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mission report

projects

**Poverty in the Arab Region
(RAB/95/003/E/01/01)** *BOX 1*

**Support to Governments for the
formulation of policies and programmes for
poverty prevention and alleviation
(RAB/97/005/A/08/01)**

countries:

Morocco, Lebanon and Syria

duration

1-19 October 1997

Republic of Lebanon
Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform
Center for Public Sector Projects and Studies
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<i>Executive Summary</i>	4
BACKGROUND	5
OBJECTIVES OF THE MISSION	6
MAROC	7
Les majeures programmes de lutte contre la pauvreté	7
Propositions reçues pendant la mission	9
Ministère de la Population	9
Entraide Nationale	11
Ministère de l'Habitat, l'Emploi, et la Formation Professionnelle	13
LEBANON	14
Overview	14
Current social development and poverty alleviation programmes	16
DRAFT AIDE MEMOIRE FOR A NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE FRAMEWORK OF ECONOMIC GROWTH IN LEBANON	17
Background	17
Objectives	19
development objective	19
immediate objectives	19
Strategy	19
Organisational matters	20
Conference documentation	20
Output	21
Implementation arrangements	21
Participants	21
Date	21
Tentative Agenda	21
Budget	23
SYRIA	24
Issues in social development and poverty alleviation	24
Programmes for social development and poverty alleviation	24
DRAFT PROPOSAL OF A NATIONAL FORUM ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN SYRIA.	26
Background	27
Issues in social development and poverty alleviation in Syria	28
Outline of a national programme	30
Preparatory phase	30
Assessment of available data	30
Conduct of surveys	30

First phase	30
In depth analysis	31
Organisation of the National Forum	32
Second phase	33
Budget of the first phase	33
Work programme	35

Executive Summary

The regional projects "Poverty in the Arab Region" (RAB/95/003/E/01/01) and "Support to Governments for the formulation of policies and programmes for poverty prevention and alleviation" (RAB/97/005/A/08/01) are designed to complement the activities that countries of the Arab Region are undertaking with UNDP support for the formulation, implementation and evaluation of strategies, policies and programmes for social development and poverty alleviation. They do so while promoting national dialogue and consensus building.

The mission to Morocco, Lebanon and Syria is the first in a series of missions that will take a DESA team to ten countries in the Arab Region. This mission aims to assess their interest to participate in the regional projects and to assist those which are interested to identify the specific national activity that these projects could finance. The proposals received during the mission will be reviewed by DESA and UNDP/RBAS which will select one per country.

In **Morocco**, several programmes for poverty alleviation are already underway. A few preliminary proposals were received during the mission and others are expected by the end of October. The proposals received are for:

- four provincial workshops for the presentation and discussion of provincial plans for poverty alleviation.
- four provincial workshops on programmes for upgrading skills in the formulation of anti-poverty programmes at local level among municipal staff;
- a national workshop for the establishment of units in the *Entraide Nationale* that will assist trainees integrate themselves in the labour market;
- a national workshop for the presentation of a Handbook on self-employment for the trainees of the *Entraide Nationale*;
- a national workshop aimed to mobilize the support of business for the project *Struggle against poverty in urban and peri-urban areas* in the cities where this operates.

Until recently, in **Lebanon**, the urgency to reconstruct and to restart the economy has pushed social development and poverty alleviation somewhat to the margin of the political agenda. As a result of a recent policy shift, however, interest in these issues is growing. Assistance is provided by UNDP to the Lebanese Government in the definition and in the assessment of poverty as well as in the implementation of an integrated rural development programme.

The proposal informally submitted for funding to the regional projects during the mission is for the organization of a *National Conference on Social Development in the Framework of Economic Growth*. This will present the status of social statistics in the country on the basis of the surveys recently conducted by the Central Administration of Statistics and by other entities. It will also analyse these data and identify priority areas for policy formulation.

In **Syria**, the improvement in the social situation in the past years have been impressive. Nonetheless, it is uncertain whether these trends will extend into the coming century. The exhaustion of oil reserves, the high fertility rates, and the difficult employment situation are expected to tax the capacity of the Government to continue its traditional policies in this field. There is a need for new orientations in social development and poverty alleviation policies.

With assistance from UNDP, the Government has embarked on a process of data gathering and analysis which will assist it identify priorities for action. A proposal has been discussed with the appropriate national authorities for a *National Forum on Social Development and Poverty Alleviation in Syria*. At the Forum, national and international consultants recruited by the regional projects will present in-depth analyses of the situation in sectors relevant for a national strategy for social development and poverty alleviation. These sectors include: economic trends and future prospects, sustainable livelihoods, human resources development, including health and education, social safety nets, population issues and institutional development.

BACKGROUND

World Bank estimates of absolute poverty in mid 1980 and 1990, place the Arab Region somewhat in the middle, between Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Asian Pacific.¹ Also, in the MENA Region, with Latin America and Africa, poverty had been growing in this period. According to more recent estimates, one in three of the Arab citizens live in poverty².

Poverty in the 1980s and early 1990s, was seen to be related to the crisis of the centralised economic system, to the political turmoil of the region, and to the high rates of population growth. In recent years, these trends have been reversed. The economy is growing rapidly, and the region enjoy greater stability. Also population growth rates are declining. But the effect of these changes will be felt in years or decade to come. The social situation in the Arab World is still precarious and requires urgent attention.

