



CHAPTER SIX

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

Members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Bahrain	Oman	Syrian Arab
Egypt	Palestine	Republic
Iraq	Qatar	United Arab
Jordan	Saudi Arabia	Emirates
Kuwait	Sudan	Yemen
Lebanon		

This year's simulation will include one the Economic and Social Commission's regional commissions, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). Participation in ESCWA includes one or two representatives for the countries that are currently represented on the Commission (see list above). ESCWA will meet all four days of the Conference, and will report to a combined ECOSOC plenary session on Tuesday afternoon.

Purview of the Simulation

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) is one of five regional commissions of the Economic and Social Council. UN-ESCWA is responsible for promoting economic and social development through regional and subregional cooperation and integration in the region. The Commission provides a framework for the harmonization of Member States' sectoral policies, while focusing on meeting Arab states' unique needs and emerging global challenges in development. UN-ESCWA reports to ECOSOC on Western Asia's economic challenges, progress, and proposals for the future.

Website: www.escwa.un.org/

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY: WATER RESOURCES

Water is a necessity of life, and water scarcity poses a serious challenge to sustainable development and poverty alleviation. The Member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) collectively encompass the most water-stressed region in the world. Water supply issues are affected by a combination of geographic, economic, political and social challenges. Population growth in the region has stressed already-scarce water resources by further reducing the amount of water per capita. Climate change has also exacerbated the region's environmental challenges by making water scarcity more prevalent and drought more common than in the past.

However, perhaps most significant, is the complexity of water resource sharing within the region. There are seven major shared surface watercourses in the ESCWA region, as well as a number of shared aquifers. For instance, the Mediterranean and Jordan River Basin are shared water resources of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and the Syrian Arab Republic. The ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict has also played a significant role in the determination of water policies in the Jordan River Basin. The combination of these challenges has produced a progressively untenable situation, with Member States facing immense pressure to meet growing demand with diminishing capacity. The development of more effective integrated water resource management (IWRM) practices will be essential to reducing the risk of conflict over water.

To confront these challenges, recent ESCWA discussions have prioritized strengthening the legal framework of international water law and enhancing knowledge and coordination between States. International legal principles clarify the obligations and rights of states in water management issues. Key principles include equitable and reasonable utilization and participation, as well as the obligation not to cause significant harm. The principle of equitable and reasonable utilization and participation includes both the right to utilize the watercourse and the duty to protect and develop it. According to the

Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, while states have the right to utilize international watercourses in their territories, they are also obligated to take measures to prevent causing significant harm to other watercourse states. Though these principles provide guidance to states regarding water sharing arrangements, they are frequently a point of contention. Downstream states, or lower riparians, tend to emphasize the "no harm" principle, while upper riparians often emphasize the principle of equitable utilization. Though current international treaties on shared water usage - including both the Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses and the Law of Transboundary Aquifers - have not yet entered into force, they have had considerable influence in the negotiation of a number of regional and bilateral treaties in the ESCWA region.

In addition to strengthening the legal framework surrounding water usage rights, the development of sound water management policies depends, in part, on adequate access to information and knowledge. Improving the quality and coordination of information gathering is essential. Joint technical activities, such as monitoring or data collection on water quantity and quality, have the potential to further build trust and cooperation between Member States. The implementation of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), in particular, has been discussed as an avenue to increase the availability and quality of data available to Member States. As described in ESCWA Drought Report I, GIS could help to prevent socio-economic drought as well as mitigate climate change effects.

Because conventional water resources have been unable to adequately meet demand, Member States have turned increasingly to non-conventional water resources, including desalination programs and the use of treated waste water. However, given the substantial capital investment and significant energy and environmental costs of desalination practices, alternative water resources are unlikely to be sufficient in redressing regional water issues.

Thus, the primary challenges facing ESCWA countries as they confront regional water scarcity will be building sufficient capacity

and increasing coordination in national and regional water policies. Developing effective integrated water management regimes will require building on internationally accepted legal principles, supporting transparent knowledge gathering and sharing, encouraging further development of technical capacity to monitor and manage water resources, and promoting coherence between state and regional policies. Without a coordinated regional response to shared-water issues, sustainable development in the ESCWA region will be further imperiled.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective include the following:

- How does your state's national water policy interact with regional water policies?
- How can ESCWA further assist in building the capacity of Member States to develop integrated water resource management policies?
- How can institution building, both at the national and regional levels, contribute to improved management of shared water resources?
- To increase monitoring and management of shared water resources, what further investments in technical and human capacity should be promoted by ESCWA?

