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REGIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE
INTEGRATION OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT
FOR THE COUNTRIES OF THE ECWA REGION

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INTRODUCTION

Foundations of the Plan of Action

1. The Regional Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development in the ECWA Region has national, regional and international basis. At the national level, the basis is the realities of the social situation in each country of the region, as it endeavours to meet the challenges of development for its people. On the regional level, a common historical and cultural heritage unites the countries and peoples of the region as part of the Arab nation, with continuous efforts toward greater economic, social and cultural integration. This plan is also based on principles adopted by the United Nations and its various organizations in their declarations, charters and conferences aimed at promoting international co-operation.
2. National development plans in the countries of the region include various programmes and projects aimed at improving the quality of life of both men and women. In spite of the difficulties and obstacles impeding the processes of planning and implementation, national development planning in general, and the development of human resources in particular, have become established policy in the countries of the region.
3. As part of the Arab World, the region is witnessing increasing endeavours towards economic integration and co-operation, directly among its countries, through Arab regional organizations such as the League of Arab States and its specialized agencies, or through the economic and social development funds. With regard to the role of women in development, this integration and co-ordination are manifested in the numerous conferences and seminars held at the regional level. The Declaration of Social Action of the Arab States, issued in 1971, asserted, among its Fundamental Principles, that "Men and women are partners in

life and destiny and they must work together to build a life based on co-operation and equality". The national plans and development programmes of the countries of the region affirm that human beings, both men and women, are the ultimate objective of all development activities. Simultaneously, they are the creators of their own development and only with their effort can development be achieved. All countries in the region have realized the necessity for increasing the capacities of women, both as a goal for and a means of development, to enable them to play a more active role in the building of society as equals to men.

4. The global initiative of the United Nations was highlighted in the Mexico Conference, the adoption of the World Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development and the designation of the period 1976-1985 the United Nations Decade for Women Promoting Equality, Development and Peace. These actions have led to greater concern and efforts in this region to achieve the goals of the Decade. Vigorous efforts are needed to achieve equality between man and woman, to integrate women in development activities and to enhance the increasing role of women in the establishment of friendly relation and co-operation among nations.

5. With a view to facilitating these endeavours, representatives of members of the Economic Commission for Western Asia met at the invitation of the United Nations Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs and the Economic Commission for Western Asia to formulate a regional plan of action for the integration of women in development. The elements of the plan are based on the present conditions of women in this region, the assessment of their role in the sphere of development, and the definition of the policies, legislation and programmes that should be adopted to enable the Arab Women to participate effectively in contributing to the present and in shaping the future of their societies. Within an integrated framework of economic and social development, the Plan aims at the betterment of the Arab individual and the effective attainment of national goals. It is hoped that this plan will provide guidelines for national plans and programmes, for joint regional activities, and also for the types of

assistance that can be provided - at the request of governments - by the United Nations and international bodies to help achieve the goals of the Decade for Women in this region.

Some Indicators of Women's Social Situation in the Region

6. According to the 1975 censuses and estimates the general population of the countries of Western Asia totals approximately 86 million persons, around 58 per cent of the population of the entire Arab World. The average rate of population growth is around 3 per cent per year, with high rates of fertility. This rate of growth represents one of the major factors, at least in the short and medium term, which development planners have to take into consideration in setting objectives and in allocating resources. With the exception of the oil-producing states in the region where special conditions prevail as a result of labour migration, the demographic structure in the other countries of the region is characterized by the youthfulness of the population, since the proportion aged 15 years or less accounts for over 48 per cent of the total population.

7. In the region as a whole, the rate of the economically active population is very low, ranging from 22 per cent to 32 per cent of the total population with the female participation rate varying from 3.5 per cent to 18.5 per cent of the total population. In the non-agricultural sector, the average activity rate of women over the age of 15 does not exceed 6 per cent in the countries of the region. It fluctuates between 3.5 per cent and 15 per cent of the total workers aged 15 years and above.

8. In considering infant mortality, in direct relation to the living conditions of mothers, high rates of infant mortality are to be found in the countries of the region. The 1975 statistics show that infant mortality rates are more than 100 per thousand for those countries maintaining relatively accurate statistics. Estimates in countries which do not possess accurate statistics exceed 200 per thousand. Only one country of the region shows a low infant mortality rate, 41 per thousand. Despite appreciable progress in general health standards as a result of the expansion of medical services, such indicators demonstrate the need to improve health standards in general.

9. Educational statistics indicate that the illiteracy rate among women is higher than that among men. According to 1975 statistics the average illiteracy rate in the countries of the region is around 47 per cent of the total number of males aged 15 and above, but exceeds 70 per cent among women. The difference between the two rates in countries of the region varies from 20 per cent to 60 per cent. One study of the literacy situation reveals the relatively slow progress being made in female as compared to male education in the Arab states in general. Between 1960 and 1970 the illiteracy rate among males dropped from 71.6 per cent to 60.5 per cent while the rate for females during the same period dropped from 90.7 per cent to only 85.7 per cent.

10. Great attention is being directed towards girls' education in all countries of the region, although the introduction of modern education varies in accordance with the historical circumstances of each of these countries. Thus, while girls' education in some of the countries in Western Asia was first introduced in the early nineteenth century, in other countries' girls' schools were only established after national independence and the opening up of the country to the outside world in the early sixties or even in the early seventies. The efforts made to promote girls' education are clearly reflected in the increased proportion of girls (ages 6-24) enrolled at various educational levels in the Arab countries as a whole. This proportion rose from around 14.3 per cent in 1960 to around 25 per cent of the total number in this age group in 1975. It is also noteworthy that the proportion of females in the total number of students enrolled at various educational levels is increasing.

11. In spite of all this progress, over 45 per cent of girls do not attend primary school owing to the lack of educational facilities. Although some countries of the region have provided facilities for all or most of their girls of primary school age, the least developed countries have only succeeded in enrolling 15 per cent to 20 per cent of the girls in the compulsory school age. Furthermore, girls' education in general suffers from the problem of school drop-outs and the obstacles posed by certain economic conditions and social values to progression from one educational stage to another. In addition, the low proportion

of girls enrolled in technical and vocational schools and training institutes, with their traditionally narrow scope and content, is noticeable since the proportion of girls receiving technical/vocational education, as compared to those receiving general education, is at best 18 per cent. In some countries the proportion is negligible. In many other countries, this proportion does not exceed 4 per cent.

12. Female workers in the agricultural sector represent the vast majority of all women contributing to economic activity in those countries where agriculture constitutes the principal economic activity. The proportion of female workers in this sector ranges between 60 per cent and 80 per cent of all female workers. Despite the absence of detailed statistics it can be reasonably assumed that most female workers in the modern economic sectors are concentrated in the service, commercial and financial sectors with only a low proportion in the industrial and commodity producing sectors.

13. The statistical data and surveys which provide various indicators for the assessment of the situation of Arab women and the monitoring of their progress in a time series are extremely rare.. Available data can only provide rough approximations of the main features of women's situation in this region and of the continued endeavours required for their integration - as contributors and beneficiaries - in the developmental effort.

Basic Development Factors in the Region and their Relevance to the Integration of Women

14. The region of Western Asia is characterized by the diversity of levels of economic and social development. While some of its countries are among the world's richest, with regard to average income per capita, others are classified among the least developed countries. Some of the countries are characterized by a high population density and a relatively large reserve of trained manpower, while others have a relatively low population density and lack qualified manpower. In its positive aspect this variance offers scope and opportunity for integrative activities at the regional level since, together, these countries are endowed with

the necessary combination of material and human resources. Through integrated planning the development process could be accelerated to a large extent by collective self reliance and mutual co-operation among the countries of the region, combined with the technical assistance that could be provided by the international community.

15. The region is characterized by rapid economic and social changes in all aspects of life as a result of internal and external developments. New challenges have emerged requiring a review of the responsibilities of both men and women and requiring them to meet the challenges, to achieve the goals of economic and social development, and to better the life of the Arab individual.

16. The culture of Western Asia is based on the spiritual values of religions that had originally appeared in the area. The promotion and consolidation of these values represent one of the principal constituents of development and progress. In this cultural background and deep-rooted historical heritage, the woman is esteemed as man's sister. This historical legacy provides examples of women's roles in the Arab civilization in the fields of science, politics, law and literature. Furthermore, the contribution of Arab women to the political struggle and public life in modern times cannot be overlooked. Nevertheless, there is a residue of spurious values and attitudes that accumulated during the periods of decline and stagnation of the region's culture. These residual values are impeding effective participation of women in Arab society and restricting their role within a limited, stereotyped context incompatible with the requirements of development.