In view of the severity of this problem, the eradication of poverty constitutes one of the main goals of the Regional Programme of the Regional Bureau for Arab States, RBAS.³ One of the main activities undertaken by RBAS in the context of its battle against poverty, was the organisation of the Regional Expert Meeting on Sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation in the Arab Region, convened in Damascus, in 1996. The report of the Meeting was published in 1996 with the background documents presented at this event. In 1997, the main elements of a regional strategy for the prevention and eradication of poverty completed the work began in Damascus.⁴

The regional projects, "Poverty in the Arab Region" (RAB/95/003/E/01/01) and the SPPD "Support to Governments for the formulation of policies and programmes for poverty prevention and alleviation" (RAB/005/A/08/01) have been formulated to encourage countries in the region to apply some of the recommendations contained in the regional strategy, taking into account national specificities. They have the aim to supporting national efforts towards the formulation of national strategies, policies and programmes for social development and poverty alleviation..

In essence, these projects aim to complement national efforts in the Region to prevent or alleviate poverty. The specific activities are determined by the progress achieved by each country in this endeavour. For the countries which have already prepared strategies and plans, the projects offer assistance in reviewing and evaluating their impact. The countries which have not prepared these strategies yet may wish to use the regional projects to assemble the international and national technical assistance needed.

An essential characteristic of these projects is their emphasis on building consensus at national level. They are designed specifically to support national or subnational activities involving consultation processes, such as national workshops, conferences, fora or seminars.

¹ World Bank, *The World Bank Development Report, 1990*. Washington, D.C. Estimates, however, refer to Middle East and North Africa, which does not coincide with the region covered by the Regional Bureau for Arab States.

² UNDP-UNDDSMS, *Preventing and Eradicating Poverty. Report on the experts' meeting on poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods in the Arab States*. Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, February 28-29, 1996. New York, May 1996

³ UNDP Regional Cooperation Framework for the Arab States

⁴ UNDP-UNDDSMS, *Preventing and eradicating poverty. Main elements of a strategy to eradicate poverty in the Arab States*. New York, May 1997.

Typically, these events will be attended by high-level policy-makers, selected eminent personalities, representatives of NGOs, experts and academics, multi- and bi-lateral agencies, and media.

The United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) is the executing agency of these projects, which have been designed for implementation in up to ten countries

In April 1997, national UNDP Offices were informed of this window of opportunity and invited to submit relevant proposals through a circular letter. In view of the delays in the reply to this letter, it was decided that the executing agency should undertake brief field missions. Their aim would be to assess the interest of Governments and UNDP offices to participate in the regional projects and assist those who are interested to develop concrete proposals.

OBJECTIVES OF THE MISSION

to assess the interest of the Governments of Morocco, Lebanon and Syria to participate in the regional projects. This assessment would be determined in close consultation with UNDP field offices and the regional programme on the basis of:

- *the progress achieved in the preparation of strategies, plans and programmes for poverty alleviation,*
- *the degree to which these strategies, plans and programmes have been formulated in consultation with the social actors involved, and*
- *the expression of interest of Government officials responsible for such programmes.*

MAROC

Les majeures programmes de lutte contre la pauvreté

Selon les données dont on dispose sur la magnitude de la pauvreté au Maroc, ceci est parmi les pays de la Région où la pauvreté a reculé le plus à partir de la moitié des années '80. En effet, les taux de pauvreté calculés sur la base des données récoltées par les enquêtes sur la consommation des ménages conduites en 1984/85 et en 1990/91⁵ indiquent que en plein ajustement structurel, la pauvreté a baissée du 26% à 13.1% de la population.

Parfois le progrès réel n'a pas été aussi rapide que le progrès mesuré. A cause de la sécheresse qui a frappé le pays en 1984, les niveaux de consommation du 1984/85 ont été particulièrement bas, tandis que ceux du 1990/91, à cause d'un année agricole très favorable, particulièrement élevés. Par conséquent, il est légitime de douter qu'on aurait obtenu les mêmes chiffres si les enquêtes avaient été menées un ou deux ans plus tard.

Aussi, les enquêtes mêmes montrent que la pyramide des niveaux de consommation s'amplifie vers la ligne de la pauvreté, ce qui suggère que le nombre des marocains vulnérables -- ceux qui seraient poussés au dessous de cette ligne par une quelconque des disgrâces qui affectent les familles, comme le chômage du chef, une maladie grave, des dégâts exceptionnelles -- a augmenté dans la période étudié. Ce-ci en bonne partie parce que les conditions d'emploi -- niveau salariale et sécurité d'emploi -- ne se sont améliorées avec la même vitesse que la demande de travail.

Cependant, il est incontestable que la pauvreté au Maroc s'est réduite pendant la période considérée -- ce qui est un succès important dans le contexte de la région -- et que la volonté politique du Gouvernement a été un des causes principales d'un tel succès.

Les actions menées par le Gouvernement dans le contexte de la politique de lutte contre la pauvreté sont nombreuses. Ce qui est dans quelque mesure unique est que ces actions aient été réalisées dans le contexte d'une stratégie. La Stratégie du Développement Social a été formulée au début de la décennie, bien avant que la communauté international réunie à Copenhague pour le Sommet Social en 1995 recommandait aux pays d'approcher la question de la pauvreté de manière stratégique et non fragmentaire.

