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REPORT

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF HARMONIZED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR ESCWA MEMBER STATES BEIRUT, 11-12 APRIL 2001

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. In order to ensure sustainable development, the countries of the region adopted Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) policies as a basic preventive mechanism for protecting the environment. The general purpose of EIA is to enhance development projects by preventing, minimizing, mitigating or compensating for their potential adverse environmental and, often, social impacts. All the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) member States have introduced EIA regulations for the protection of their environment, which have been implemented with varying degrees of success.
2. The wide disparity in the stringency with which EIA policies are implemented may, in some cases, lead to the loss of various economic opportunities and a flight of foreign investment to countries with less stringent EIA policies. Furthermore, some large-scale activities which might cause significant adverse transboundary impacts may also cause transboundary environmental disputes. Harmonization of EIA policies in the ESCWA region is considered the first step towards preventing transboundary environmental disputes and should help to avoid environmental dumping.
3. In an attempt to integrate environmental concerns into the mainstream of development in the region and without any negative socio-economic implications, ESCWA held the Expert Group Meeting to address the issue of developing harmonized regional environmental impact assessment for member States.
4. The main objectives of the Meeting were to:
 - (a) Assess the current situation with respect to the adequacy of institutional, legislative and technical competence needed for the proper implementation and enforcement of EIA policies in the ESCWA region;
 - (b) Enhance the capacity of ESCWA member States to promote the institutionalization of EIA at all levels of decision-making;
 - (c) Identify and assess the risk of creating pollution havens in some ESCWA member States as a result of inharmonious EIA policies;
 - (d) Facilitate closer cooperation among ESCWA member States so as to promote dialogue and exchange of information on EIA issues in a transboundary context;
 - (e) Explore the best way of avoiding the emergence of pollution havens (environmental dumping) through regional cooperation and harmonization of EIA policies;
 - (f) Develop a practical framework and establish realistic guidelines for the harmonization of EIA in the ESCWA region.
5. The purpose of the Meeting was to encourage competent national environmental authorities to introduce appropriate mitigation measures, without worrying about the potential migration of economic opportunities to neighbouring competitor countries, and contribute to the development of human resources by sharing success stories and avoiding experiences of failure. The Meeting provided a forum for policy- and decision-makers in the region to explore the need for harmonized EIA and strategies for achieving it, in order to avoid exploitation by developers seeking locations in countries of the region. Ultimately, this should prevent the ESCWA region becoming a pollution haven.
6. Despite the efforts made by some countries to include non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the EIA process, the Meeting concluded that, in some, public commitment is still less than the minimum required for any significant EIA process. Some countries also lack firm political commitment to adopting EIA as a routine, nonnegotiable planning and decision-making tool, and EIA is still perceived as a case of procedure prevailing over value and purpose, whereby legislation leads to the production of expensive, impressive, but useless, reports.

7. Socio-economic assessment has not been treated as an inherent part of the EIA process, along with the physical and biological environment. Many countries of the region prefer to treat socio-economic impacts separately, so EIA includes only those socio-economic impacts that are directly related to environmental resources and affected communities.
8. In most countries, decision-makers are still tuned towards mitigation measures (the *post hoc* approach) rather than the “cradle to grave” or, better, “cradle to cradle” approach. For various reasons, the implementation of Pollution Prevention Programmes (PPP) and Reduce, Reuse and Recycle (RRR) approaches have not been fully adopted or institutionalized as an inherent part of EIA policies.
9. There was agreement on the need to develop harmonized methodologies for applying EIA in a transboundary context for large-scale projects and major regional development programmes. There is insufficient awareness by decision-makers of the need for harmonized EIA policies in the ESCWA region as a fundamental means of integrating national economies into regional, and then global, economies, and the role of both central and local government, including Competent Environmental Authorities (CEAs), in carrying out the harmonization process is unclear and ill-defined.
10. Existing national legislation and institutions should be reexamined and enhanced to ensure that EIA is fully integrated into decision-making so that a comprehensive environmental management approach can be implemented.
11. Cumulative environmental effects should be included in the screening and scoping process. The cumulative environmental effect of the synergy, interaction and interdependency of a proposed project with other existing and potential projects and activities should not be overlooked. The contribution of a proposed project to those cumulative effects should therefore be a major factor influencing decision-making.
12. Countries should incorporate EIA provisions in existing and new bilateral and multilateral treaties or agreements with potential environmental implications.

I. INTRODUCTION

13. The Meeting on the development of harmonized environmental impact assessment in the ESCWA region was jointly organized by the secretariat of ESCWA, the United Nations Environment Programme, Regional Office for Western Asia (UNEP/ROWA), the Technical secretariat of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment (CAMRE), and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). The meeting was held at United Nations House, Beirut from 11 to 13 April 2001.
14. Environmental experts designated by the Governments of nine member States, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen, attended.
15. Representatives of various United Nations organizations and specialized agencies, other Arab institutions, and regional and international organizations, as well as representatives of academic institutions, research centres, NGOs, and the private sector in Lebanon also attended.
16. The Meeting adopted the proposed organization of work (E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/L.2).
17. Documentation consisted of background papers prepared by the ESCWA secretariat, and papers prepared by a consultant from ESCWA and a regional adviser on the environment from the UN Economic Commission for Europe. Country papers by Government-designated experts and papers prepared by representatives from regional and international organizations, such as the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), and the Centre for Environment and Development for Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE), were also presented (see list of documents, annex III).