17. Women's integration in economic and social development and their participation in community activities is an established fact. In rural areas within the region, women are undertaking many agricultural tasks and engaging in various domestic crafts and cottage industries. Women have also entered the labour market in a number of modern economic sectors in the towns and cities. The traditional division of labour between men and women, both in and outside the home, has its origin in a pattern of social equilibrium linked to a subsistence economy. Presently, the new

social equilibrium is complicated by linkages with market economies making it necessary for all human resources, both male and female, to be drawn into national life and to be involved and trained for effective participation in all development activities.

18. Up to now, women's role has been limited to wife, mother, rearer of children and housewife. In recent years, women have entered the labour force, towards the acceleration of the development process. Therefore, there is a pressing need for efforts to be made to help them to play their role in bringing up the children and for changing attitudes in such a way as to induce men to take on more responsibilities in this role. This necessitates co-operation between men and women within the home for a better social and psychological upbringing of children.

19. A sound approach to the integration of women in economic and social development in the region must begin with a study and assessment of the present situation in each country and in the light of regional and international prospects for co-operation. It is essential that women's effective participation should proceed rapidly at three levels: (a) participation in the formulation of policy planning and decision making; (b) participation in the execution of policies and plans and expansion of work opportunities for women; and, (c) benefiting from the fruits of their work on an equitable and equal basis with men. The integration of women becomes a question of "give and take", rights and responsibilities, efforts and enjoyment. It is not conceived as a superficial process of modernization, nor as blind imitation of the course followed in the "advanced" patterns of industrial development. It is, however, an essential creative and constructive cultural development towards the freedom of both men and women to prepare them and enable their full capacities to be used in the enrichment of individual and social life. The process of integration cannot be confined to the mere demand for women's legitimate human and national rights but encompasses, with equal weight, their obligation to shoulder their responsibilities in their various roles in the community.

20. Development issues in the countries of Western Asia need to be tackled within the framework of an integrated process of cultural reconstruction in which the community can assert its identity and social realities. The core of this reconstruction process is the continuous satisfaction of the physical, mental, spiritual and social needs of human beings (men and women), the achievement of equality of opportunity through developmental efforts and the compensation for the less fortunate sections of society to enable them to participate effectively in the development of their society and to benefit from the fruits of their work. In order for developing countries to create alternative patterns of development compatible with their present situation and future aspiration without imitating the development patterns of the industrial world, planning and project implementation should be focussed on the increasing satisfaction of basic human needs, rather than on mere economic growth and capital accumulation. This requires the formulation of integrated policies and programmes and the adoption of new methods of developmental action in such a way as to allow broader and deeper scope of participation for both men and women. At the same time, this pattern of development would entail the definition of specific priorities and programmes for women in order to make up for the lag in their development opportunities. The priorities should be a major constituent of a general strategy for establishing special priorities for various deprived social groups in rural, nomadic and urban settlements. A strategy based on these considerations is essential for ensuring social balance and cohesion within the fabric of society.

21. The achievement of the goals of economic and social development is dependent on the effectiveness of institutions and organizational structures for planning and on the ability to provide valid indicators for the establishment of priorities. It is also affected by the matching of goals and financial resources. Since the administrative planning and financial institutions lag behind expected performance, they hinder the achievement of human and material development. At the same time, these institutions form an obstacle to the integration of women in development, as they consider this subject to have secondary priority.

22. One of the major issues severely impeding stability and development in the region is the Israeli occupation of territories belonging to the Palestinian people and to other countries. The liberation of the land and the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people are still the core of many issues in this region with all their political, economic, social and psychological dimensions, so that political responsibilities take priority over development plans. These issues are matters of urgent concern to the international community with all their implications.

Plan of Action - Characteristics, Aims and Means

23. Based on the above premises and goals of the integration of women in development in the countries of Western Asia,

Realizing the urgent need to accelerate the development process and to make effective utilization of material, financial and human resources in a manner consistent with the aspirations of the people in the region,

Affirming that human beings are the ultimate goal of development and that they are, at the same time, its means and resources, within the framework of their deep-rooted cultural values and the requirements of the contemporary life,

Believing in the role of Arab women, who constitute half of the manpower, and the greater proportion of whom are unemployed or underemployed and whose potential has not yet been utilized,

Confirming the historical circumstances to which Arab women have been subjected in this region, which have impeded their full participation in economic, social, cultural and political fields, and have made their opportunities, rights and responsibilities unequal to those of men,

Seeking to focus attention on the formulation of policies, the establishment of plans and the implementation of programmes designed to achieve increasing participation by women in the labour force and in the various areas of socio-economic development,

Supporting the woman's role in the home and her joint responsibilities with the man for the upbringing of children and home management,

Urging governments, regional and international organizations, and women's societies and organizations to review and appraise their efforts in the field of women and family oriented programmes,

Recalling the principles, and recommendations laid down in the World Plan of Action adopted at the Mexico Conference and voiced at numerous national, regional and international conferences held in connexion with women's role in development,

The Regional Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development in Western Asia deals with the issues, recommendations and action proposals outlined in the following manner:

- I. Action at the Level of Planning and Implementation;
- II. In the Legal Field;
- III. In the Field of Education and Training;
- IV. In the Field of Employment;
- V. In the Field of Family Services and Welfare;
- VI. In the Field of Family Formation and Personal Status;
- VII. In the Field of Improving the Conditions of Rural and Nomadic Women;
- VIII. Palestinian Women;
- IX. The Role of Mass Media and Culture;
- X. The Role of Women's Association and Organizations;
- XI. The Role of Research, Studies and Information;
- XII. Regional and International Co-operation.

PART ONE: ACTION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

I. Action at the Level of Planning and Implementation

24. Action to improve the conditions of women and to provide them with equal opportunities with men requires that the development of human resources should be a primary objective of planning, a fact which requires the adoption by governments of measures and policies at the national level. In certain cases it may be necessary to introduce changes in economic, social and institutional structures to counteract.

residual historical constraints to enable women to carry out their full responsibilities as citizens. The responsibility for efforts promoting this lies primarily with the government and its public institutions. However, an important and significant role must also be played by political organizations, unions, women's associations, intellectuals, the media, professional associations and other groups with nation-wide influence. Policy makers in all these organs must be convinced and knowledgeable about the objectives and needs of the integration of women in development. This can help to form a public opinion conducive to a rectification of the situation of women and receptive to the establishment of the necessary national policies in this regard and the execution of programmes which lead to the advancement of women, socially and economically.

Proposals for Action

a. To ensure the adoption and promotion by the government and its executive leaders at all levels, of the objectives and necessity of women's participation in development as an integral part of general national policy, within the distinctive cultural and civil framework;

b. To formulate policies and implement the necessary measures to improve the living conditions of women in all developmental sectors and to afford them equal opportunities with men to benefit from the various educational, health, social, cultural and other services for the improvement of living standards; and to exert additional efforts to close the existing gap between the opportunities afforded to the two sexes as soon as possible;

c. To set the objective of a successive increase in women's proportional participation in the productive labour force as one of the main targets in national development plans, to ensure that this objective is not left as a by-product of investment and development activities in general, and to give due consideration to this objective in national planning beginning with the forthcoming development plans to be initiated in most countries of the region in 1980;

d. To provide wider representation of women in decision making, policy formulation, and defining the planning priorities at all levels, at national, regional and international conferences and seminars, to create a suitable atmosphere as well as the needed requirements to implement the plan;

e. To support national women's commissions, women's bureaus and other governmental machineries concerned with women's affairs; to initiate the early establishment of such organizations in countries where this has not already been done, and to include in their membership representatives of ministries and bodies concerned with planning and co-ordination of programmes related to women's activities, in order to ensure the effectiveness of programmes and their compatibility with the needs of various groups of women and to ensure monitoring and the co-ordination of implementation;

f. To undertake studies and research in connexion with national planning needs, particularly the planning of human resources (of both men and women), with special emphasis on field surveys, in order to assist in monitoring and evaluating the national plan and to provide a more objective assessment of the opportunities and services available to women and the difficulties hampering the achievement of the planned targets, with a view to overcoming constraints in subsequent planning exercises;

g. Stressing the necessity of the participation of the decision makers and executives in conferences and seminars which deal with the objectives of integration of women in development, as developmental activities and not merely as women's activities.

II. In the Legal Field

25. In many cases, the achievement of effective participation of Arab women in development requires the promulgation of the necessary laws and legislation to provide women with parity of status with men with regard to civil status and legal rights. Sound legislation is undoubtedly an important instrument for the attainment of the desired steps in development.