Très en synthèse, les actions de lutte contre la pauvreté comprennent:

- la formulation de la susmentionnée Stratégie de Développement Sociale, dont le suivi et l'évaluation est assuré par le Secrétariat du Comité de Suivi présidé par le Premier Ministre;
- la réalisation d'un premier programme de développement social réalisé dans le contexte du SDS, la Programme BAJ1 (Barnamaj Al Aoulaouiyat Al Ijtimaiya), qui comprend programmes importants dans les domaines de l'éducation, la santé et la promotion sociale. Ce programme ci est financé avec un prêt de la Banque Mondiale;
- les programmes nationaux d'électrification rural;

⁵ République du Maroc. *Niveaux de Vie des Ménages*, 1990-91. Premiers Résultats. Rabat

- le Programme Nationale d'Alimentation du Milieu Rurale en Eau Potable;
- les programmes de construction des logements sociaux;
- le Programme Nationale de Routes Rurales;
- le Programme de Fonds pour la Promotion de l'Emploi des Jeunes
- *Développement Humain Durable et Lutte contre la Pauvreté (MOR/96/002);*
- *Lutte contre la Pauvreté en milieu urbain et périurbain (MOR/97/) ;*
- *Appui au programme de Développement Humain Durable dans les provinces enclavées du Nord; et*
- *le programme d'Appui à la Gouvernance (MOR/97/001/A/01/99) ;*

Ces derniers quatre programmes sont cofinancés par le PNUD. En effet, le "Renforcement des capacités nationales a promouvoir un environnement propice à la lutte contre la pauvreté et génération de moyens de subsistance durable" est le premier, et, en terme de ressources financières un des plus importantes des domaines de concentration du PNUD/Maroc pendant la période 1997-2001⁶.

Les quatre programmes susmentionnées prévoient déjà plusieurs activités destinées à promouvoir le consensus social. Par conséquent, la plupart des propositions soumises au Conseiller Interrégional pendant sa mission au Maroc se réfèrent à activités complémentaires à initiatives déjà prévues dans les documents de projet respectifs ou serviraient à ajouter une dimension de participation plus étendue à activités prévues mais dont la dimension de dialogue et participation n'est pas considérée suffisante.

Il est indispensable d'ajouter que le PNUD/Rabat a annoncé que d'autres propositions seront soumises au PNUD/RBAS et à DESA avant la fin d'Octobre 1997. Par conséquent, les propositions inventoriées à continuation, ne constituent pas la totalité des propositions qui seront prises en considération.

⁶ PNUD: *Premier cadre de coopération de pays*. Royaume du Maroc (1997-2001). United Nations. Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme and of the United Nations Population Fund. DP/CCF/MOR/1. Janvier 1997.

Propositions reçues pendant la mission

Ministère de la Population

titre	Plans d'action provinciaux: aspects locaux et thèmes transversaux
justification	Il est prévu que le projet " <i>Développement Humain Durable et lutte contre la pauvreté</i> " formule des plans d'action provinciaux. Il le fera sur la base de la mappature socio- économique des 10 communes prioritaires par province et de l'inventaire raisonné des projets socio-économiques réalisés dans chacune d'elles. Les plans provinciaux comprendront donc une sélection des activités prévues sur le plan locale ainsi que des activités à réaliser sur le plan provincial.
objectifs	ouvrir un dialogue avec les partenaires sociaux sur les plans d'action provinciaux;
participants	100 entre représentants de l'administration régionale, présidents de commune, NGOs, l'équipe du projet et experts
durée	1 journée par atelier
date	mai - juin 1997
inputs	consultants nationaux qui prépareront des documents de base sur un des thèmes transversaux pertinents pour tous les provinces sélectionnées. Ce thème sera choisi par l'agence nationale d'exécution du projet et le PNUD
coût (est.)	40 000 pour le 4 atelier

titre	Ressources humaines pour la réalisation d'actions efficaces de lutte contre la pauvreté au niveau communale
justification	La réalisation efficace d'actions de lutte contre la pauvreté au niveau communale requiert que les communes disposent de ressources humaines de haut niveau pour évaluer les besoins des populations, mobiliser les ressources nécessaires, formuler les actions appropriées, les suivre et évaluer. Bien que plusieurs ateliers aient déjà été réalisés sur le thème de la décentralisation, il n'existe pas encore une évaluation des capacités présentes, un modèle des capacités nécessaires et un plan pour doter les municipalités de telles capacités.
objectifs	présenter le résultats d' une étude sur les capacités techniques disponibles dans les communes prioritaires du projet DHD et lutte contre la pauvreté et des propositions d'actions pour former telles compétences.
participants	100 entre représentants de l'administration régionale, présidents de commune, NGOs, l'équipe du projet et experts
durée	1 journée par chaque atelier
date	automne 1997
inputs	un consultant international sur les besoins des communes en terme de capacités institutionnelles pour la lutte contre la pauvreté; des consultants nationaux pour l'évaluation des capacités présentes déjà dans les communes des provinces prioritaires
coût (est.)	60,000 pour le 4 atelier