II. OPENING OF THE MEETING

18. The Meeting was held under the patronage of His Excellency Dr. Michel Moussa, Lebanese Minister of Environment. In his speech, the Minister welcomed the participants and emphasized the role played by the Ministry in following environmental protection policies through prevention and considering EIA a sound tool for the conservation of the environment and protecting from unregulated, unsustainable consumption. He outlined the environmental legislation his Ministry had introduced and explained its importance for the implementation of EIA. He stressed the importance of harmonizing environmental legislation among Arab member States.

19. Ms. Mervat Tallawy, Executive Secretary of ESCWA, welcomed the participants and stressed the importance of the Meeting, since EIA was the best tool for ensuring sustainable development. She said experts would evaluate EIA policies and try to find the best means of harmonizing them to prevent the migration of foreign projects to Arab countries because of lack of strict environmental legislation, which would lead to environmental dumping in the ESCWA region. She concluded by saying that the participants were the leading experts from regional and international organizations who would enrich discussions and produce appropriate conclusions and recommendations for the region.

20. Mr. Omar Touqan, Chief of the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division, said the Meeting was part of ENRED's 2000-2001 work programme and would seek to develop harmonized EIA and draft appropriate recommendations for the region. He added that the Meeting would provide an opportunity for Government representatives and experts to share the experiences of their countries and organizations and identify best practices in the EIA field.

III. WORKING PAPERS

21. The Meeting focused on the following themes: (a) evaluation of current EIA practices in ESCWA member countries; (b) developing a framework and drafting guidelines for the harmonization of EIA policies appropriate for the ESCWA region; (c) European experience in developing a convention on EIA in a transboundary context; and (d) impact assessment on land degradation and biodiversity. Particular attention was paid to EIA in a transboundary context and the consequences of the lack of regional harmonization on the potential for environmental dumping. Fourteen papers were delivered and discussed.

22. The following papers were presented by the ESCWA secretariat:

(a) *Evaluation of environmental impact assessment policies in selected ESCWA countries*

23. The paper reviewed the EIA process in all its stages, assessed the legislative, institutional and technical aspects of EIA policies and reviewed the common institutional capacity problems encountered in selected ESCWA member States, namely, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Yemen. The paper then described environmental screening processes for projects and identified the constraints hindering full implementation. Suggestions were made for improving environmental screening in selected member States. The scoping process and ways of increasing its effectiveness were presented, along with methods for identifying key impacts and specifying alternatives and preventive measures. It went on to describe the evaluation of an EIA study and resultant decision-making. The paper reviewed the major obstacles to developing and implementing EIA policies, and identified the capacity enhancement measures needed for the development and full implementation of EIA policies in the selected ESCWA countries.

(b) *Development of guidelines for harmonized environmental impact assessment for the ESCWA region*

24. The paper had two main objectives: (a) to explore the need to harmonize the environmental regulations, standards and processes governing the development and implementation of EIA policies; and (b) to analyse the need for Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment (TEIA) in the region and the main related issues and difficulties that should be subject to negotiation and agreement among ESCWA member States. In addition to highlighting the potential role of ESCWA in paving the way to TEIA and achieving

harmonization, the paper thoroughly reviewed the potential economic implications of the implementation of EIA policies and evaluated the need for harmonization and its benefits. It also described the obstacles to full implementation of the EIA process, reviewed the need for TEIA in the ESCWA region and the obstacles to it, as well as the role that ESCWA might play in this respect.

25. The UN/ECE Regional Adviser on Environment presented the following paper:

(c) *The UN/ECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context*

26. The paper described the development of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, which was adopted in February 1991 at Espoo, Finland and came into force in September 1997, in response to environmental challenges in Europe. It described EIA procedure, including the main procedural steps, in addition to the substance of EIA documentation. It highlighted the implementation of EIA and, in particular, the provisions and mechanisms that can be used to promote conflict prevention and the settlement of disputes about transboundary environmental issues. It also reviewed the practical applications of the Convention, and its role in enhancing transboundary cooperation in Europe.

27. Representatives from regional organizations presented the following papers:

(d) *Impact assessment on land degradation and biodiversity in West Asia (ICARDA)*

28. The paper discussed biodiversity and agro-biodiversity in the region. It described ten natural resources management projects which use GIS and remote sensing techniques to assess land degradation in the region, accompanied by field studies with farmers. It stressed the importance of agro-biodiversity in securing food for local communities, and the threats to it, ranging from deforestation and the cultivation of rangelands to urbanization. It presented various databases that indicate the status of agro-biodiversity in the region, including genetic diversity data, geo-referencing data linked to the GIS system and global data on wheat crops. It concluded by describing *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation in the region.

(e) *Status of land degradation in Western Asia Arab countries and measures taken to combat it since Rio Conference 1992 (ACSAD)*

29. The paper described the current status of land degradation in the Western Asia region where 90 per cent of the area is either desert or vulnerable to desertification. It reviewed the efforts made and the national strategies developed to combat desertification, and concluded by describing the institutional measures taken to implement Agenda 21 in this regard.

