. Those workshops were followed by a study tour to knowledge stations in Jordan. Entrepreneurship and communication were among the topics discussed and analysed;

(d) The partnerships established in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the local and national Government proved to be very helpful in the execution of the SCP project. The partners helped to ensure smooth implementation of local activities and are committed to ensuring the sustainability of project outcomes;

(e) In 2006, a training workshop was conducted at the Agro-Food Processing Unit in Qusaybeh, Syrian Arab Republic, and eight operators were prepared for the production phase;

(f) As part of the establishment of the Hadran SCP, a workshop was held in Yemen in November 2006. The main focus of the workshop was on women's empowerment through the training and hiring of local women in the established facilities. The feedback obtained from the local community was very positive;

(g) A similar workshop was held in the Syrian Arab Republic in December 2006, which catered to partners from NGOs, concerned institutions and managers from multi-purpose technology community centres in Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Feedback showed that the workshop successfully addressed many of participants' needs.

20. Access to ICT applications and services and systematic knowledge sharing in disadvantaged communities and rural areas is either non-existent or very difficult. Individual and household access to ICTs remains out of the reach of such disadvantaged communities and, in particular, to women. The second project aims to empower poor and disadvantaged communities through the transformation of existing ICT access points in selected countries around the world into hubs of global knowledge networks. The project will increase the engagement in those networks of target beneficiaries and, in particular, women in disadvantaged communities, and provide access to knowledge on such key areas of sustainable development as employment, education, gender and health. In all its activities the project stresses the link between ICT and development, including achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular Goal 8. The involvement of both Governments and NGOs in the creation and establishment of community access points is essential for their sustainability.

21. As part of the second project, entitled "Knowledge networks through ICT access points in disadvantaged communities", the following major activities were undertaken:

(a) Each of the United Nations regional commissions reviewed and assessed ICT access points in different regions;

(b) An inaugural meeting was held with the regional commissions, which resulted in the development of a detailed implementation plan for transforming existing ICT access points into knowledge hubs and networking them;

(c) A global review of ICT access points was conducted on the basis of the aforementioned regional reviews;

(d) Regional stakeholder meetings were held in each of the five regions as part of the second phase of the project, which includes the implementation of regional and global networks.

SUBPROGRAMME 6. COMPARABLE STATISTICS FOR IMPROVED PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING

22. As part of this subprogramme, ESCWA undertook the following two activities during the 2006-2007 biennium:

(a) Strengthening national capacities in environment statistics, indicators and accounts in support of progress towards achieving the internationally agreed development goals in Western Asia and Latin America (fifth tranche);

(b) Strengthening the development of international merchandise trade statistics and e-commerce in ESCWA member countries (fifth tranche).

23. The aim of the first project was to enhance national capacities in respect of environmental statistics, indicators and accounts and enable them to integrate environmental concerns into economic development, thereby supporting progress towards environmental sustainability and related internationally agreed development goals. The project will contribute to that goal by the following:

(a) Strengthening the national capacities of ESCWA and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) member countries in the collection, dissemination and exchange of reliable, timely and comparable environment statistics, indicators and accounts;

(b) Taking advantage of an integrated environmental statistical system approach in support of progress towards national and internationally agreed development goals.

24. The project complements previous projects that have focused on environment statistics and economic development by addressing related issues within an integrated and coherent context, with specific emphasis on national priorities. It seeks to accomplish objectives by following a sectoral approach at regional, subregional and national levels, and to ensure benefits by building on interregional synergies in order to maximize cost-effectiveness and contribute to subregional, regional and interregional networking.