Entraide Nationale

titre	Création de partenariats pour la mise en place de cellules de suivi - insertion des lauréats des Centres relevant de l'Entraide Nationale
justification	Le cours de formation fournis aux jeunes filles lauréats des Centres de l'Entraide Nationale ne garantissent pas leur intégration dans le marché du travail. Pour l'améliorer, il est nécessaire, inter alia, d'établir des liens étroits de collaboration entre l'Entraide Nationale et le monde de l'entreprise. Celle - ci pourrait aider l'Entraide Nationale à formuler une stratégie de formation plus efficace et offrir aux lauréats des stages de durée limitée pour leur permettre d'entrer en contact avec le monde du travail.
objectifs	Entamer un dialogue avec le monde de l'entreprise pour qu'il assiste dans l'intégration des lauréats de l'Entraide Nationale dans marché de travail.
participants	50 entre entrepreneurs, représentants de l'administration publique, de l'Entraide Nationale et experts
durée	1 journée
date	1998
inputs	expertise nationale pour la préparation d'une proposition d'établissement des cellules de suivi-évaluation
coût (US\$)	15,000

titre	Séminaire de discussion d'un manuel de formation des lauréats des Centres de l'Entraide Nationale à la gestion de micro-entreprises
justification	Le cours de formation fournis aux jeunes filles lauréats des Centres de l'Entraide Nationale ne leur donnent pas des compétences dans la gestion de micro-entreprises, ce qui serait indispensable pour leur permettre d'explorer l'option du travail indépendant.
objectifs	Présenter et discuter un manuel qui aura été rédigé avant l'atelier sur la formation des lauréats de l'Entraide Nationale dans la gestion de micro-entreprises
participants	50 entre directeurs des Centres de l'Entraide Nationale, entrepreneurs, représentants de l'administration publique, et experts
durée	2 journées
date	1998
inputs	expertise nationale pour la rédaction du Manuel
coût (US\$)	30,000

Ministère de l'Habitat, l'Emploi, et la Formation Professionnelle

Les idées de projet avancées par le Ministère de l'Habitat, l'Emploi, et la Formation Professionnelle se réfèrent à types d'activités complémentaires à projets déjà en cours et dont le besoin de création de consensus sur les objectifs des actions entreprises n'est plus centrale ou il est déjà satisfait dans le contexte d'autres projets nationaux. Ce-ci, est particulièrement le cas de la Direction de l'Emploi, qui constitue la contrepartie nationale du projet de "*Lutte contre la pauvreté urbaine et périurbaine*", qui envisage déjà des actions précises et nombreuses visées à la création de consensus: ateliers, séminaires, conférences.

Pendant l'entrevue avec le Conseiller Interrégional, la direction de l'Emploi a faite - informellement -- la proposition d'utiliser les ressources du projet pour établir un fond rotatif de crédit pour les petites et micro-entreprises l'appui aux quelles constitue l'objet du projet "*Promotion de la micro et petite entreprise*" à Settat et El Jadida. Ce projet est cofinancé par le Bureau International du Travail (BIT) et le Gouvernement Italien.

En outre, la proposition a aussi été faite d'étudier la possibilité d'organiser un atelier dans chaque zone d'intervention du projet "*Lutte contre la pauvreté dans le milieu urbain et périurbain*" afin d'impliquer au projet les entreprises localisées dans ces zones. Le programme de l'Union Européenne de lutte contre la pauvreté à niveau local enseigne que le succès des initiatives locales repose sur la participation de tous les groupes principaux installés sur le territoire, et que les entrepreneurs sont parmi les plus importants parmi ces groupes. Leur appui est particulièrement important dans le contexte de la création d'emploi, qui est un des buts principaux du projet de *Lutte contra la pauvreté dans le milieu urbain et périurbain*.

L'importance du secteur privé est reconnue par ce projet. Cependant, il pourrait être utile de déployer des efforts particuliers pour le mobiliser. Tandis que les autres acteurs impliqués soit bénéficient du projet ou y contribuent par mandat institutionnel, les entrepreneurs bénéficient de la réduction de la pauvreté de manière indirecte et non immédiate. Des ateliers, donc, pourraient être organisés afin de présenter aux entrepreneurs des zone d'intervention du projet des expériences intéressantes -- parmi celles l'expérience européenne -- de coopération entre les forces sociales pour la promotion de l'emploi et la réduction de la pauvreté.

SYRIA

Issues in social development and poverty alleviation

Indicators of social development in Syria have been improving steadily in the past thirty years. The 1994 Human Development Report ranks Syria as one of the top ten performers in human development for the period 1960-1992. The infant mortality rate decreased from 135 for 1000 births to 39 in that period. Life expectancy increased from 49.8 to 67.1 years. The enrolment ratio and literacy have similarly improved.

Social development has been high on the agenda of the Syrian Government since several decades, and raising living standards is one of the essential goals of the national five years development plan.

The future prospects for social development, however, are not optimistic.

The improvement in social indicators has been the result of the rapid expansion in the public offer of basic social services. Although not all do profit from it, every Syrian citizen is entitled to basic education and primary health care. In 1990 education and health constituted 4.1% and .4% of the national budget. These expenditures are financed essentially by revenues from oil exploitation. At the current level of exploitation, it is expected that oil reserves will be exhausted in 10 to 15 years. Unless other sources for financing social expenditures are found, the current levels are not sustainable beyond 2105, and, since current levels of social welfare are closely related by public expenditures, it is natural to expect that they will suffer.

Although fertility levels are declining, they are still very high, 4.8 birth per woman. The number of first job seekers every year is expected to be in the order of 450,000 at year 2000. The current rates of economic growth are unlikely to be able to produce demand capable to satisfy this offer. Also, the chances for Syrian workers to migrate to neighbouring countries or to Europe are becoming slimmer, as unemployment hits these countries. Unemployment and underemployment is likely to increase. Since social security is financed through employers' and workers' contributions, social safety nets will probably become weaker.