(f) *Decision-support system for assessment of environmental impacts associated with irrigation projects (CEDARE)*

30. This paper discussed the development of software on EIA in relation to the execution of irrigation projects which would help decision-makers select the best options and identify the best mitigation measures for each project. The expected impacts were five-fold: impact on natural resources and biological life, as well as socio-economic, economic and political impacts. The paper presented different sections of the software and how to use it.

31. Nine country papers were presented reviewing the current status of EIA in ESCWA member States:

(g) *Iraqi experience of EIA policies*

32. The Iraqi paper described EIA procedures and EIA-related legislation. It evaluated capacities for and problems involved in implementing EIA in Iraq and reviewed the impact of large-scale projects in a transboundary context and the migration of foreign investment to the region. It concluded by stressing the importance of harmonizing EIA policies for social and economic development in the ESCWA region and assessing the potential of harmonization as a necessary tool for promoting conflict prevention and overcoming major environmental problems.

(h) *United Arab Emirates practices in implementing environmental impact assessment*

33. The paper reviewed the institutions and legislative bodies in the country and EIA-related laws and regulations. It briefly described the newly developed policies and procedures followed by the environmental authorities in implementing EIA processes.

(i) *Environmental impact assessment in Qatar*

34. The paper presented the EIA system in Qatar, covering all the Government departments involved in the EIA process. It outlined the procedure industries should follow to obtain Government clearance. It also discussed the obstacles to full implementation of EIA in Qatar, which include political, legislative and economic factors and lack of public participation, and highlighted the importance of harmonized standards for more effective policy.

(j) *Environmental management in Saudi Arabia: an overview of environmental impact assessment procedures*

35. The paper reviewed MEPA's responsibility for including environmental concerns in all development plans, which has resulted in the establishment of an EIA department. It also reviewed various measures taken by MEPA to ensure proper implementation of EIA policies in the Kingdom, set out the political, legislative, technical, institutional and public participation problems that impede full application, and described the Saudi management mechanism for the implementation of large-scale projects. It concluded by putting forward recommendations for the harmonization of EIA policies in the ESCWA region.

(k) *Syrian experience in EIA*

36. The paper focused on the legislative framework in the country and reviewed EIA regulations and the obstacles to full implementation. It described the areas covered by the National Environmental Action Plan.

(l) *Harmonization of EIA: an Egyptian perspective*

37. The paper reviewed the EIA system in Egypt, the problems encountered in the past seven years and the attempts to solve them, and how the system had evolved in response to the pressure and obstacles encountered. It described the impact of economic development on the environment, especially in the context of poor implementation of the EIA system and lack of EIA legislation. It highlighted Egyptian attempts to study transboundary impacts and a management mechanism to mitigate them. It also gave the Egyptian view of how the issue of EIA harmonization in the region should be tackled and followed up and priorities set. The paper described the regional EIA harmonization project sponsored by METAP for 14 Mediterranean countries, where Egypt successfully harmonized EIA policies, especially by developing guidelines for the EIA process.

(m) *EIA in Oman*

38. The paper described current procedures for implementing the EIA system in the Sultanate of Oman, including the mechanism used and the practices involved in the process. It set out the problems hindering implementation of the EIA system and presented an environmental action plan in this connection. A request for harmonized EIA policy was stressed and several recommendations were made.

(n) *Environmental impact assessment system in Lebanon: an evaluation of the need for harmonizing the EIA policies in the ESCWA member States*

39. The paper detailed the establishment of a comprehensive EIA system in Lebanon, described the current status of the system, and reviewed the factors that may facilitate or hinder its implementation. It highlighted the impact of EIA policy on economic development, with an emphasis on foreign investment. It stressed the importance of adopting international environmental conventions to avoid the creation of pollution havens and considered that ESCWA countries already have a harmonized EIA system, since they follow the same

international EIA guidelines, in addition to the METAP regional Institutional Strengthening Project for such harmonization. Recommendations were made for achieving better, more harmonized EIA systems in the ESCWA region.

(o) *Application of environmental impact assessment in Yemen*

40. This paper described national policy on EIA, including the legislation and activities requiring EIA, and procedures. It reviewed the EIA guidelines required for projects, which must be evaluated before implementation. It reviewed the EIA development process, including screening, guidelines, the creation of an EIA authority, training, and related awareness activities. It also described the present state of EIA implementation, including the institutional and legal frameworks. The paper concluded by reviewing Yemen's experience of EIA implementation and the lessons learned from it.

IV. EVALUATION OF THE MEETING

41. At the end of the Meeting, participants were asked to complete the evaluation questionnaire prepared by ENRED. The results of the evaluation indicated the following:

(a) Half of the participants considered the coverage of EIA "very good", half rated it "good";

(b) According to 80 per cent of the participants, the Meeting was very well organized and very well coordinated;

(c) The quality of the information, presentations and discussions were rated "good" and "very good".