However, legislation as an instrument can only become effective if both the letter and the spirit are strictly applied. In addition, the achievement of greater participation of women in development requires a parallel development of social and cultural values and traditions through national campaigns to stimulate awareness of the requirements of development and progress.

Proposals for Action

- a. To ensure that constitutions and laws of the State stipulate full equality between men and women with regard to their rights and obligations; as well as to ensure the implementations of these constitutions and laws;
- b. To ensure that constitutions provide for equal rights between men and women in the exercise of political rights, including the right to stand for election as well as to vote in various bodies of political representation, and to make compulsory the right to vote for women as is the case for men, in countries whose laws and constitutions have not already made these stipulations;
- c. To raise the consciousness of women with respect to the importance of exercising their political rights as well as to adopt the required measures for the political enlightenment of women, making use of mass communication media in order to removing certain burdensome traditions which hinder the positive exercise of these rights;
- d. To urge the Arab countries to apply the United Nations Declaration issued in 1969 on the elimination of discrimination against women and to ratify all United Nations' conventions related to the rights of women, if such ratification has not taken place already;
- e. To urge the Arab countries which did not ratify the ILO conventions relating to conditions of labour, protection of workers, protection of motherhood and other conventions to ratify them and adopt the necessary measures to implement them;
- f. To ensure equality between men and women in labour laws and legislation, and abolish all discriminatory regulations in countries

where this has not already been achieved; to stipulate particularly in labour laws that maternity is a public service, including provisions to enable women to carry out their roles as mothers and workers; to assure women's right to receive termination of service compensation ; to combine their pension with that of their spouses; as well as their right to return to work while retaining their rights acquired through service;

g. To strive to enact laws which guarantee the right of rural women to acquire property in the framework of agricultural reform as well as their right to participate in existing cooperatives;

h. To enact necessary laws and to take the necessary measures which govern employment and protection of nationals, men and women, in transnational corporations;

i. To establish a specialized body to review administrative regulations and procedures which might hinder women's enjoyment of equal rights guaranteed to them by law and to adopt measures to close the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* situations, assuring that the national commissions for women, wherever established, are represented in this specialized body;

j. To establish means to promote the awareness of women at all levels and to encourage women's appointment to the legal profession, including judges, as a step towards the realization of legal equality.

III. Education and Training

26. The governments of the region have attached great importance to the improvement of the educational and training standards of their human resources, both male and female. They have made great strides in the expansion of all levels and types of educational opportunities. They spend, both in terms of recurrent and capital expenditure, on education a sizeable proportion of their national income, which exceeds, on the average, 5 per cent of the GNP, and about 15 per cent of annual budgets. In spite of this effort, the available educational opportunities remain well below aspirations. The development of education in the region suffers from lack of internal efficiency of the educational system itself, as well as those related to its external efficiency and employment opportunities. Furthermore, a number of social and cultural factors in certain areas tend to minimize the value of education, especially for girls.

27. While the literacy rate differs from one country to the other in the region, it is generally low. As mentioned earlier, the literacy rate for women is much lower than that for men in every age group. While it is true that the illiteracy rate is generally declining in the countries of the region, the absolute number of illiterates as a whole is actually on the rise. The major reason for this is the increase in the number of illiterate women, especially in the rural areas and in the poorer quarters of towns and cities. Even though the rates of enrolment in the compulsory elementary school cycle are improving, the gap remains wide between boys and girls in some of these countries. Except for a limited number of ECWA countries, discrepancies in enrolment ratios between boys and girls tend to increase in the higher cycles of education. Families, in deciding to keep their children in school through the secondary and higher education cycles, tend in most cases to favour boys over girls. This preference is a response to both economic conditions and social values.

28. Educational problems in the region are not limited to quantitative aspects, but also create unequal educational opportunities between boys

and girls. Qualitative problems are equally pressing. The rigidity of the educational content and the limited variety of institutions and curricula affect the choices of both male and female students. In many of the ECWA countries there is little correspondence between existing academic structures and the various types of skills and know-how required by the expanding employment market; hence, the phenomenon of unemployment in some ECWA countries among men and women who have graduated from universities was created.

29. The opportunities for technical education and vocational training for girls remain limited - despite the expansion that has taken place recently in this area. The opportunities that do exist are limited to a number of traditional skills related to the woman's role as housewife. Given the constraints of social norms and the traditional character of women's training institutions, vocational training opportunities for girls are limited in scope and do not allow for entry into diverse activities.

Proposals for Action

a. To adopt comprehensive educational policies and plans as integral parts of over-all socio-economic planning, so as to provide for a diversity of skills in the labour force - for both men and women; to promote, without discrimination as to sex, the development of the full capabilities of individuals and to prepare them adequately for productive employment within the priorities in the development plan;

b. To fully implement a policy of compulsory primary or basic education, to expand the capacity of school enrolment for girls at this level, and to adopt educational measures and social incentives (such as school meals and school health care) necessary for diminishing the high drop-out rate for girls; and to establish a time limit for the enrolment in schools of all boys and girls of the compulsory school age;

c. To pay sufficient attention, on the part of the responsible ministries and authorities, to the quality and the methods of education

at child care centres and kindergartens and to the expansion of these institutions; as well as to provide the necessary training to female teachers of this level, in order that children receive a sound education during this crucial stage of their personal and social growth;

d. To encourage girls to pursue their education beyond the compulsory level and into the various areas of specialization including technical and vocational training compatible with their abilities and talents, to study the current factors that deter capable students from pursuing their studies, and to provide needed incentives, including free boarding facilities;

e. To review text books and rewrite those parts that reiterate the sex-stereotyped roles of men and women in society, with a view to correcting the traditional image of Arab women that portrays them as making no contribution to their society beyond the walls of the home and the world of the household;

f. To orient school curricula towards a sound equilibrium in its scientific, vocational and cultural goals for establishing a common culture for boys and girls, thus promoting the constructive interaction of the two sexes as partners in life. This common culture, in addition to other topics of civic education, should define the responsibilities of the two sexes in the development of modern society, develop an awareness of the issues of scientific and technological progress, and promote a sound approach towards responsible fatherhood and motherhood in the formation of the family and the rearing of children;

g. To pay attention to developing educational methods that prepare students for their participation in developmental activities for the achievement of economic and social goals and the use of methods which promote individual creativity, initiative, respect for the other sex and responsibility;

h. To increase the enrolment of girls in technical education, expand facilities for technical training, diversify the variety of specializations taught therein and encourage girls to enrol, thereby

increasing the scope of employment and productivity available to them;

i. To expand opportunities for women to enter higher scientific and technological fields of specialization to which they can make creative contribution, and to provide increased scholarships to women for higher specialization at home and abroad;

j. To adopt comprehensive strategies for the eradication of illiteracy among adult men and women, giving priority to the age group 15-35 years; to open educational institutions for the age group of 8 to 14 who are not enrolled in primary schools; to develop suitable curricula and methods so as to render adult education functional and relevant to the needs of adult men and women;

k. To promote the return of drop-outs to schools at their former level and to administer positive and negative incentives for regular attendance in adult education programmes; also to develop curricula and methods suitable to the needs of men and women in their work and daily life, and to use strategies to promote the regular attendance of housewives in literacy and other adult education classes.

l. To consider the eradication of illiteracy, within a feasible time limit suitable to each country's circumstances, as an integrated national effort in which political organizations, trade unions, women's and civic associations, and co-operatives participate with the concerned government specialized bodies;

m. To maximize the use of mass media, especially television, as a useful tool in the eradication of illiteracy and in the education of adult women inside the home and within the family environment;

n. To work at including in-training programmes for elementary education teachers, in their respective institutes, the subjects of health, nutrition, poultry and agriculture, in order to assist teachers to perform their duties as social counsellors in their own environments;

o. To develop vocational training techniques using modern educational methods and to increase vocational training opportunities for women in different skills, especially in the new skills required in

development projects and to provide such training either at special centres or on the job;

p. To organize non-formal studies and education programmes for women by correspondence through the mass media, through practical demonstration studies, and through in-plant training, so as to improve their knowledge and skills, and to enable them to return to active life if they have left it for a certain period because of family responsibilities;

q. To provide adequate and organized in-service training for women in the different fields of employment to increase their productive abilities, to expand present and future training opportunities for women engaged in management, in production, in government service and in private and public sector industries;

IV. Labour and Other Economic Activities

30. Aside from the participation of rural women in agricultural activities, the proportion of women in the active labour force in each of the ECWA countries remains low. Women's participation tends to be concentrated in specific sectors and to be limited to occupations traditionally considered "appropriate" for women.