Another potential source of concern for the future of social development in Syria is the relative weakness in civil society. In order to mobilise the financial and human resources available in civil society for programmes of support to the vulnerable sectors of the populations, there is a need to promote liberalisation in the social sector as it has been promoted in the economic sector.

Programmes for social development and poverty alleviation

The social situation in Syria compares favourably with that of countries in the Region. Of 15 Arab countries on which data are available (Algeria, Bahrain, in, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, S.A.R., Tunisia, U.A.E. and Yemen), Syria ranks 11th on GNP per capita (1995), but is fifth on adult illiteracy rate (1995), ninth on total educational expenditure as

% of the GNP (1992), and sixth on girls' primary school enrolment, eighth on life expectancy at birth¹⁴.

While there is ample scope for improvement, the urgency of the Government formulating social development and poverty alleviation policies is dictated by the need to confront the expected changes in the economy and in society as much as to accelerate the pace of development already underway. The first and essential step which must be taken therefore is to spread awareness among policy-makers of the need for such policies to be formulated and implemented. This step must be accompanied by the collection of relevant data and the analysis of the evidence for the establishment of priority action and areas of intervention.

Both spreading awareness of the need for social development and poverty alleviation policies and assisting policy-makers collect relevant information are among the priorities of UNDP/Damascus. Relevant programmes sponsored by UNDP include national poverty mapping and goal setting, job creation and sustainable livelihoods and community development interventions. Under these programmes, poverty is defined, assessed and analysed. Also, the national human development report is going to be drafted and the national strategy for social development and poverty alleviation will be formulated. Finally, an integrated 'rural' development programme has been designed for one of the poorest areas of the country, Jabal al-Hoss, in the governorate of Aleppo.

The proposal which is attached contributes to promoting awareness of issues of social development and poverty alleviation among policy-makers and encourages them to begin the process of formulation of the national strategy.

¹⁴ These statistics are from World Bank and United Nations sources

**DRAFT PROPOSAL OF A NATIONAL FORUM ON SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN SYRIA.**

projects

Poverty in the Arab Region (RAB/95/003/E/01/01)

**Support to Governments for the formulation of
policies and programmes for poverty prevention
and alleviation (RAB/97/005/A/08/01)**

**Draft proposal for implementation
in the Syrian Arab Republic**

Damascus, 16 Oct. 1997

Background

In March 1995, the representatives of Member States of the United Nations meeting at Copenhagen for the World Summit for Social Development adopted unanimously the Declaration and Plan of Action for Social Development. One of the main recommendations of the Plan of Action was that countries should prepare national strategies for social development which focused on the issues of national priority within the three overriding goals of the Summit: the promotion of employment, the eradication of poverty, and social integration.¹⁵

The position paper circulated at the Social Summit by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic (S.A.R.) underlined its achievements in the social sphere, including the rapidly declining infant mortality rate, the increasing literacy and school attendance and the growing provision of utilities.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), taking into consideration the recommendations of the Social Summit, decided to include poverty alleviation among its three main institutional goals in the fifth and sixth cycles of operation. In the context of these programmatic aims, it has promoted and supported a number of regional and national level activities on this issue.

The Regional Expert Meeting on Sustainable Livelihoods and Poverty Alleviation is among the main initiatives undertaken at the regional level. This meeting took place in Damascus in February 1996. It provided an important forum for the exchange of views among Arab practitioners, high government officials and experts on equity and development, growth and poverty alleviation. While it would be impossible to summarise the richness of the debate in a few sentences, it may be useful to recall that the meeting made evident that poverty affected the entire region. No country was excluded. Also, poverty was considerably more widespread than was expected. While estimates of poverty varied as a result of the different methodologies adopted, all oscillated between 15 and 30% of the population of the region.¹⁶

In order to identify policy recommendations for preventing and alleviating poverty in the Arab Region on the basis of the information presented at the Damascus Meeting, experts were invited by UNDP to formulate the elements of a regional strategy.¹⁷ The strategy essays to reconcile economic growth and poverty alleviation. Social development would not be possible without a solid economic base, but similar levels of production can be accompanied by different levels of equity and poverty. The strategy identifies in the provision of well-remunerated and employment the key to living standard improvements and economic growth. Social transfers must be provided to those who do not find such employment, but cannot constitute the main building block of a social development strategy.

The Poverty Strategy Initiative (PSI) is an additional window of opportunities for countries which wish to formulate policies for social development and poverty alleviation. The resources made available by UNDP through the PSI are intended to encourage the national institutions to collect relevant data and information, to analyse these data, to assess progress achieved, to appraise government action

¹⁵ United Nations. *World Summit for Social Development. Declaration and Plan of Action*. New York, 1995

¹⁶ UNDP-UNDDSMS, *Preventing and Eradicating Poverty. Report on the experts' meeting on poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods in the Arab States*. Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic. February, 28-29, 1996. New York, September 1996.

¹⁷ UNDP-UNDDSMS *Preventing and eradicating poverty. Main elements of a strategy to eradicate poverty in the Arab States*. New York, May 1997.

for poverty alleviation, and to formulate proposals for more effective and efficient policies and programmes.

It is in the national interest to promote social development. Poverty, particularly in urban areas and among youth, can be a cause of political and economic instability, and is a waste of valuable resources. Investing in human resources is both a key to growth and to social development. Also, enabling every fellow citizen to lead a life free of misery and indignity is the obligation of all members of a society¹⁸. No one should go hungry. No one should be obliged to forgo the opportunity to learn because he cannot afford the fees for education. No one should die at birth if death is avoidable, nor lead a life plagued by diseases if disease is avoidable¹⁹.