42. A number of suggestions made on the questionnaire can be found in annex IV.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. CONCLUSIONS

1. With respect to the evaluation of EIA practices in ESCWA member States

43. A number of obstacles and problems hindering the efficient implementation of EIA in most ESCWA member States were identified, including the following:

(a) Through their competent national environmental authorities (CEAs), most countries have established independent entities for EIA, or sections and units attached either to environmental protection directorates or environmental planning departments. The trained manpower needed to run those entities should be provided and the linkages between those institutions and other government departments clearly defined. Chronic shortage of qualified human resources is a continuing challenge in most countries;

(b) Many countries have either passed new EIA legislation and regulations or are in the process of doing so;

(c) Existing laws and regulations generally provide an adequate foundation and authority for full implementation of EIA in most countries;

(d) In some countries, government red tape and delays lead many project proponents (PPs) to regard EIA as simply another set of barriers and impediments to their investments. They consider the process time-consuming, and an unjustified expense, so there is always hidden resistance to the concept. This often results in poor commitment and ineffective implementation;

(e) In most ESCWA countries, there is no central authority responsible for compiling, validating, verifying, analysing, organizing, interpreting and disseminating the environmental data needed to provide the baseline environmental conditions necessary for the prediction and/or projection of the environmental impacts of projects;

(f) Attempts by some Governments in the region to control NGOs have compromised ability to play an independent, impartial role in EIA by representing communities directly affected by projects;

(g) In most countries, there are no specific procedures for project monitoring during the project construction and commissioning stage. Furthermore, post-project monitoring and environmental management during operation, maintenance, and decommissioning are almost non-existent;

(h) Frequently, once an environmental licence for a project has been issued, its conditions are virtually ignored because of inadequate inspection, control, enforcement and reporting capacities;

(i) In some countries, EIA studies are *ad hoc* and mostly donor rather than demand driven. In these countries, EIA is restricted to large development and infrastructure projects in order to satisfy the requirements of foreign donors or international funding agencies;

(j) In general, the practice of EIA in the region tends to overlook the “cumulative environmental impacts” of proposed projects. EIA screening and scoping are usually performed in isolation from the potential environmental impacts of other projects in the same geographic area with similar and/or different, but synergistic, environmental impacts;

(k) The cumulative environmental effects of small and medium-sized projects have recently been suppressed in many countries by the establishment of environmentally regulated industrial zones. The environmental management of those zones is reasonably well established in some countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, while it still lacks many essential elements of efficiency in others;

(l) Fragmented, scattered, heterogeneous, ambiguous regulations, and inadequate environmental standards and by-laws are all obstacles to efficient implementation of EIA studies in some countries;

(m) Conflict of interest among government authorities is an impediment to effective implementation of EIA. In many cases, affected communities are ill-informed until a decision has been taken and the results publicized;

(n) Despite the efforts made by some countries to include NGOs in the EIA process, public commitment still lags behind the minimum needed for any significant EIA process;

(o) Some countries lack a firm political commitment to adopting EIA as a permanent, nonnegotiable planning and decision-making tool;

(p) In some countries, EIA is still perceived as a case of procedure prevailing over value and purpose, whereby legislation leads to the production of expensive, impressive, but useless, reports;

(q) Most EIA studies are intended for development projects in general and industrial projects in particular. However, in most ESCWA countries, structural adjustment programmes, and national development strategies, regional and sectoral activities, national mega-scale projects with potential socio-political ramifications are still not subject to EIA studies;

(r) Socio-economic assessment has not been treated as an inherent part of the EIA process, along with the physical and biological environment. Many countries of the region prefer to treat socio-economic impacts separately, so EIA includes only those socio-economic impacts that are directly related to environmental resources and affected communities;

(s) In most countries, decision-makers are still tuned towards mitigation measures (the *post hoc* approach) rather than the “cradle to grave” or, better, “cradle to cradle” approach. For various reasons, the implementation of PPP and RRR approaches have not so far been fully adopted or institutionalized as an inherent part of EIA policies;

(t) In some countries, the environmental authority has no local or branch offices. As a result, the screening process is very centralized, leading to serious delays in decision-making;

(u) CEAs in ESCWA countries usually lack the full range of technical expertise needed to assess the adequacy and comprehensiveness of an EIA system. In many cases, the final decisions stem from the professional judgment, common sense, experience or intelligent speculation of a single-discipline assessor at the CEA. External consultants (individuals or institutions) should be called in to compensate for such deficiencies. The qualification and competency of decision-makers are thus another source of deficiency.

2. With respect to harmonizing EIA in the ESCWA region

44. ESCWA countries have yet to deal with the current and potential eco-dumping practices that might result from discrepancies in EIA policies among ESCWA countries. So far, it has been left to each country to determine the need for legislation and regulations to deal with environmental dumping. However, if long-term objectives become more important in a globalizing world market, strict implementation of harmonized EIA policies in ESCWA countries will be inevitable sooner or later.

45. It is true that the harmonization of production processes and ambient standards is most desirable in the context of addressing transboundary environmental problems. Nonetheless, there are environmental and economic limits to harmonization. Process and production methods (PPM) standards, for instance, will have to vary from one country to another, according to differences in environmental conditions, resources, level of economic development, and social preferences. Such differences help structure a country's comparative advantage in the world market.

46. An excessive level of EIA harmonization would be economically inefficient for the ESCWA region. It could remove companies' incentives to compete by adopting more efficient environmental technologies.

47. At present, environmental cooperation among ESCWA countries is inadequate and, at times, vague. The framework for consultation on policies among the member countries is quite loose.

48. There was agreement on the need to develop harmonized methodologies for applying EIA in a transboundary context for large-scale projects and major regional development programmes.