31. Despite the fact that the ECWA countries have recognized the right of the working women to equal pay with men, several studies have revealed that the average wages for women are actually much lower than those for men in various economic sectors. The opportunity for promotion remains lower for working women, especially promotion to executive positions. In addition, there are specific jobs that are completely closed to women. In some countries, areas of discrimination between men and women are evident in social benefits, and even in minimum entitlements particularly in the private sector. Furthermore, opportunities for working women to improve their productive abilities at work have not received adequate attention.

32. Women make up a small proportion of the labour force. This can be partially explained by the fact that many women face the problem of having to leave their work upon marriage and upon having children. Dropping out from work is particularly prominent among low-income working women. It is quite difficult for women to return to work after interruption for any period of time. In the more congested cities women are faced with difficulties in transportation. Finally, social pressures on women persist, while they endeavour to reconcile their diverse responsibilities.

33. The emphasis laid upon the importance of the participation of women in the different economic activities of the labour market does not in any way diminish the economic and social value of their work as mothers and housewives. While national accounts have not yet developed a statistical method for estimating the monetary value of this work, it is nevertheless important that the demands of work within the household

be studied in terms of facilities and services that will permit women to carry out optimally their responsibilities in this sphere.

Proposals for Action

a. To formulate strategies for increasing the rate of the participation of women in the labour force as an integral part of the development of human resources; the aim is to provide the necessary labour force to achieve the objectives of socio-economic development in all sectors, and to identify planning indicators for the increase of these rates in short, medium and long-term planning;

b. To establish programmes and policies required to encourage women to enter the various new professions - in addition to the traditional professions practiced by them - and to equip them for these jobs and professions through measures taken by governments, the labour unions, and the employers, and through educational and training programmes;

c. To introduce necessary legislation concerning equality between men and women in wages, social security and promotion opportunities in countries where the laws have not yet provided for such rights, to monitor the strict conformity to these laws and to impose preventive penalties in case of their contravention; to ensure also the right of women to take legal action in case of discrimination against them on grounds of sex or marital status;

d. To formulate policies necessary to encourage women engaged in various fields of artistic activities, offering material and moral incentives in appreciation of their enriching role in the development of society and culture;

e. To set a minimum wage policy and to monitor its application, particularly in small factories, small stores and household jobs;

f. To enact legislation for the protection of minors, male and female, from exploitation at work in household jobs or through involvement in the labour market before maturity and before they receive proper vocational training which ensures their integrity and safety;

g. To create training and cultural programmes suitable to diversified educational and social levels, for men and women; to promote the proper skills and knowledge for family planning and to enlighten women of child-bearing age in their home and family activities;

h. To raise the consciousness of women to benefit from consumer education and guidance towards optimum use of family income with a view to making women's household work an enlightened job having a n economic and social value and contributing to the realization of development plans, and not representing a liability thereon;

i. To provide procedures and facilities in order to permit women to combine family and work responsibilities in a way that will ensure that neither responsibility will have a negative effect on the other, and that, in particular, women will not have to leave their work; to provide also transportation facilities, services for food, popular restaurants and ready made clothing which would aid women to work regularly;

j. To urge governments to include in labour laws and regulations special articles supporting part time-work for women, flexible employment hours and nursing periods which would correspond to women's needs within the context of their increased participation in development; also to ensure that the maternity leave period would conform to ILO conventions;

k. To provide a variety of incentives for those private sector organizations which employ large numbers of women, whenever they provide good social, cultural and health standards and conditions for women workers; and to exempt from taxation expenses spent in these areas;

l. To provide child welfare institutions such as child care centres and kindergartens, to give priority in these facilities to the children of working women, and to encourage government and public sector institutions as well as private employers to establish child care centres in factories and places where a substantial number of women work;

m. To urge union leaders to provide opportunities to increase women's participation in professional organizations, trade unions, committees and boards in order to maximize benefits from women's efforts, thus increasing production and productivity, and to request these organizations to offer women increased opportunities to participate in programmes of workers' education and labour leadership;

n. To provide working women in governmental, public and private sectors equitable opportunities to occupy higher managerial positions on the basis of qualifications, experience and efficiency without discrimination based on sex;

p. To organize on-the-job and in-service training courses for employed women to improve their productivity and provide them with promotion opportunities in their fields of activity;

V. Family Services and Welfare

34. The family, the basic unit of Arab society, requires strengthening the reciprocal responsibilities and family bonds among its members, on the basis of a principle which the society carefully safeguards. It is essential that this first nucleus of the social structure should be provided with all the knowledge, science and public services which would allow its members to grow normally and to adapt socially under the conditions of modern life. Males receive better chances for physical, mental and social growth; the provision of similar chances of growth for females is a family responsibility, as well as a general social obligation.

35. Health, food and housing standards are generally low for the majority of the population in countries of the region, particularly in rural and desert areas. This represents a heavy burden on girls and women due to their ignorance of modern knowledge, the prevalence of superstitious thinking, and their second class position in relation to the men who receive the largest share according to norms and traditions.

36. Family and maternal welfare is a national and developmental duty which must be regarded accordingly as a significant component of economic and social development.

Proposals for Action

(i) Health and Nutrition

a. To give attention to health services and preventive health care, especially concerning infections and epidemic diseases and to promote women's access to vaccination campaigns as well as preventive health services;

b. To expand availability of maternal and child health centres and to provide technical and financial resources to facilitate preventive and curative services;

c. To establish comprehensive health programmes which would guarantee the absorption of all pre-school children, boys and girls, at all levels of education in preventive and curative medical programmes for children's diseases such as chicken pox, diphtheria, tetanus, measles, polio, and tuberculosis, so as to provide them with immunity at an early age;

d. To study traditional nutrition and health habits and practices, to identify the negative effects of these, and to publicize the dangers of these habits and practices through the various educational, informational, and communication media;

e. To formulate an agricultural policy which ensures the availability of the principal nutritional elements to the community and to provide essential food items at reasonable prices to meet the needs in particular of pregnant and nursing women and small children;

f. To stimulate awareness of the economical use of food so as to eliminate waste, to curb conventional eating habits, such as those evident in family table hospitality and feasts, thereby limiting their negative effect on the national economy and on food security;

g. To educate women about nutrition and their nutrition needs especially during pregnancy and lactation; to enlighten them through educational programmes, mass communication and other means of guidance on the effects of malnutrition on children of both sexes;

h. To introduce nutrition education programmes into the school curriculum and into adult education programmes for both sexes, in the form of specific courses;

(ii) Social Welfare

a. To support family planning centres and the services they offer in countries which have adopted a family planning policy;

b. To make available ways and means for consciousness raising for men and women about family planning in order to guarantee the effectiveness of programmes and the achievement of population policies;

c. To increase the number of child care centres and kindergartens to assist working women in their family responsibilities, and to provide public parks and gardens where all members of the family can spend their leisure time;

d. To intensify all efforts during the International Year of the Child and during the preparatory period preceding it; to implement the Declaration of Children's Rights and the development and expansion of child welfare services at the pre-school stage;

e. To utilize the services of male and female social workers to guide adolescent students to help them overcome their problems and ensure co-operation between family and school with a view to promoting sound intellectual and emotional development at this stage of the individual growth;

f. To establish social programmes and to expand social security systems to support the needs of widows, women without means of support, and elderly women;

g. To provide material support to the family for the care of the mentally, emotionally, or physically handicapped or those without direct means of support, in order to lighten the burden of social welfare institutions and strengthen intra-family welfare and cohesion which, given proper support and guidance, will prove more effective than institutional welfare;

h. To adopt appropriate measures for punishing criminals who violate women; to rehabilitate female delinquents and juveniles during the course of their sentence with an objective of their return to normal life;

i. To establish consumer protection societies and encourage the expansion of consumer co-operative societies, housing co-operatives, associations of housewives and other societies and institutions providing family services;

j. To enable working women to obtain loans and other aid for business activities and handicrafts.

(iii) Housing

a. To increase low-cost and limited income housing, to provide water supply, sanitary facilities and other necessary domestic amenities in urban and rural settlements in order to decrease the burdens for women in the home;

b. To promote the establishment of housing co-operatives which would cater to the needs of the different social categories;

c. To enable working men and women to obtain loans on easy terms for the procurement of appropriate accommodation on marriage.

d. To take into consideration the needs and proposals of women when designing human settlements and housing projects.

VI. The Formation of the Family and Personal Status Matters

37. Since the Arab family is the basic nucleus for the development of society, as mentioned in several constitutions, it is necessary to include in development plans provisions for governmental responsibility towards the well being of the family, by ensuring the establishment of dignity, stability, and mutual respect among its members, and guaranteeing responsible and equal relations. Social and economic changes and the requirements of the development process. make it imperative to develop and strengthen family relations, values, and responsibilities. However, the unity of the family must be congruent with general national cohesiveness and with the general civic obligations so that kinship and family bonds do not override the needs and interests of the common weal.

