



# UN-ESCWA

## WEEKLY NEWS

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### Land Degradation in the Arab Region



Asia (UNEP/ROWA) and the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Drylands (ACSAD) at the Shepherd Hotel in Cairo from 30 October to 1 November 2007.

The speech focused on the fact that UN-ESCWA organized this conference while realizing the importance of enhancing regional cooperation in combating land degradation, and achieving a sound contribution from the Arab region to the sixteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-16). The speech also focused on the fact that the issue of land degradation, around which revolves the program of the conference, represents one of the major issues facing the achievement of sustainable development in the Arab region.

The aim of the conference was to discuss innovative ways for enhancing regional cooperation in combating land degradation, and propose action-oriented recommendations in order to encourage national and regional efforts aimed at fostering regional cooperation in combating land degradation. The UN-ESCWA paper on "Promoting Regional Cooperation in Reversing Land Degradation in the UN-ESCWA Region" was presented and discussed in this context. The conference also reviewed and assessed background papers on the five thematic areas of CSD-16, namely: Agriculture, Rural Development, 

The Arab region suffers from limited fertile land, and is subject to different levels of degradation caused by high population growth rates, which place continuous pressure on natural resources. If we add over-cultivation of marginal lands, and overexploitation of water and resources, we find that these factors combined have negative repercussions over agricultural productivity in the majority of regional countries, especially in the absence of proactive policies for encouraging the efficient and sustainable use of natural resources, namely lands.

These points were stated in the inaugurating address delivered by Ms. Anhar Hegazi, Chief of UN-ESCWA Sustainable Development and Productivity Division (SDPD), on behalf of the Executive Secretary, Mr. Bader Omar Al Dafa, at the "Regional Conference on Land Degradation Issues in the Arab Region", organized by UN-ESCWA, in cooperation with the League of Arab States (LAS), the United Nations Environment Program-Regional Office for West

### Development of International Merchandize Trade Statistics

UN-ESCWA organized a "Workshop on Data Compilation and Application of Methodological Concepts" as an activity of the Project "Strengthening the Development of International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS) and the compilation of e-commerce in Member Countries of UN-ESCWA" from 28 October to 2 November 2007 in Amman, Jordan.


The meeting aimed to update the capabilities of officers in the implementation of the concepts and definitions in collecting, processing and disseminating international merchandise trade statistics; to update participants' knowledge in the use of technology for this purpose in customs administrations and central statistics offices; to present and discuss the importance of coordination between national institutions involved in trade data compilation, and to exchange experiences and concerns between UN-ESCWA member countries in the field of collecting, processing and disseminating IMTS.



Participants discussed the application of methodological concepts in collecting, processing and disseminating IMTS, as well as recommendations that assist UN-ESCWA countries in improving their statistical capabilities in the field of IMTS, according to international standards.

Participants formulated several recommendations on the importance of following-up international definitions and recommendations and implementing them in collecting, processing and disseminating IMTS, in addition to the need to use technology in customs centers, and to validate data at customs administration and central statistics offices.

### The Forum on Internet Governance - Second Meeting

The World Summit on the Information Society, held over two stages in Geneva and Tunis, requested that the Secretary-General of the United Nations establish an Internet Governance Forum (IGF) to promote multi-stakeholder dialogue on Internet policies at the global level, and call for periodic meetings. The first meeting was held in Athens (Greece) at the end of 2006 and the second in Rio 



## The Forum on Internet Governance - Second Meeting(Cont.)

de Janeiro (Brazil), on 12-15 November 2007. UN-ESCWA, represented by Mr. Mansour Farah, the Leader of the Policies team in the Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD), and Mr. Ayman El-Sherbiny, the First ICT Policies Officer in the division, participated in both meetings.

The Rio meeting was committed to fostering a dialogue among all stakeholders as equals. The meeting addressed several key topics, including critical Internet resources, access, diversity, openness, and security. The meeting also addressed activities of the United Nations regional commissions related to Internet Governance policies, multilingualism, and measurements of ICT for development.