49. Harmonization (or at least approximation) of EIA policies might succeed in curbing, or even avoiding, environmental dumping in ESCWA member States. This does not mean, however, that such problems have been resolved with other developing countries outside the ESCWA region. Many of those countries might be chasing dirty industrial projects rejected by ESCWA countries. At this point, the search for a solution to the eco-dumping problem would be transferred to the international arena.

50. In most countries, the legal systems specifying the requirements for monitoring and enforcing compliance with harmonized EIA policies are insufficient. It is neither sufficient nor auspicious to rely only on the traditional command and control approach, with all the associated impediments to effective inspection, monitoring and enforcement of harmonized EIA policies.

51. The CEAs responsible for the implementation of harmonized EIA suffer from fragmentation, difficulties in coordination, overlapping functions and inadequate technical and human resources.

52. Decision-makers are insufficiently aware of the need for harmonized EIA policies in the ESCWA region as a fundamental means of integrating national economies into regional and then global economies.

53. The role of both central and local government, including CEAs, in carrying out the harmonization process is unclear and ill-defined.

54. At regional level, most countries have adopted EIA policies that were originally formulated by international organizations such as UNEP, the World Bank, Development Banks, and the OECD. At sub-regional level, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has developed uniform EIA regulations to be followed by GCC countries. This makes EIA harmonization in the ESCWA region much easier to achieve.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

55. In the light of the above conclusions, and after extensive discussions by participants representing ESCWA member States and the invited guests, the following recommendations were made:

1. *With respect to upgrading EIA practices in ESCWA member States*

(a) *Recommendations for member States*

(1) Improve collaboration and coordination between government institutions involved in EIA in order to cut down the time needed for EIA procedure and minimize the potential increase in the total cost of projects.

(2) Monitoring and reporting requirements should be included and defined as an inherent part of the EIA system. The EIA system should clearly indicate:

- a. What, when, and where to monitor?
- b. Who is responsible for monitoring tasks?
- c. Report to whom, how often, and in what form?

(3) Public commitment to EIA should be further encouraged by disclosure of the environmental performance indicators of projects to the media and/or concerned parties and NGOs. The public itself could exert pressure for projects to comply with environmental requirements and standards.

(4) Existing national legislation and institutions should be reexamined and enhanced to ensure that EIA is fully integrated into decision-making, so that a comprehensive environmental management approach can be implemented.

(5) The scoping process should be undertaken very early in EIA by involving and consulting all parties concerned, including stakeholders, advisory groups, NGOs and the affected community. This would avoid unnecessary cost and delay, and enable the conflicting interests of the parties involved to be taken into account early on.

(6) Cumulative environmental effects should be embodied in the screening and scoping process. The cumulative environmental effect resulting from the synergy, interaction and interdependency of a proposed project with other existing and potential projects and activities should not be overlooked. The contribution of a proposed project to those cumulative effects should therefore be a major factor influencing decision-making.

(7) There is an urgent need to identify the gaps in the current structure of human capacities of all types, at all levels, and in all institutions concerned with the EIA process. Adequate correction methods should be devised and implemented to fill those gaps and strengthen the human capacity of the institutions concerned as soon as possible.

(8) EIA documentation should be subject to independent review to control the quality and adequacy of information prior to decision-making. Meanwhile, the current shortage of adequate skills and expertise in the national agencies involved in the EIA evaluation process could be partially compensated for by using specialists from various national and local research centres, universities and private consulting firms. Such national research and academic institutions and consulting firms have the advantage of being fully aware of the institutional frameworks, legal structure, eco-systems and resource bases, as well as the historical, cultural and social fabrics of the affected community. In this regard, it might be advisable for the leading environmental authority to prepare rosters of accredited and certified national and international EIA experts and consulting firms. The choice of experts and consulting firms should be based on professional competence, managerial ability, resources available, history of professional impartiality, fairness of fee structure, professional integrity and quality control systems.

(9) In order to provide input to EIA, efforts should be made to improve regular integrated monitoring programmes and methods for the collection, analysis, storage, reporting and timely dissemination of directly comparable data on environmental quality.

(10) Education and training for managers in the competent environmental authorities and practitioners should be regarded as important tools for the practical application and implementation of EIA.

(11) In order to avoid the sensitive issues of environmental conditionality and jeopardy of national sovereignty, EIA should be perceived as being the responsibility of recipient countries and not just that of donor countries.

(12) Ideally, EIA should gradually rely more on national capacities and less on expatriate consultants. When expatriate expertise has to be used, national counterparts should be actively involved as a carefully designed on-the-job-training programme.

(13) In order to avoid the decision-making process being influenced by political considerations and to ensure the consistent implementation of EIA policies, clear political commitments, backed by empowered administrative and legal procedures, need to be strengthened at national level.

(14) Countries should conduct more research into using various suitable economic instruments as efficient tools for enhancing the effectiveness of the prevailing command and control approach. This would create business incentives for the development of innovative environmentally sound technologies appropriate to the special characteristics of ESCWA countries.

(b) *Recommendations for ESCWA*

(1) There was discussion and general agreement on ESCWA's potential role in enhancing the capacity of member States to conduct EIA studies.