Other countries in the region have already advanced in the formulation of social development and poverty alleviation strategies. In all the countries that have undertaken structural adjustment programmes in the course of the 1980s and 1990s, data have been collected -- usually through household consumption and expenditures surveys -- and studies have been conducted on poverty. These are Tunisia, Morocco, Sudan and Egypt. Special programmes designed to alleviate the social costs of structural adjustment policies have been implemented. The Social Development Fund in Egypt is an example of such programmes, perhaps the best known in the Region for the scope of its activities and the success that it claims to have achieved. In Morocco²⁰, Tunisia and Yemen, far-reaching programmes, some of which with funding from UNDP, have been launched, covering data collection, analysis and assistance to policy-making. In Lebanon, the collection and analysis of relevant data constitute government priority. Several surveys have just concluded, are underway or are about to start: a household consumption and expenditures survey in Greater Beirut; a national living standards measurement survey; a national manpower and labour force survey; a national population and housing survey; a national maternal and child care survey, and a public expenditures survey.

Issues in social development and poverty alleviation in Syria

Indicators of social development in Syria have been improving steadily during the past thirty years. The 1994 Human Development Report ranks Syria as one of the top ten performers in human development for the period 1960-1992. The infant mortality rate decreased from 135 for 1000 births to 39; life expectancy increased from 49.8 to 67.1 years; and the enrolment ratio and literacy have similarly improved.

However, changes both outside Syria and within it might jeopardise these achievements in the first decade of the new millennium.

Confronted with the globalisation of the markets, the economy of Syria, like that of many other developing countries, faces a difficult choice; either it adapts to fierce competition on a world scale or it risks to be marginalised, losing the

¹⁸ In the words of the Secretary-General of the United Nations Boutros Boutros Ghali, "Persisting poverty is not only inconsistent with social harmony and a durable political order, but it is morally wrong"

¹⁹ In the case of the Syrian Arab Republic, there is an additional reason to invest in social development. Syria has begun negotiations with the European Union to embark on a process leading to a partnership between the two institutional entities. To some extent, the speed with which the agreement will be reached will depend on the improvement in certain aspects of the social situation in Syria.

²⁰ In Morocco, the Social Development Strategy was prepared and adopted by Congress in 1995.

ground that it has gained in the past thirty years of uninterrupted economic growth. This competition will be increasingly based on issues of openness of markets, of security and stability of institutions and of quality of human resources. To attain these two objectives, social conditions have to improve.

The Government of Syria has already embarked on a course which will lead its economy to face globalisation successfully. To consolidate this course, economic policies must be accompanied by further improvements in social programmes. In particular, it is essential to increase the value and quality of human resources, and to make additional steps towards greater openness in the social institutions.

In addition, Syria may soon have to confront the consequences on economic growth and social development of the erosion of one of its main source of income. At the current level of exploitation, it is expected that oil reserves will be exhausted in 10 to 15 years. The improvement in social indicators of the past thirty years has been the result of the rapid expansion in the public offer of basic social services made possible by the oil revenues.

In the coming decade, therefore, Syria may be faced by a painful choice; either to increase fiscal revenues from other sources than the exploitation of oil, or to reduce expenditures. In the absence of changes in the regional political situation, it is very likely that social expenditures will be targeted for the cut. Unless the resources of civil society are mobilised to complement public finance, the social progress which they have fuelled in the past thirty years may come to a halt.

In addition, rapid population growth will continue to make policy adjustment difficult. Fertility levels are declining, but they are still very high at 4.8 birth per woman. 450,000 youth will look for their first job in year 2000 and similar numbers before and after that date. At the current rates of economic growth, providing them with a remunerated employment is a major challenge. Even with the most effective policies, it is very likely that unemployment rates will increase, particularly among youth. The prospects for employment abroad do not look promising. Policies designed to protect national labour are about to be implemented in the neighbouring countries, and the European Union has erected barriers against external migration. Also, the conditions of employment of illegal Syrian workers abroad are far from inviting. Salaries are irregular and often lower than the minimum wage, and security is minimal.

On average, rural families count ten members. The pressure on land and water is steadily and rapidly increasing. The wise policies of the past years in support of the small farmer that have been able to make Syria self-sufficient in food, will meet greater difficulties as the rural population grows. Syria is already urbanised. More than half of its population live in cities. Transferring social problems from the rural to the urban areas is not a solution; but to keep rural populations in the countryside, their productivity will have to increase beyond what is possible in the foreseeable future.

Syria has already begun to confront these problems. An inter-ministerial committee has been established for the follow up to the Social Summit. A committee for the prevention and alleviation of poverty has also been set up with the State Planning Commission, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, and the Central Bureau of Statistics. The mandate of these entities is, among others, to reflect on the present situation and on the future prospects of social development in the country.

In addition, there are several initiatives that address social problems with the assistance of UNDP.

Occupational Safety and Health (SYR/88/001). The project seeks to establish in-country training capabilities for occupational safety and health representatives in Syria.

Capacity Building of the National Statistical System (SYR/92/006) The project seeks to strengthen the operational and technical capacity of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). This project also provides technical assistance to CBS in the collection and analysis of the data on household income and expenditures, which will greatly contribute to the understanding of social problems in Syria.

Promotion of rural community development at Jabal al Hoss (SYR/97/004). This project is about to be signed for the promotion of rural community development in one of the least advanced areas in the country. It is hoped that this project may test implementation mechanisms on community participation and income generation in rural areas that will be applicable elsewhere in Syria.