38. It is also necessary that the basis for formation or dissolution of family ties must be built on principles that guarantee the present and future dignity of family members without exploitation or disrespect and assure the stability and security of the family members.

Proposals for Action

a. To implement laws giving women and men the same right to choose freely their partners and requiring the mutual approval of both partners before entering marriage;

b. To assure the strict implementation of the laws specifying minimum marriage age thus allowing for the physical and mental development of both young men and women; to issue such legislation in countries where such laws have not been adopted;

c. To make mandatory official registration of marriage, to be regulated by the government in countries where such regulation has not been adopted, and to make compulsory medical certificates testifying to the absence of hereditary and sexually transmittable diseases before marriage;

d. To create public opinion against costly dowries and marriage rituals and celebrations;

e. To educate boys and girls, through the family, the school, and mass media towards their equal responsibility in the household, in child care, and in any other family matters requiring the participation of the couples in decision-making;

f. To educate the parents to inculcate in their children attitudes conducive to the equality of the sexes, negating the prevailing attitudes towards the superiority of the male over the female and the consequences of such differentiation in terms of family relations;

g. To review personal status laws in order to guarantee the regulation of divorce, marriage, child custody and other family relations falling under such laws;

h. To provide consultation services to partners prior to marriage and to advise in situations of family conflicts, and to recruit trained women to participate in the consultation and in the necessary house visits required for such counselling;

i. To review court procedures on personal status matters and to simplify them in order to allow the wife and the children to receive their rights in the shortest possible time;

j. To study the social functions of the extended family, so as to fulfil these functions, and to provide the needed services in the areas of housing and social welfare; to strengthen family relationships and to support the state's responsibility towards the protection and the cohesion of the family;

VII. Improving the Conditions of Bedouin and Rural Women

39. Living and working conditions of the bedouin and rural women deserve special attention in the Regional Plan of Action since the population of the bedouin and rural sectors is more than two-thirds of the total population in the region. In addition, the rural and bedouin population - including women and girls - is responsible for most of the income derived from agricultural production, animal husbandry, fishing, home industry and handicraft.

40. Both the rural areas and the rural population suffer from underdevelopment as compared to the urban centres, inasmuch as most of the services centres are located in the urban areas. Although the governments of the region have started to pay greater attention to the rural areas, a large gap remains between the modern sector and the rural-traditional sector in most of the countries in the region. Rural women suffer from very low standards of living, which statistics do not portray, e.g. fatigue due to overwork in agriculture, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, and isolation from cultural and political aspects of public life, unsanitary water, inadequate housing sanitation and other unsatisfactory living conditions.

41. A recent scientific study on nomadism in an Arab state showed that the living conditions of bedouin women remain at a very low level, with high rates of mortality, morbidity, and malnutrition. There has been little recent progress, in contrast to urban and rural areas. Nomadic areas, furthermore, remain dependent on the dry and rainy seasons, and both human beings and livestock are exposed to hardship. Resettlement efforts are limited. Nomads face not only the need for the provision of physical facilities but also the need to meet the social and psychological requirements of the bedouin. Except for those resettlement projects connected with water storage and irrigation projects, where budgetary provision has already been made, there is the further obstacle of tremendous cost of new projects.

42. Therefore, proposals in the Plan of Action, regarding the participation of women in development in order to raise their levels of living and dignity, apply especially to the urgent needs of rural and bedouin women.

43. Agricultural statistics of the countries in the region show a decrease of production in agriculture and animal husbandry. At the same time, both the total population and the demand for production have increased. The agricultural methods in most of the countries are still traditional and new agricultural methods have not been sufficiently introduced.

Proposals for Action for Rural Women

a. To prepare rural development plans as an integral part of overall national development plans, to ensure investment necessary to increase agricultural production both horizontally and vertically, especially food production, and to make available basic facilities such as water and electricity, as well as to improve living conditions in rural areas;

b. To integrate industrial and agricultural development and to establish agro-industrial centres in the different sub-regions to decrease rural to urban migration;

c. To carry out field studies to identify the volume and location of wastage of crops, vegetables and fruits at both farm and home levels, to raise awareness of the extent of this problem, to take the necessary means to reduce wastage as much as possible, and to train rural women - considering their participation in agricultural activities - through literacy classes, domestic guidance and other educational means and mass media;

d. To encourage the political, public, and popular organizations on the national and local levels to increase the participation of rural women in these organizations by stating their problems and needs before formulating solutions.

e. To expand agricultural co-operatives for animal husbandry, fishing and marketing and to encourage women to participate in them;

f. To establish institutions for special agricultural loans to men and women employed in agricultural activities and animal husbandry;

g. To call on women's organizations to establish funds for receiving loans in rural areas which would aid rural women in agriculture, commercial or handicraft projects; to promote marketing of local rural products;

h. To adopt an integrated rural development policy for programming projects in agriculture and services, in order to provide more employment opportunities, to decrease seasonal unemployment, and to provide basic services for men and women labourers in agriculture;

i. To provide for the distribution and continuation of services suitable for geographic distribution of rural settlements and to utilize regional planning methods to determine the location and economic feasibility of these services; to take advantage of services of rural extension agents to reach rural homes and to increase both health and social consciousness;

j. To study the means of decreasing female drop-outs from compulsory education and literacy classes and to provide educational and social incentives for girls and women to maintain their regular attendance in adult literacy programmes; to develop educational programmes suitable to the needs of rural women and suitable to both the agriculture seasons and school vacations;

k. To strengthen preventive health programmes for rural and bedouin women and children, to include water sanitation, health care for children, training of women health leaders for local and district areas where day care and child care centres are non-existent, and to adopt the primary health care approach where health institutions are not available;

l. To establish integrated rural development centres in rural areas for the training of statisticians, counsellors and local leaders; to form public women's committees to participate in identifying and providing self-help in local problems, with the co-operation and financial support of the government;

m. To prepare series of educational material using mass media especially audio visual methods and the radio for education of rural and bedouin women in the fields of child rearing, child health, nutrition and food preservation, new agricultural practices, protection from animal diseases and other subjects required by extension workers in their training and field activities;

For Bedouin Women

a. To study the needs of bedouin women while resettling and to provide services and training in agriculture as a basic aspect of their resettlement programmes;

b. To plan and programme adequately for a policy to promote better conditions for bedouins in their pastoral areas as a transitional solution until their resettlement and to provide mobile units to deliver services to the bedouins at their gathering places;

c. To assess the experiences of co-operatives for husbandry in bedouin and semi-bedouin areas, and to benefit from these experiences in order to promote skills in husbandry;

d. To benefit from international experience in the use of simple technologies for reducing the drudgery of nomadic and semi-nomadic women such as drying dates and yogurt and the preservation of foods, as well as to examine the possibilities of developing such technologies in similar areas in the region;

e. To utilize the resources of the armed forces to offer literacy courses to bedouins and technical skills as well as to provide necessary health services.

VIII. The Palestinian Women

44. Owing to the special conditions of the Palestinian people inside and outside the Occupied Territories, the Regional Plan of Action devotes a special chapter to the Palestinian women. The special condition of the Palestinian people stems from their lack of access to, and control of, their land which constitutes the basis for stability and development.

45. In the light of the circumstances of the Israeli occupation and the dispersion of the Palestinian people, the Palestinian women need special attention to enable them to cope with the urgent demands of continuing the struggle for the liberation of their land and of confronting the basic requirements for survival and for daily life.

46. With due appreciation of all the assistance of the Arab States to the Palestine Liberation Organization and its institutions and to the voluntary Palestinian associations, the Arab States are called upon to provide further educational opportunities appropriate to the needs of the Palestinian students of both sexes, to improve the health and nutrition levels of the Palestinian women and children, and to facilitate the training and specialization for both sexes in institutions in or outside the host countries.

47. It should be noted that two resolutions of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, resolution 2026 of 4 August 1976 and 2100 of 3 August 1977, call upon all United Nations bodies, in co-operation with the Palestine Liberation Organization, to identify the social and economic needs of the Palestinian people taking into account proposals for concrete projects that can be implemented.

48. It should also be noted that the 22nd General Conference of UNESCO on 25 November 1976 condemned Israeli occupation for suppressing the fundamental freedom of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories and for depriving them of their right to national education and the cultural life that would preserve their national identity. Furthermore, the 26th Assembly of the World Health

Organization on 28 May 1975 (WHO 28,35, A.B.C.) requested WHO in co-operation with the Palestine Liberation Organization to render assistance to the Palestinian people.