(2) Within its available resources, ESCWA, in cooperation with other regional organizations, should focus on strengthening EIA institutional and human resource capacities in member States, particularly the use of EIA as an effective tool for identifying community-based development needs.

(3) ESCWA should coordinate its future EIA activities with other agencies, notably UNEP/ROWA, the UNDP, UNIDO, METAP, CEDARE, JCEDAR, and CAMRE to avoid duplication and/or overlap of actions.

(4) When resources are available, ESCWA might publish a compendium of case studies, "Best EIA Practices", for member States to provide examples of integrating environmental concerns in the decision-making process.

(5) ESCWA should help member States assess the cumulative environmental impact of projects and identify the assimilative capacity of environmental systems, which are lacking in most of the region. This would enable member States to accomplish several objectives, such as: providing accurate advice on discharge limits, transboundary impacts, siting of new industries, introducing and implementing the system of "tradable emission permits".

(6) In cooperation with other regional organizations, ESCWA should help member States develop simple methods for managing the public commitment in EIA, including the identification of the role and expected functions of NGOs.

2. With respect to harmonizing EIA in the ESCWA region

(a) Recommendations for member States

(1) There should be a minimum degree of harmonization of EIA policies at national and regional levels to unify terminologies and procedures and secure a minimum level of coordination through the development of a list of terms, to facilitate mutual understanding and enable the EIA to be undertaken in a transboundary context.

(2) Cooperation in the field of EIA in a transboundary context is necessary and should be developed and intensified among ESCWA countries, taking into account national sovereignty over natural resources in order to enable:

- a. The provision of information, notification and consultation as early as possible in the EIA process and prior to decision-making on planned activities with potentially significant environmental effects on other countries;
- b. The exchange of environmental data and information on planned activities and their potential transboundary effects;
- c. When appropriate, the provision of a mechanism for independent review which may involve a joint commission, joint monitoring and preparation of assessment documentation, implementation of mutually agreed mitigation measures and means of incorporating the views of the affected country into the decision-making process.

(3) Countries should incorporate EIA provisions in existing and new bilateral and multilateral treaties and agreements with potential environmental implications.

(4) Given the globalization of the world market, strict implementation of EIA policies in ESCWA countries is inevitable sooner or later. It would be better for countries to act fast through regional negotiations to take appropriate and effective steps towards:

- a. Harmonizing environmental standards and regulations, in general, and EIA policies, in particular, as a way of confronting intensifying international environmental restrictions;
- b. Preventing, reducing and controlling significant adverse transboundary environmental impacts from development activities in various parts of the region.

(b) Recommendations for ESCWA

(1) In cooperation with other regional organizations, ESCWA should continue its efforts to bring together EIA experts from member countries in meetings, workshops and conferences in order to build trust, which is the best vehicle for implementing harmonized EIA and achieving its goals.

(2) ESCWA should act as a guiding agent in addressing specific regional issues for which there are no clear institutional mandates. One of its primary tasks should be to coordinate the efforts of member States to develop effective EIA systems through regional negotiations in order to come up with a working agreement on a harmonized EIA process. That process could at a later stage be developed further into a harmonized transboundary EIA process.

(3) In cooperation with other regional agencies and organizations, ESCWA should help to initiate the process of reaching regional agreements on a harmonized EIA system, as well as transboundary EIA procedures for certain environmental problems or subjects of common concern to most member States.

(4) When requested to do so by member States, ESCWA should assist in the creation of mutual understanding on the national legislative and administrative EIA systems and procedures in member States.

Since different countries have different EIA procedures, it might be useful to conduct a comparative analysis of similarities and differences in procedural requirements for conducting transboundary EIA and national EIAs.

(5) ESCWA should encourage member States to increase transparency and create good working relations among government authorities at national and regional levels, to improve the chances of drafting and applying harmonized EIA agreements.

(6) ESCWA should help member States to strengthen the consultative role of the public and NGOs in the process of preparation for harmonized EIA agreements.

(7) When requested to do so by member States, ESCWA, in cooperation with other regional organizations, should ensure that adequate measures are taken to strengthen the institutional capabilities of parties to comply with the directives and constitutions of harmonized EIA agreements.

(8) In cooperation with other regional organizations, ESCWA should assist in the development of a regional EIA entity to provide advice on the restructuring of the industrial sectors in member States, so as to produce cleaner production structures that comply with the long-term objective of sustainable development in the region.

Annex I

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Annex II

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Monday, 9 April 2001

08:30 – 10:00 a.m. Registration.

10:00 – 11:00 a.m. Opening session.

Opening statements

- Chief, Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division
Mr. Omar Touqan
- Regional Director, UNEP/ROWA
Mr. Mahmood Abdulraheem
- Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment, Technical Secretariat (CAMRE)
Ms. Fatma El-Mallah
- Division for Sustainable Development/DESA
Mr. Rod Holesgrove
- Executive Secretary of ESCWA
Ms. Mervat Tallawy
- H.E. Minister of Environment
Dr. Michel Moussa

11:00 – 11:30 a.m. Break.