Outline of a national programme

In order for it to be able to tackle the rapid changes in the economic and social environment mentioned above, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has decided to formulate a strategy for social development and poverty alleviation. The aim is to identify policy options and programmatic interventions which can combine improvements in the standards of living for all Syrians with economic growth.

This strategy comprises three phases: preparatory, first and second phase. They are outlined in the graphic on page 33 of this report.

Preparatory phase

The preparatory phase will comprise two main activities: assessment of the data bases available and conduct of surveys to complete them.

Assessment of available data

There are four data bases relevant for social development and poverty alleviation: the 1994 National Population Census, the 1997 Consumption and expenditures Survey, the Maternal and Child Health Survey, and the Local Survey on Child Health. These data bases will be assessed, in order to identify the information available, its reliability, coverage and relevance. This work will be carried out by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). Expected length of work: two months.

Conduct of surveys

This assessment of existing data bases will identify gaps in information which the second activity carried out in this phase will try and fill, through punctual, targeted, small local surveys over the entire national territory. These surveys will be done by CBS. Expected length: two months.

First phase

The first phase has a descriptive goal. It consists of two main activities: analysis of the current situation and the organisation of a national forum.

In depth analysis

During this phase an in-depth analysis will be done of the data that already exist on the social situation in Syria, assessed and completed in the preparatory phase, and on sectoral data collected from the relevant ministries. The analysis deals with sectors relevant for social development, such as sustainable livelihoods, human resource development, social safety nets and institutional support.

These studies describe the current situation, problems encountered and future trends. They also place emphasis on the achievements and shortcomings of the social and economic policies implemented in the course of the past years and on the challenges ahead.

These sectoral analyses are carried out by teams composed of two national experts chosen in representation of the interested parties. It is desirable that they comprise one expert from an organisation of civil society and one from Government. The overall co-ordination of this effort is entrusted to a high level international expert selected by the executing agency in close consultation with the Government and UNDP.

This activity lasts two months. The consultancy have a one-month duration.

In-depth studies are conducted on the following issues:

- **Economic trends and future prospects**

Understanding the current state of the economy and forecasting its future is essential for the formulation of the strategy because it allows to assess crucial issues in regard to labour demand and public revenues. Consultants assess trends and prospects in industry, agriculture and services. They identify problems that the economy might encounter in the coming years and propose solutions. The output of their work constitutes the economic scenario which defines the economic feasibility of social policy options.
- **Sustainable livelihoods**

In most Arab countries, poverty is of such magnitude that providing every poor with the goods, services, and transfers needed to overcome it would require resources far above those available. Therefore, the critical component of any social development strategies must be the provision of sustainable livelihoods to the low-income groups. The consultants assess current conditions and future prospects in employment in the formal and informal sector. The basis is constituted by the analysis of current and forecast economic trends. They present and analyse the available data on income and employment, and make proposals of policies for the promotion of employment and income-generating activities in urban and rural areas.
- **Human Resources Development, including Health and Education**

The second basic component of a national strategy for social development and poverty alleviation is the promotion of human resources. As was said above, competition among national economies is based, among others, on the quality of human resources. Although Syria has already progressed significantly in this field, it is likely to encounter difficulties in the near future if it does not press ahead with needed improvements. The current situation in education and health and future prospects is described by the consultants, who also identify problems and recommend policies for their solution.
- **Social Safety Nets**

In every society, there are those who cannot provide for themselves on a temporary or on a long-term basis: the unemployed, those who, though employed, earn a salary below the poverty line, and those who do not have the skills or the capacities needed to earn an income, such as the orphans, the widows, the aged and the disabled. The consultants describe and evaluate the current situation of social safety nets, including those provided by the traditional charity foundations, *waqf and zakkat*: entitlements, coverage, administration and financing. They also make reasonable proposals for improvement.

- **Population issues**

The rapid growth of the population will not make it possible to address effectively the problems mentioned above. One of the essential components of the Syrian social development strategy is therefore an analysis of the current population trends and a policy-package designed to deal with high fertility.

An issue of special concern is that of youth. Syria is a very young society. Youth are an asset provided that their passage into adulthood is facilitated by the provision of the chance to integrate themselves in the society of adults. This entails first of all access to education at all levels for boys and girls, and, at a later stage, access to remunerated employment. Youth, however, also demand culture and entertainment. These are very differently available over the national territory. The consultants analyse the situation of youth, in close consultation with youth organisations, identify problems and bottlenecks, and make suggestions for policies that promote the integration of youth in society taking into account their views and priorities.

- **Institutional development**

All the policies and programmes mentioned above require a supportive institutional environment. The consultants reflect on the roles that the state and civil society should perform and propose policies and programmes to improve their capacities.

Organisation of the National Forum

The outcomes of the sectoral analysis are presented and discussed in a national workshop, which is attended by Government officials and representatives of non governmental organisations, multilateral and bilateral agencies, donors and agencies of the United Nations system.

This event has the aims to:

- present the results of the studies that have been conducted on the different issues relevant for social development and poverty alleviation in Syria;
- assess the scope and aims of the social development and poverty alleviation strategy in Syria;
- identify priority areas for intervention;
- propose a work plan for the preparation of the strategy to the interested parties;
- build partnership and agree on mechanisms for co-ordination among the different actors in this exercise; and

- mobilise the resources needed for this work in addition to those already made available by UNDP.