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Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary

Watercourses and International Lakes

Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses

The Law of Transboundary Aquifers

Additional Web Resources

<http://www.escwa.un.org/> - ESCWA Sustainable Development and Productivity: Water Resources

<http://www.unesco.org/water/> - UNESCO Water

<http://www.unsgab.org/index.htm> - Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation

<http://www.unwater.org> - UN Water Portal

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: POPULATION AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Population trends and socioeconomic development are inextricably intertwined. For Member States in the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), rapid changes in population demographic structures have important consequences for the region's social and economic development. Average annual population growth in Arab countries has increased at 2.45 percent since 1980, compared to the world average of 1.5 percent. The real result of this population growth is the projected addition of 35 million people to the region between 2005 and 2010, which will also continue to skew regional populations younger. Similar to global trends, the population of ESCWA Member States is moving from rural to urban areas. By 2020, the urban population of the Arab region is estimated to reach 59.7 percent. In addition, the past three decades have also seen substantially decreased infant mortality rates coupled with significantly increased life expectancy. In sum, the rapidly changing demography will test the region's capacity to deal with the challenges posed by social change, economic strains, globalization, and political instabilities. However, careful policy planning among ESCWA Member States may harness the human resource potential and capitalize on their respective population growth to further spur national development.

The Population and Social Development (PSD) Section of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia works to increase Member States' abilities to take emerging demographic shifts into consideration in national and regional development policies. In recent years, the PSD Section has focused on, among other population issues, how youth, ageing, and the changing structural-age demography of the region's population affect countries' development efforts. With the assistance of technical experts, the Population PSD Section strengthens the ability of member nations to coordinate their efforts through disseminating information regarding the relevance of demographic changes on development policy. Support is also provided to Member States to fully implement population and development goals that have arisen from past UN conferences and agreements aimed at addressing population-related issues, including the Cairo Programme of Action on Population and Development, World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, and the Millennium Declaration.

One significant issue to address is the looming quandary of the “youth bulge.” Over 30 percent of the population in the ESCWA region is aged 15-24, the highest in the region’s history. A quarter of youth in the region of are unemployed (compared to 14 percent internationally). The rapid growth in the size of youth has also not yet peaked, and by 2025, the youth population is projected to still make up around 20 percent of the population. Some experts argue that the “youth bulge” represents an enviable opportunity for a readymade economic boon to the region, while others contend that the substantial influx of young people will foster economic and political instability throughout the region. Regardless of the outcome, the “youth bulge” will significantly shape the course of the region in future years. A 2008 survey of ESCWA Member States’ efforts to implement World Programme of Action for Youth found that national and regional development strategies are frequently organized in a sectoral arrangement (i.e. education, health, or labor) which fails to address youth as a specific socio-demographic group. ESCWA reported that many Member States had not developed appropriate policies to engage their youth, noting that the failure to address specific challenges facing youth in development strategies exacerbates youth poverty and unemployment.

A second major issue has been the rural to urban shift of the working-age population, and a concurrent urban to rural migration of the over-65 population, which has accelerated the rate of rural ageing. Both migration and urbanization trends have weakened societal and familial networks that have traditionally cared for the elderly. Thus, despite the aforementioned “youth bulge,” ESCWA Member States are also confronting the challenge of addressing specialized needs of its ageing rural populations. The PSD Section has also been working to assist Member States in the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) at the regional level. ESCWA has worked to engender awareness regarding the importance of addressing the needs of ageing populations proactively. Currently, most ESCWA Member states lack sufficient social security and health services to meet the needs of the increasing population of vulnerable elderly people.

Despite the host of demographic challenges facing ESCWA Member States, some experts assert that this demographic transition may offer a certain “demographic window of opportunity” within the region, wherein the larger working age population could lead to increased savings and investment in economic and social development. Carefully formulated regional and national policies will be necessary to maximize the potential socioeconomic benefits while minimizing the negative societal effects of shifting population dynamics.

In May 2009, ESCWA participated in Conference on Population and Development in the Arab Region, which marked the fifteenth anniversary since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). Emerging population trends were analyzed in light of the ICPD Plan of Action, and the potential to learn from the experiences of other global demographic shifts was also discussed. Going forward, ESCWA Member States will continue to confront demographic issues in the difficult context of the destabilizing effects of the world economic crisis and, in some states, internal political dissent. Further support will be needed to help states channel the “youth bulge” towards positive outcomes for the region. ESCWA Member States bear the responsibility to develop and implement policies that lead to sustained economic growth while avoiding instability.

Questions to consider from your government’s perspective include the following:

- What do your country’s population pyramids and other demographic indicators in the region look like? How are they expected to change in coming years? What policies, if any, have ESCWA Member States enacted in response?
- What strategies should be undertaken by Member States to better incorporate the specific challenges faced by youth in their national development policies?
- How have labor migration patterns impacted rural and urban populations in your country?

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E/ESCWA/SDD/2007/WP.1
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E/ESCWA/SDD/2007/Booklet.1/Rev.1

Additional Web Resources

www.escwa.un.org/popin/ - ESCWA Population Information Network

www.unfpa.org/ - United Nations Funds for Population Activities

www.un.org/esa/population/ - United Nations Population Division

www.mdgafrica.org - MDG Africa Steering Group