Thematic Round Table on “Regional Preparations for the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development”

I. First session (Achievements and Obstacles)

Chairpersons: *Mr. Mahmood Abdulraheem*
Mr. Omar Touqan

11:30 – 11:45 a.m. Introductory statement: *Mr. Rod Holesgrove (DESA)*

1. Socio-economic aspects

11:45 a.m. – Noon Social Aspects of Sustainable Development in the ESCWA Region
Ms. Fatma Kassem (ESCWA)

Noon – 12:15 p.m. Discussion.

2. Environmental management–Governance

12:15 – 12:30 p.m. Governance for Sustainable Development in the ESCWA Region
Mr. Hosny Khordagui (ESCWA)

12:30 – 12:45 p.m. The Road from Environmental Protection to Sustainable Development: A Case Study of Governance in the Arab region
Mr. Osama El-Kholi (UNEP/ROWA)

12:45 – 1:00 p.m. Discussion.

Monday, 9 April 2001 (continued)

3. *Water supply and management*

- 1:00 – 1:15 p.m. Implications of Agenda 21 Chapter 18
Mr. Mohamed Abdulrazzak (ESCWA)
- 1:15 – 1:30 p.m. Water Demand Management and Pollution Control
Key to Securing and Safeguarding the Water Supply of MENA in the 21st Century
Mr. Hamed Bakeer (WHO)
- 1:30 – 1:45 p.m. Discussion.

4. *Energy, industry and waste management*

- 1:45 – 2:00 p.m. The Necessities and Possibilities of Using Solar Energy for Achieving Sustainable Development
Ms. Anhar Hegazi (ESCWA)
- 2:00 – 2:15 p.m. Impacts of GHG Mitigation Strategies on Developing Countries: Perspective from OPEC Countries
Mr. Ghasemzadeh (OPEC)
- 2:15 – 2:30 p.m. Discussion.
- 2:30 – 3:00 p.m. Break.

5. *Land degradation*

- 3:00 – 3:15 p.m. Desertification and Land Degradation
Mr. Moh'd Nabil Alaa El-Din (UNEP/ROWA)
- 3:15 – 3:30 p.m. GEO-3 Process in the Field of Land Degradation
Mr. Ahmad Abido (UNEP/ROWA)
- 3:30 – 3:45 p.m. Discussion.

6. *Marine environment*

- 3:45 – 4:00 p.m. Background Paper on the Marine Environment of the ROWA Region
Mr. Hratch Kouyoumjian (UNEP/ROWA)
- 4:00 – 4:15 p.m. Achieving Sustainable Development of Coastal and Marine Areas in the ROPME Region
Ms. Naheda Al-Majed (UNEP/ROWA)
- 4:15 – 4:30 p.m. Discussion.

7. *Trade and environment*

- 4:30 – 4:45 p.m. Trade and Environment
Ms. Christine Fakhoury (ESCWA)
- 4:45 – 5:00 p.m. Discussion.

Tuesday 10 April 2001

II. Second session (National, Subregional and Regional Initiatives to Respond to Regional Problems)

Chairperson: *Mr. Osama El-Kholy*

08:30 a.m. – Noon Round-table discussion to elaborate on actions, initiatives, innovative approaches, challenges and opportunities at the national, regional and international levels.

Noon – 12:30 p.m. Break.

III. Third session (Global Initiatives)

Chairperson: *Mr. Osama El-Kholy*

12:30 – 4:30 p.m. Discussion of initiatives, innovative approaches and opportunities at the global level.

Wednesday 11 April 2001

IV. Fourth session (Consideration of Report of Round Table)

Chairperson: *Mr. Osama El-Kholy*

09:00 – 11:00 a.m. Discussion of report.

V. Fifth session (Closing Session)

Chairperson: *Mr. Osama El-Kholy*

11:00 a.m. – Noon Adoption of recommendations.

Noon – 12:30 p.m. Break.

“Expert Group Meeting on the Development of Harmonized Environmental Impact Assessment in the ESCWA region”

I. First session

Chairpersons: *Mr. Omar Touqan*
Mr. Habib El-Habr

12:30 – 1:00 p.m. Evaluation of environmental impact assessment in selected ESCWA Countries.
Mr. Hosny Khordagui (ESCWA)

1:00 – 2:30 Discussion.

1:30 – 2:00 p.m. Development of Guidelines for a Harmonized EIA Suitable for the ESCWA region
Ms. El-Sayeda Moustafa (ESCWA)

2:00 – 2:30 p.m. Discussion.

2:30 – 3:00 p.m. European Experience in Developing the Convention on EIA in a Transboundary Context
Mr. Branko Bosnjakovic, Regional Adviser on Environment (ECE)

3:00 – 3:30 p.m. Discussion.

Thursday 12 April 2001

II. Second session (Presentations by Regional Arab and International Organizations)

Chairpersons: *Mr. Mahmood Abdulraheem*
Mr. Emad Adly

- 09:00 – 09:15 a.m. Impact Assessment on Land Degradation and Biodiversity in West Asia
Mr. Jan Valkoum (GRU/ICARDA)
- 09:15 – 09:25 a.m. Discussion.
- 09:25 – 09:40 a.m. Status of Land Degradation in Western Asia Arab Countries and Measures Taken to Combat it Since Rio Conference 1992
Mr. Gilani Abdelgawad (SWUD/ACSAD)
- 09:40 – 09:50 a.m. Discussion.
- 09:50 – 10:05 a.m. Decision-Support System for Assessment of Environmental Impacts Associated with Irrigation projects.
Mr. Ahmed Wagdy (CEDARE)
- 10:05 – 10:15 a.m. Discussion.
- 10:15 – 10:45 a.m. Break.