49. Resolution 32 of the World Conference of International Women's Year, held in Mexico, 1975, as well as the Declaration of Mexico adopted by the Conference condemned Zionism as a form of racism and urged the women of the world to support the Palestinian women in their struggle to oppose Israel's violations of human rights. The resolution also requested the United Nations and its specialized agencies and organizations, as well as international, regional, and national organizations to provide moral and material assistance to the Palestinian women, their Union and institutions.

50. Whatever the problems of the Palestinian people, men and women, the solution to the root of the problem lies in ending the Israeli Occupation and giving the Palestinian nation its right to self determination. In its occupation of Arab territories, Israel has obviously adopted a population policy closely linked to its definition of secure Israeli borders as demonstrated in the Israeli "settlements" policy. Through this policy and its policy of deportation, the Israeli population has displaced and continues to displace the Palestinian population.

Proposals for Action

1. In the Occupied Territories:

a. To offer financial and technical support to the Arab universities, colleges, and schools in the Occupied Territories in order to guarantee the development and expansion of these institutions so that they can increase their enrolment of students of both sexes;

b. To increase the enrolment of Palestinian students of both sexes in universities in Arab and friendly countries, especially in scientific and technical fields that are not available in the Occupied Territories;

c. To support the expansion of private Arab educational institutions so that they can increase their absorption of students and draw the students away from the Zionized educational curricula;

d. To utilize the radio for educational programmes directed to the students of the Occupied Territories; to study the feasibility of establishing the open university as well as an air university;

e. To develop, expand, and increase vocational training centres, especially the UNRWA centres, and to diversify their specialization in the technical and vocational fields, and increase the number of women enrolled in these centres;

f. To increase the number of fellowships and grants for students from the Occupied Territories so that they can benefit from international training centres, and to call upon UNESCO to review the educational curricula taught to Palestinian women in order to ascertain the educational relevance of their content;

g. To increase the number of women teachers trained in literacy training centres, especially at the Arab States centre for Functional Literacy - Sirs Al-Layan - Arab Republic of Egypt, and to provide literacy centres in the Occupied Territories, equipped with recent studies, techniques, and expertise as well as financial support, so that they can increase and develop their services;

h. To call upon women's associations in the Arab States to provide financial support to the educational and training institutions in the Occupied Territories;

i. To support Palestinian children and to improve their education and health conditions and to provide them with the basic services;

j. To support financially and technically health institutions through training their cadres and providing for improvement of facilities;

k. To assist private institutions in the Occupied Territories to establish mother-child care centres which would include nutrition services;

l. To assist private institutions to establish co-operatives for marketing the products of women of the Occupied Territories;

m. To encourage and assist private societies to protect and promote Arab Palestinian heritage;

n. To support the voluntary women's associations in the Occupied Territories so that they can continue their struggle to liberate their land and fulfil their objectives;

o. To urge international organizations to put an end to discrimination against Arab labourers and to help release prisoners, both men and women, from Israeli prisons;

2. Outside the Occupied Territories:

a. To develop the technical and professional abilities of Palestinian women through their participation in Arab training programmes in the fields of integrated social work and in programmes for the improvement of their productivity;

b. To support and develop technically and financially child care centres and kindergartens in Palestinian camps through training their cadres, and to make provision for increasing their numbers;

c. To support welfare institutions, especially "the Home of the Children of the Resistance" (Beit Atfal As-somud), by providing technical expertise, educational facilities, and training for the staff;

d. To request Arab Governments to establish a fund to support the activities of the General Union of Palestinian Women;

e. To utilize the mass communication media to highlight the role of Palestinian women in the armed struggle and in popular activities;

f. To introduce an agenda item concerning Palestinian women in all international and regional conferences dealing with women and development, starting with the regional preparatory meeting for Western Asia, scheduled for 1979, which will precede the 1980 World Conference for Women;

g. To urge international and regional organizations to set definite dates for the implementation of the resolutions and recommendations concerning special activities and projects for the improvement of the conditions of the Palestinian people;

h. To urge the League of Arab States to finalize necessary steps for the establishment of a fund for the support of Palestinian resistance in its various forms and for the support of voluntary and women's organizations inside and outside the Occupied Territories which provide social services to the Palestinian people and Palestinian women in particular;

i. To call on regional and international organizations to classify data related to the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories;

j. To find ways and means to make available funds and technical expertise to women's programmes inside the Occupied Territories and to request international organizations to take an active part in this respect;

k. To call on Arab Governments to include in their school curricula informative and cultural subjects on the Palestinian question and its different aspects.

l. To urge regional and international organizations to take the necessary measures to implement the United Nations resolution on the protection of women and children in the case of armed struggle and in the case of wars of liberation and under foreign occupation, in relation to the Palestinian women under occupation.

m. To call on the Palestine Liberation Organization to prepare reports and statistics on Palestinian women in host countries, as a part of the technical preparation for studies to be presented to the Seminar to be organized by the League of Arab States on the condition of Palestinian women inside and outside the Occupied Territories.

IX. The Role of Mass Media and Culture

51. Informational and cultural mass media are widely used in the countries of Western Asia, reaching all categories of people in all parts of the region, bedouin, rural and urban. These media include daily and weekly newspapers, women's journals, magazines, radio, television, theaters, popular theater, mobile cultural units, puppet shows, cultural festivals, artistic and scientific exhibitions, poetry readings, novels, short stories, seminars, encounters... All of them illustrate and reflect social and human values, which affect strongly the intellectual, emotional and behavioural patterns of the various groups of people in the region. These media help to overcome the obstacles in integrating Arab women and to promote their full participation in national development. The governments of the region pay special attention to improving the technological capacity of mass communication, in order to widen its scope, coverage and impact. Constant progress can be seen in the programmes and contents of these means of information and communication, which stress the role of culture in improving human and material resources.

52. In spite of efforts in the field of information and education, especially in the case of programmes prepared for women and children, the main image of women largely appears in rigid traditional stereotype, where women play a secondary role.

53. Reviewing the pioneering works that have appeared in the field of information and culture in recent years, one still finds that the way to attract attention in the media is by using stereotyped images of women. This calls for changing many of these programmes, since they merely reinforce the traditional conception of women. Social change and the transformation experienced in the region have expanded beyond the frontiers and objectives of the mass communication media leading to the need to re-examine the form and content displayed by the media.

Proposals for Action

- a. To work to have mass communication and cultural media, adopt, as part of their aims and strategy, the development of various programmes which reinforce the idea of equality between men and women and remove discriminatory biases;
- b. To eliminate the image of women as a sexual object in the media and to require commercial advertising to portray a positive image of women;
- c. To present programmes that demonstrate the changing roles of the sexes in Arab contemporary society and to underline women's role in political and economic activities in firms, factories, universities, medicine, engineering, research laboratories, and all other fields, and to point out women's present and future role in the development of society;
- d. To include women representatives on the committees that evaluate programmes, in order to enable them to participate in insuring a high level of social content and to give a positive portrayal of women's roles without discrimination as to rights and duties;
- e. To increase opportunities for technical and professional training for women who are working in the field of mass media, through training programmes and scholarships at home or abroad;
- f. To produce programmes, films, and educational, health and cultural magazines, in order to develop ideas, attitudes and practices that will reach women in all sectors of society, and to render these materials relevant to the social realities of the Arab woman and to her legitimate ambitions in accordance with opportunities offered to her by society, in order to avoid false expectations and values, which may lead to loss of self confidence and cultural identity conflicts.
- g. To produce programmes, films, and plays that show the role of women leaders in the history of the region, in the national movements for liberation and independence, and give examples of women's participation in the fields of science, politics, administration, and economic activity;

h. To issue commemorative postal stamps and medals symbolizing the struggle of Arab women and their efforts in the fields of agriculture, industry, commerce, handicrafts, and science; to use the revenue from the sales to finance projects for women in the poorest sectors of society, and to award decorations to women who have contributed to solving problems of poverty and underdevelopment;

i. To utilize fully the mass media in national efforts to eradicate women's illiteracy, to improve living standards, to promote campaigns providing information relating to health and nutritional knowledge, and to show women available opportunities for education, training and employment.

j. To establish a bureau, in which women participate, in coordination with public educational, cultural and information institutions in order to review critically the values that society wishes to safeguard and those that it does not.

k. To increase systematically regional and national efforts aiming at portraying a positive image of the changing role of Arab women to the outside world and to counteract the effects of mass media in its negative portrayal of Arab women.

l. To increase interaction between national women's organizations both inside and outside the region and to formulate a policy for representation of these organizations in international gatherings which would adequately express the Arab women's views on development and peace.