25. The project is in an early stage and, in the current phase, ESCWA has been mainly concerned with the following:

(a) Coordinating with partners: ESCWA carried out official consultation and coordination of project activities with its project partners and member countries: ministries of the environment and statistical departments nominated focal points with backgrounds in environmental statistics in order to ensure the sustainability of the project. Partnerships with the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Bank,

MEDSTAT,² and the Environment Section of the World Bank were established in order to coordinate project activities;

(b) Promoting and raising awareness of the project: ESCWA initiated the development of an ESCWA/ECLAC preliminary in-house website for the project entitled: Environment Statistics, Indicators and Accounts Project (ESIAP). The website aims to raise awareness and can be accessed through the following link: <http://web.escwa.un.org/esiap>. In future, the website will provide access to the docubase, the network and the database;

(c) Gathering assessments of environment statistics and accounts: A global assessment of environment statistics and accounts was conducted by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), and replies were received from five ESCWA member countries. While the principle of confidentiality was adopted by both UNSD and ESCWA, statistical offices were requested to allow for the sharing of replies;

(d) Preparations for the development of the network, the docubase and the methodological documents: A list of focal points nominated by ESCWA member countries and field experts who participated in ESCWA meetings and terms of reference for the development of the network were prepared and a consultant was identified. ESCWA reviewed existing documents on environment statistics and accounts on ESCWA and United Nations websites and libraries, as well as other publications in the field, to serve as a component of the docubase. Part one of the System of Environmental and Economic Accounting for Water (SEEAW) was translated for subsequent use during training sessions;

(e) Preparation for meetings and missions to countries.

26. The aim of the second project, entitled “Strengthening the development of international merchandise trade statistics and e-commerce in ESCWA member countries (fifth tranche)”, is to assist those countries in developing and improving their capacity to collect, process, analyse, utilize and disseminate trade data for the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of national plans and policies for international and regional trade negotiations. High-quality international merchandise trade statistics (IMTS) are necessary for the analysis of economic development at the national and international levels. Current merchandise trade data in the ESCWA region are not only inadequate but demonstrate poor coverage, non-compliance with IMTS recommendations, lack of confidentiality and insufficient treatment of e-commerce. That may be largely attributed to lack of coordination between the national statistical offices (NSOs), customs authorities and other institutions involved in the recording and processing of IMTS data.

27. Against that background, two major activities were conducted by ESCWA as part of the project in the 2006-2007 biennium, namely, a review of the status IMTS compilation and regional training workshops. The review of the status of IMTS compilation was a combined effort by ESCWA and its partners. The review process was coupled with evaluation, national compilation and dissemination practices.

(a) In reviewing the status of IMTS, ESCWA and UNSD met and discussed compilation practices with national compilers from NSOs, custom administrations, central banks, ministries of industry and commerce and free zones organizations. During those meetings awareness was raised of IMTS-related international recommendations. Issues of concern to ESCWA member countries include the compilation, processing and dissemination of IMTS. Those issues were discussed with national officials and it was decided to include the outcomes during the various capacity-building activities and training workshops;

(b) Regional training workshops. Because of the security situation in Beirut, not all the workshops were implemented as planned. The first workshop was held from 28 October to 2 November 2007 in Amman and jointly organized by ESCWA, UNSD, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (ASYCUDA) and MEDSTAT II. A total of 50 participants attended from all 13 ESCWA member countries, representing NSOs, customs administrations and central banks. The workshop

² MEDSTAT is the regional statistical cooperation programme between the European Union and 10 Mediterranean countries and territories, namely, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Turkey.

aimed to provide training on basic customs data collection, cooperation between customs and NSOs or other agencies responsible for the compilation of IMTS, concepts and definitions critical for data collection, use of technology and data validation procedures at customs and the statistical agencies. Some 85.4 per cent of participants expressed satisfaction with the workshop.

II. GOOD PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

28. DA projects which were executed by ESCWA in 2006-2007 demonstrated several successful practices and generated useful lessons. One such example was the “Promoting New Technologies for Employment and Poverty Alleviation in ESCWA Member Countries” project, which was concluded in July 2007. An external evaluator highlighted the significance of local community involvement, which mobilized resources in order to expand the project. Such community adoption of the project was viewed as highly instrumental in ensuring post-funding project sustainability.