III. Third session (Presentations by Member States)

Chairpersons: *Mr. Hisham Al-Khatib*
Mr. Ahmed Abul-Azm

- 10:45 – 10:55 a.m. Country Paper of Iraq
Mr. Sami Mati Polous
- 10:55 – 11:05 a.m. Country Paper of UAE
Mr. Wael Basil Mustafa
- 11:05 – 11:15 a.m. Country Paper of Qatar
Mr. Abdul Hadi Nasser Al-Marri
- 11:15 – 11:25 a.m. Country Paper of Syrian Arab Republic
Mr. Fouad El-O'k
- 11:25 – 11:40 a.m. Discussion.
- 11:40 – 11:50 a.m. Country Paper of Saudi Arabia
Mr. Taha Alghazi
- 11:50 a.m. – Noon Country Paper of Arab Republic of Egypt
Mr. Ahmed Abul-Azm
- Noon – 12:10 p.m. Country Paper of Sultanate of Oman
Mr. Ahmed bin Abdullah Mahroos
- 12:10 – 12:20 p.m. Country Paper of Lebanon
Mr. Ramez Kayyal
- 12:20 – 12:35 p.m. Discussion.
- 12:35 – 1:00 p.m. Break.

Thursday 12 April 2001 (*continued*)

Fourth session (Round Table on Harmonization of EIA Policies in ESCWA Member Countries)

Chairpersons: *Mr. Omar Touqan*
Mr. Hosny Khordagui
Mr. Sami Polous

1:00 – 2:00 p.m.	Round table discussions.
2:00 – 2:30 p.m.	Conclusion and approval of general recommendations.

Annex III

PROVISIONAL LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Symbol	Title
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/L.2	Provisional agenda
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/3	Harmonization of EIA: an Egyptian perspective
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/4	Environmental management in Saudi Arabia: an overview of environmental impact assessment procedures
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/5	Environmental impact assessment system in Lebanon: an evaluation of the need for harmonizing the EIA policies in the ESCWA member States
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/6	Status of land degradation in Western Asia Arab countries and measures taken to combat it since Rio Conference 1992
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/7	Assessment of Palestinian EIA policy
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/8	The role and function of NGO's as one of the main actors engaged in sustainable development
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/9	The road from environmental protection to sustainable development a case study of governance in the Arab region
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/10	Implications of Agenda 21 Chapter 18
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/11	Trade and environment impact assessment in selected ESCWA countries
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/12	Evaluation of environmental impact assessment in selected ESCWA countries
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/13	Development of guidelines for harmonized environmental impact assessment for the ESCWA region
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/14	
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/15	Water demand management and pollution control: key to securing and safeguarding the water supplies of MENA in the 21st century
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/16	-
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/17	Background paper on the marine environment of the ROWA region
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/18	Achieving sustainable development of coastal and marine areas in the ROPME region
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/19	United Arab Emirates practices in implementing environmental impact assessment
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/CP.1	Country paper Syrian Arab Republic
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/CP.2	:
E/ESCWA/ENR/2001/WG.1/CP.3	Qatar country paper

Annex IV

MEETING EVALUATION

A.	Organizational aspects	Excellent	Very good	Good	Poor	Very poor
	Timing of the Meeting	17 %		80 %		
	Duration of the Meeting		40 %	50 %		
	Interaction among participants		50 %			
	Coordination among co-organizers		50 %			
	Documents and material	40 %	50 %			

B.	Substantive aspects of the Meeting	Excellent	Very good	Good	Poor	Very poor
	Socio-economic implications		30 %	40 %		
	Trade and environment		8 %	75 %		
	Energy		42 %	33 %		
	Land degradation		42 %	50 %		
	Water	10 %	50 %	40 %		
	Marine and coastal zone		58 %	42 %		
	Governance	20 %	25 %	30 %		
	EIA		50 %	33 %		

C.	Structure of the Meeting	Excellent	Very good	Good	Poor	Very poor
	Presentations by speakers		85 %			
	Time for discussion		25 %	55 %		
	Focus of the discussion			60 %		
	Level of participation and interest generated		40 %	40 %		
	Professional mix of participants	10 %		60 %		

D.	Documentation provided	Excellent	Very good	Good	Poor	Very poor
	Quality of information	8 %	60 %	25 %		
	Up to date information	8 %	33 %	50 %		
	Relevance to our area of work	18 %	27 %	35 %		
	Sufficient quantity to cover the themes		33 %	55 %		
	Quality of reproduction	18 %	50 %	27 %		

E.	Overall impact	Excellent	Very good	Good	Poor	Very poor
	Strength of capacity	10 %	50 %	40 %		
	Clarification of issues	16 %	40 %	40 %		
	Exchange of ideas and experience	16 %	25 %	60 %		

Further suggestions						
1. There is a need to hold additional meetings to review sustainable development strategies and action plans.						
2. There is a need for a private unit responsible for follow-up to the EIA process in the ESCWA region						
3. There is an urgent need to train nationals to implement the process efficiently.						
4. Implementation of a capacity-building programme for the EIA process is needed.						