X. The Role of Women's Organizations and Associations

54. Although the objective of integrating women in development is a national responsibility, the responsibility of its implementation does not only rest on governments but should be shared by popular, non-governmental and voluntary organizations.

55. Non-governmental and voluntary organizations have been able to offer aid to deprived families as well as to perform diversified social services benefiting women. In recent years voluntary and women's organizations emerged dealing with various aspects related to women. They were able to achieve noticeable accomplishments in issues related to equality between men and women and in providing services to needy families. However, these organizations and associations need to develop their policies, programmes, and personnel, to be more effective in relating their activities to the objectives of development plans and to allow women to participate effectively both as contributors to and beneficiaries from the various national efforts.

56. Due to the historical circumstances in which women's associations were established, most of them are concentrated in cities, restricting their effectiveness to urban centres. The organizations found in rural areas are limited in the effectiveness of their programmes. As a whole, women's organizations lack technical and human resources trained in administration, organization, and programming. In addition popular and private organizations, in some instances, lack funds and face financial and administrative restrictions which decrease their strength as a force for legal and effective pressure for the advancement of Arab women and their fuller participation in development.

Proposals for Action

a. To support women's organizations and associations, wherever established, both technically and financially, to encourage their formation in countries that lack them, and to give them greater opportunity and facilities to participate in activities related to planning national development and in mobilizing men and women to implement, to follow-up and to evaluate the plans;

b. Women's organizations and associations have the following fundamental responsibilities in enhancing their impact on the advancement of women and in accelerating the national development process in general:

1. To review the objectives of women's organizations and associations, and to reorient their activities so that they can become an effective tool in social and economic development.
2. To co-ordinate programmes and integrate efforts so as to prevent fragmented programmes with limited impact.
3. To participate in examining legislation related to the status of women and to their employment opportunities, and to take the necessary steps to amend these laws in order to guarantee the right of women to equality with men.
4. To make women aware of their rights, to train them to exercise these rights, and to encourage them to participate in political and economic action at various levels.
5. To create general awareness of the responsibility of women in the family and at work, and to stimulate them to demonstrate their ability and effectiveness in fulfilling both roles.
6. To enhance the impact of women's organizations and associations in programmes for improving the conditions of rural women and their methods of agricultural work.
7. To concentrate in rural and urban areas on programmes which facilitate the functions of working mothers, to improve their productive capabilities, through nurseries, agricultural and technical training centres for girls, and literacy programmes.
8. To evaluate regularly the programmes of women's organizations and associations so that they can meet the real needs of integrating women in development effectively.

c. To support women's organizations and associations financially and technically by training their present leadership and in preparing new leadership;

d. To promote the spirit of voluntary work through educational institutions and to accustom students, both girls and boys, to participate in community service during the school year and vacations;

e. To pay attention to introducing new modes for co-operation and co-ordination between women's organizations and associations with the aim of achieving fuller integration of governmental, private and popular efforts in development programmes;

f. To encourage women's organizations and voluntary organizations to strengthen their ties and to exchange experience and work in common areas of interest, to enable women's organizations to interact with international organizations and to exchange experiences at the international level.

g. To support financially and technically the General Union of Arab women so that it can fulfil its objectives in exchanging experience and strengthening co-operation between women's organizations on the regional and international levels;

h. To honour volunteers, both men and women, working in the areas related to Arab women in such fields as research, letters, business and programme implementation.

XI. The Role of Studies, Research and Data Collection

57. Economic and social planning in most countries of the region lack data and studies upon which decision making and programme planning depend. The shortage of statistics and studies concerned with the situation of women reflects a kind of discrimination against them. For example, national accounts do not take into consideration the economic activities of house wives. Employment and unemployment statistics consider the majority of women as outside the labour force and not seeking work. Housing statistics are generally scanty. There is no accurate data over periods of time to enable the formation of statistical indicators concerned with women's living conditions, levels of health, life expectation, literacy, nutrition and other social indicators.

58. Reports, studies and statistics are essential for the carrying out of plans and for following the progress of development in all its aspects. This fact emphasizes the importance of national programmes to collect and analyse data in order that accurate and objective information becomes the basis of proper scientific work.

Proposals for Action

1. To improve census techniques and methods; conduct censuses regularly and start general population censuses in countries where such have not yet been carried out.
2. To collect and analyse data concerning the extent of women's participation in various economic and social groups, adopt a unified system of indicators in Arab countries in order to ascertain and compare the extent of improvement in the conditions of women and the extent of their participation in development, both as producers and beneficiaries.
3. To conduct labour force surveys in rural areas, to include the extent of women's participation in agricultural activities, animal husbandry and domestic handicrafts.

4. To encourage women to specialize in research and statistics and to provide scholarships required for specialization and training in Arab or foreign institutions.
5. To urge universities, research centres and statistical institutes to conduct studies on Palestinian women in and out of the Occupied Territories; to call upon ECWA to introduce studies on the condition of the Palestinian women in its study on the social and economic situation and potential of the Palestinian people.
6. To encourage and support research centres concerned with studying the situation of Arab women in the area, to publish the results of their research and to exchange information in this field.
7. To give priority to research and field studies, which help in planning, programming, evaluating projects, and policy making in matters concerning the integration of women in development. Among these priorities are the following examples:
 - a. Studies of the changing roles of Arab women along with the problems of social and psychological adaptation arising from assuming new roles;
 - b. Factors influencing females to drop out from schools and from literacy programmes;
 - c. Studies concerned with the evaluation of women's benefits from health services and child care;
 - d. Social and cultural surveys concerning traditional customs and practices hindering the participation of women in development;
 - e. Analytical studies examining the image of women, their roles and responsibilities as reflected in school textbooks, and information programmes;
 - f. Studies concerning the conditions of emigrant families in cities, women in shanty towns and bedouin women in resettlement areas;
 - g. Basic data on the effect of inflation and new consumption patterns on the family budgets;

h. Case studies evaluating the effectiveness of family planning centres and maternity and child care centres;

i. Studies of the negative effects which may arise from the participation of women in certain jobs, and possible ways of counteracting these effects.

PART TWO: ACTION AT THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

XII. Regional and International Co-operation

59. Action on the regional level reinforces and complements action on the national level. Programmes for the region as a whole can be undertaken with more competence and economy on the regional rather than the national level. Regional activities can act as a catalyst and a support for national activities, such as activities in research, exchange of expertise and information, setting standards and levels of information collection regarding the progress achieved in the advancement of women, monitoring equal opportunities with men, and the degree of their integration into national and local development.

60. Machineries for development and Arab regional and international institutions must be fully utilized to fulfil the proposals stated in each of the previously mentioned fields of activity in this Plan of Action. Emphasis must be placed upon expanding the work programmes of these regional institutions to include the participation of women in economic and social development and to give the necessary assistance to the countries of the region in this respect. The region contains numerous regional organizations that must increasingly extend their activities to encompass the integration of women as part of their development goals. Among these organizations are the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, its Commission on Arab Women, its specialized agencies such as the Arab Labour Organization, the Arab League for Education, Culture, and Science, Centre for Industrial Development, and the Functional Literacy Centre for the Arab States. There are also regional Arab funds, such as the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development, the Saudi Fund, the Iraqi Fund for Development, and other funding and loan institutions that have recently begun exploring the feasibility of financing projects in the field of human resources and social and educational development, along with economic projects.

61. At the regional level, regional organizations of the United Nations and its organizations carry out activities and programmes that are directly related to the advancement of women. The Economic Commission for Western Asia includes in its work programme studies and surveys on the condition of women in the countries of the region. ECWA provides, also, advisory services to its member states in the field of the development of women as a human resource. The UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States and the UNESCO Regional Office for Science Co-operation concentrate on the scientific and educational aspects of educating and training women. Furthermore, the Arab States Centre for Functional Literacy in Sirs Al-Layan provides training, research, and advice in the field of adult education and the eradication of illiteracy among men and women. The Regional UNICEF Office provides assistance in services for children and in women's affairs. In addition, there are regional offices for the International Labour Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization. Their programmes deal respectively with employment and improvement of productivity, strengthening integrated rural development, improvement of health conditions - all of which are closely linked to the prerequisites of integrating women in the development of the countries in the region. The United Nations Development Programme has made certain efforts regionally in studies and programmes related to the advancement of women. The United Nations Environment Programme touches upon the role that women can play in developing human settlements and safeguarding the environment. Besides all these services, sources for funding and loans are also available, such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development. Financial and technical assistance are also provided by the World Food Programme, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, and the United Nations Organization for Industrial Development.