UN-ESCWA contributed to two of the "open forums", the first of which was devoted to the review of the regional commissions' activities on Internet Governance, while the second was devoted to discussing activities of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development. These contributions included two presentations, the first on "Information Society in Western Asia with a focus on Internet governance", and the second on "Harmonization of statistics in Western Asia". Furthermore, UN-ESCWA held coordination meetings with representatives from the Internet Consortium for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and the Internet Society (ISOC) to explore the next steps of standardization pertaining to specifications for using the Arabic characters in the Internet Domain Names. It also held coordination meetings with representatives of the regional commissions to discuss issues of common interest.

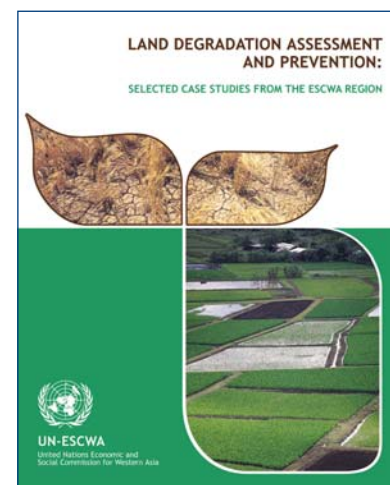
## Land Degradation in the Arab Region (Cont.)

Land, Desertification and Drought in the Arab Region. In addition, a round table was devoted to present and discuss on the role of the Regional Center for Drought Monitoring and Early Warning.

Upon its conclusion, the conference supported regional cooperation modalities on combating land degradation, and proposed action-oriented recommendations regarding the preparations of the Arab Region for the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)-16, the establishment of an Arab Center for Drought Early Warning, and regional and international cooperation on the issues covered by the conference.

### Environment and Development

On the other hand, UN-ESCWA participated in the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR), which was held from 4 to 6 November 2007, at the League of Arab States headquarters in Cairo, and in the discussions regarding the Arab Region's preparations for CSD-16 (May 2008, New York), whereby the draft Arab Region's Regional Implementation Report was presented and discussed. The report covers the progress made by Arab countries in line with the "Johannesburg Plan of Implementation" in the five thematic areas examined by CSD-16,



which are: Agriculture, Rural Development, Land, Desertification and Drought.

UN-ESCWA presented the progress made in the implementation of the regional Arab capacity building program on trade and environment. Additionally, participants discussed a number of issues, such as the follow-up on the resolutions of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Arab initiative for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region, including Arab Environment Facility, Environment and Sustainable Development Indicators, Trade and environment; and follow up on the international conventions and conferences related to Environment.

## Development of Gender Statistics



In the framework of the project on the "Development of Gender Statistics in Iraq", funded by the UN Development Group Iraq Trust Fund (UNDG ITF), and implemented in cooperation with the Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology (COSIT), UN-ESCWA convened a workshop on "Gender Statistics and Time-use Surveys" on 4-6 November 2007, in Amman, Jordan.

The meeting was attended by the newly recruited staff of the Gender Statistics Unit

that was established by the project to ensure national ownership and the institutionalization of the production of gender statistics in national statistical work. Two statisticians from the Jordanian Department of Statistics also attended the meeting.

Along the three-day meeting, presented by two experts from the UN-ESCWA Statistics Division and the Women Centre, as well as an expert on gender and time-use surveys, participants were trained on the gender concept; the production of gender statistics; and the analysis and presentation of gender-related data. Emphasis was placed on time-use data and surveys, and participants had the

opportunity to engage in a number of working group exercises as a practical application of the knowledge and skills gained in the subject matter. The meeting also presented a platform for sharing country experiences.

The meeting was followed by fellowships (7-8 November 2007) with the Jordanian Department of Statistics and the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. COSIT/ UN-ESCWA Gender Unit staff was informed on the Jordanian experience in developing a national gender statistics program, establishing gender units in both the statistics department and ministry, and integrating gender in development planning.

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