29. The “Interregional Land and Land-cum-sea Transport Linkages” project demonstrated the importance of maintaining a clear timeline for the execution of project activities. The inability to meet deadlines affected implementation of planned activities and disbursement of allocated funds. As a result, a large percentage of the fund remained unused, and many activities planned by the regional commissions remained unfinished.

30. In order to enhance the implementation of DA projects, occasional revisions are recommended in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness as well as to address challenges and constraints. It is important that external independent evaluators should undertake such assessments.

31. DA projects offer ESCWA work and outreach opportunities at both the interregional and international levels, thereby expanding opportunities for South-South cooperation, the sharing of experiences and maintaining project ownership, all of which are facilitated by the use of various information technology tools. Such cooperation is, however, challenging, especially in the context of maintaining effective negotiations, collaboration and coordination between the various stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Annex

**DA-FUNDED PROJECTS IN WHICH ESCWA IS INVOLVED,
AS LEAD AGENCY OR PARTNER**

Lead agency	Project title	Start year	End year	Budget US\$	Status
Second tranche (2000-2001)					
DESA	Capacity-building to improve water management and accelerate investment in the water sector	2000	2005	1 650 000	Completed
Third tranche (2002-2003)					
ESCWA	Capacity-building in developing interregional land and land-cum-sea transport linkages	2002	2007	1 250 000	Completed
DESA	Strengthening statistical capacity in the region of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	2002	2004	820 000	Completed
ECE ^{a/}	Capacity-building in trade facilitation and electronic business in the Mediterranean	2002	2005	600 000	Completed
ESCWA	Networking of expertise on foreign direct investment in the countries of the ESCWA region	2002	2005	480 000	Completed
Fourth tranche (2004-2005)					
ESCAP ^{b/}	Capacity-building in trade and environment	2004	2006	1 025 000	Completed
ECLAC	Interregional partnership for promoting trade as an engine of growth through knowledge management and taking advantage of information and communications technology	2004	2006	920 000	Completed
DESA	Capacity-building in ICT policymaking	2004	2006	640 000	Completed
ESCWA	Promoting new technologies for employment and poverty alleviation in ESCWA member countries	2004	2006	360 000	Completed
ESCWA	Capacity-building for sustainable utilization, management and protection of internationally shared groundwater in the Mediterranean region	2004	2007	360 000	Completed
Fifth tranche (2006-2007)					
ESCWA	Knowledge networks through ICT access points in disadvantaged communities	2006	2008	970 000	Ongoing
ESCAP	Interregional cooperation to strengthen social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) process	2006	2007	855 000	Ongoing
ESCAP	Interregional cooperation on the measurement of the informal sector and informal employment	2006	2007	800 000	Ongoing
DESA	Capacity-building to integrate older persons in development goals and frameworks through implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing	2006	2008	510 000	Ongoing

Lead agency	Project title	Start year	End year	Budget US\$	Status
ESCWA	Strengthening the development of international merchandise trade statistics and e-commerce in ESCWA member countries	2006	2008	460 000	Ongoing
ECLAC	Strengthening the capacity of Latin American and Caribbean countries to achieve MDGs by sharing information about successful initiatives through a regional network	2006	2007	410 000	Ongoing
ECLAC	Implications of macroeconomic policy, external shocks and social protection systems for poverty, inequality and social vulnerability in Latin America and the Caribbean	2006	2007	410 000	Ongoing
ECA	Sustainable modernization of agriculture and rural transformation in Africa	2006	2008	410 000	Ongoing
Sixth tranche (2008-2009)					
ESCWA	Participatory human development in post-conflict countries	2008	2011	506 000	Starting
ECLAC	Enhancing capacities to eradicate violence against women through networking of local knowledge communities	2008	2011	736 000	Starting
ECE	Enhancing the capacity of developing countries to implement international standards for commercial agricultural products in order to improve their trade competitiveness	2008	2011	703 000	Starting
ECLAC	Strengthening national capacities to deal with international migration: maximizing development benefits and minimizing negative impact	2008	2011	1 193 000	Starting

a/ Economic Commission for Europe.

b/ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.