Proposals for Action

a. To strengthen the Commission on Arab Women and the Bureau of Women's Affairs in the Secretariat of the League of Arab States so that they can fulfil their functions for serving member states;

b. To speed the establishment of the Arab League's Information and Documentation Centre for the Arab Woman which will be responsible for collecting statistics, data, and information related to women's affairs in the Arab world;

c. To form a special unit for the advancement of women as part of the organizational structure of the Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Western Asia so that it can undertake inter-disciplinary studies, collect data, and provide advice to the Commission's member States. Simultaneously ECWA's member States should give sufficient attention to the studies and projects related to women in the region as part of the Commission's work programme.

d. To strengthen the co-operation between the Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Western Asia and the Economic Commission for Africa through exchange of information and expertise in fields related to women of both regions, and to encourage the technical co-operation between their member States in those fields;

e. To form a committee to co-ordinate the women's programme undertaken by ECWA and the regional offices of the United Nations specialized agencies and the regional office of the United Nations Development Programme, in order to set the foundations for evaluating the Regional Plan of Action, to monitor the advancement of women's condition in the region and to evaluate the effectiveness of the technical assistance provided by the United Nations organizations;

f. To establish a regular procedure for reviewing and evaluating the implementation of the recommendations of the regional plan of action, the Economic Commission for Western Asia should design an appropriate plan for this procedure, including the details of its operation.

g. To urge Arab aid-giving governments and funds to pay attention and give priority to programmes focusing on increasing employment opportunities for women and improving the conditions of working women particularly in rural areas;

h. To request the Economic Commission for Western Asia to give due emphasis when setting proposals for the United Nations Voluntary Fund for the Decade for Women to training programmes for women, to income generating projects in rural areas and the poor urban sectors, and to direct a large portion of the project to the least-developed countries in the ECWA region and to seek new Arab and international sources for funding programmes for the advancement of women in the region;

i. To call upon the Economic Commission for Western Asia in co-operation with the specialized agencies and the regional Arab organizations to compile and publish a directory of professional women specialized in economic, social, and educational fields, particularly those concerned with the integration of women in development, so that the directory can assist in the exchange of experts and experience among the Arab countries and on the international level as well;

j. To make fuller use of the centres and institutions of the international and regional United Nations organizations for training Arab women in administration, planning, statistics, project programming, and other skills basic to economic and social development;

k. To urge the United Nations to support research centres dealing with the integration of women in development;

l. To establish a regional research and training centre for women and development under the auspices of the United Nations with the participation of the member States of ECWA.

m. To urge the Arab States to increase the number of Arab women nominated for announced vacant positions in the United Nations organizations in both the Secretariat positions as well as technical assistance experts for the United Nations Development Programmes;

n. To urge the United Nations to undertake missions for recruitment of Arab women to work in the Secretariat, regional offices and specialized agencies;

o. To call upon the governments and the international organizations that provide technical assistance in meeting the basic and urgent requirements of development of the countries of the region,

especially in the development of human resources, to give the participation of women in development and its prerequisites a high priority, when planning and implementing technical bilateral or international assistance programmes;

p. To urge the Arab States, the regional organizations, the Arab funds and the United Nations organizations to find flexible modalities for regional co-operation among the states of Western Asia, so that countries deficient in financial resources can implement their development plans through investments and financial resources that could be made available by wealthy countries in the region. Furthermore, the labour exporting states need to be further assisted by the importing countries to enable the former to expand and improve their educational and training capabilities in order to meet their own needs as well as the demands of their sister-countries for skilled personnel;

q. To facilitate the exchange of personnel among states of the region, especially women, and to provide them with stable living conditions in order to obtain maximum benefit from their work.

CONCLUSION

In this conclusion are listed important proposals selected from the twelve sections of the Plan of Action. These proposals can be implemented in the near future. They constitute essential elements, increasing the effectiveness of the other recommendations on the national and regional level. These proposals respond to basic needs, common to all the states of the region in their efforts to integrate women in development.

Planning and Implementation

A. National Plans of Action

Governments are urged to develop national plans of action on the basis of the Regional Plan of Action. National Plans of Action should consider developmental priorities, social conditions and the aspirations of women, within the technical, administrative and financial capabilities available in the nation, the region, and the international community.

B. General Planning

1. Training workshops should be carried out, at the national and regional level, for persons working in planning organizations. The workshops should emphasize the integration of women in development as an essential objective of economic and social planning, and study should be devoted to the achievement of this objective. Given this objective, planners should consider the use of data and information in re-defining priorities and re-formulating projects.

2. The secretariat of the League of Arab States, which is setting an Arab strategy of social development beginning with 1980, should give full attention to the recommendations of this Plan of Action for the ECWA region, in order that women (as beneficiaries and as participants) should play their part in the overall process of social development.

C. National Machinery

National women's committees and departments should be supported through the provision of technical expertise, as they draw up the necessary policies and plans, and as they follow-up and evaluate projects. If no such committees or departments exist, they should be established.

D. Funding

1. High priority should be given to projects that affect the integration of women directly or indirectly, so that the projects can be funded locally or nationally and so that they can qualify for assistance and/or loans.

2. A study should be carried out to ascertain the amount of investment, by each national development plan, in the social sector and in human resources, both men and women. The study would also inquire into the amount of assistance and loans offered by regional and international funding institutions for investment in the social sector and in human resources. Comparison would be made with the amounts invested in economic and material development. These studies are to be utilized in setting balanced formulas for the development of economic, social, and human resources.

3. Training seminars should be held on the formulation, funding and implementation of projects for the development of social and human resources. The project proposals should assist the funding agencies to re-orient their assistance to the development of these resources.

Education and Training

A regional institute should be established for the purpose of training teachers and trainers, both men and women, for vocational and technical institutes. These persons should be equipped with the modern skills and technical specializations needed for development projects in the region.

Employment and Human Resources

A. Studies should be undertaken on the movement of the labour force in the region in order to reach an equilibrium between the demand and supply of the different economic activities. These studies should form the basis for an integrated policy, aimed at preparing the needed skills for the development of the region.

B. A plan for human resources in the region should be formulated to enable the countries that export skilled human resources to compensate their loss through the funding of training institutes by the labour-importing states.

C. To construct a roster of Arab women specialized in fields related to the integration of women in development, this roster to be up-dated periodically and distributed at the regional and international levels.

Family Services

A. Organization of national workshops for specialists and technicians in the field of family services, to develop an integrated system for delivering these services and meeting the needs of members of the family.

B. A regional workshop should be held to identify problems related to social, physical and emotional development of children in the framework of social and economic change.

Rural Development and Improvement of Conditions for Life for Bedouin Women

A. Training centres should be established and supported. They should assist workers, women and men, who are engaged in the integrated rural development programmes, in preparing the required programmes and implementing them.

B. A Regional Seminar should be convened in relation to regional experience for the improvement of the conditions of the life of bedouin women and for their settlement.

C. National and regional audio-visual centres and mass communication institutes should be encouraged to produce appropriate cultural and educational materials for the improvement of methods of agricultural production, as well as the provision of nutrition and health education in rural and bedouin settings.

Palestinian Women

To introduce an agenda item concerning Palestinian women at all international and regional conferences dealing with women and development, starting with the regional preparatory meeting for Western Asia, scheduled for 1979 and leading to the 1980 World Conference on Women and Development;

Research, Studies, and Information

A. The establishment of the Information and Documentation Centre for the League of the Arab States should be hastened. Readiness was expressed by Jordan to host this Centre in Amman. It is to be linked with other national centres in the region.

B. A centre for training, research and applied studies should be established to study the conditions of Arab women in the region, in co-operation with the United Nations and making use of the experience of the women's centre in ECA and the Asia and Pacific Centre for Women and Development.

C. A recommendation was made for the elaboration of a roster for specialized Arab Women in various fields related to the integration of women and development. Up-dating of this roster is to be done periodically and should be distributed at the regional and international levels.

Regional and International Co-operation

A. ECWA is to take steps:

- 1) to follow-up the implementation of the proposals of this Plan of Action;

- 2) to collect information and data related to the position of women and the programmes designed to integrate women into the development process, as part of ECWA's preparation for the 1979 regional meeting;
- 3) to strengthen ECWA's programme for women's affairs by increasing the number of experts in this field so that ECWA can meet its increasing responsibilities during the Decade for Women; and to consider the possibility of establishing a unit in ECWA for women's affairs.

B. To form a committee to co-ordinate women's programmes undertaken by ECWA and the regional offices of the United Nations specialized agencies and the regional office of the United Nations Development Programme, to set the basis for evaluating the Regional Plan of Action, to monitor the advancement of women's condition in the region and to evaluate the effectiveness of the technical assistance provided by the United Nations organizations.