The Forum lasts two days and is held in Damascus.

Second phase

In the second phase, the results of the National Workshop are translated into policy options through the formulation of the Syrian national strategy for social development and poverty alleviation.

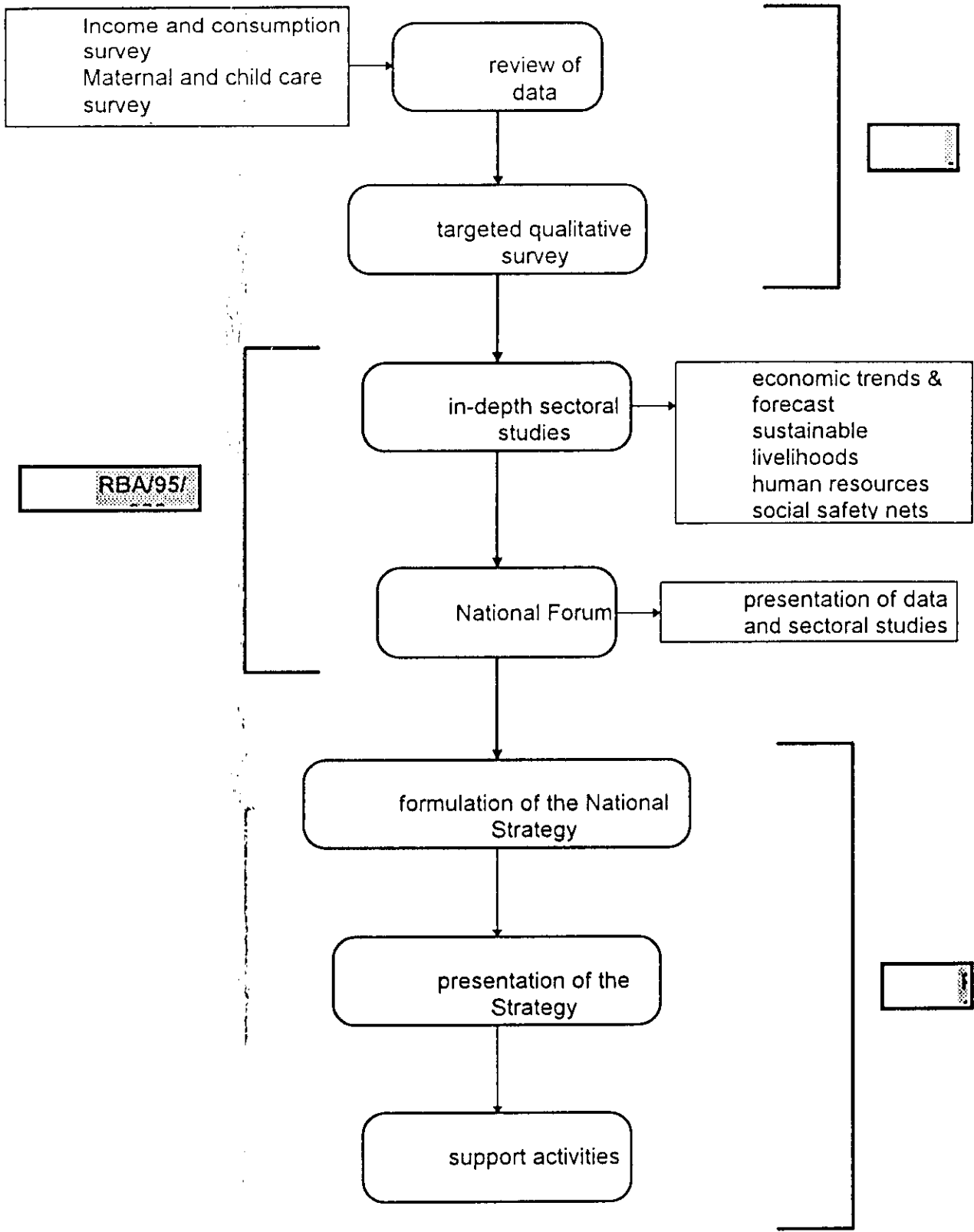
This exercise requires the establishment of a team of national and international experts which drafts the preliminary strategic document on the basis of the knowledge acquired in the first phase through the in-depth studies, and of the existing policy framework. The document, in which social and economic policies are related to mid- and long-term priorities for action, provides the Government with a tool for the formulation of effective policies and programmes for social development in the framework of economic growth.

The elements of the national strategy which should be taken into account include:

- creation of consensus on the meaning of poverty in Syria;
- dissemination of the data;
- promotion of programmes for poverty alleviation.

Budget of the first phase

item	number of w/m	cost x unit (US\$)	total cost (US\$)
national consultants	17	1,000	17,000
international consultants	1	15,000	15,000
mission cost		5,000	5,000
organisation of the National Forum			5,000
TOTAL			42,000



Work programme

Activity	Execution	Source of funds	Budget	Date
Formulation of the Poverty Strategy Initiative PSD	UNDP			15/11/97
Approval of the PSI PSD	State Planning Commission UNDP			1/12/97
Review of data and reporting	State Planning Commission Central Bureau of Statistics	Poverty Strategy Initiative	\$US 10,000	1/3/98
Preparation and completion of targeted qualitative survey	State Planning Commission Central Bureau of Statistics	Poverty Strategy Initiative	\$US 20,000	1/6/98
Formulation of in-depth sectoral studies and provision of international technical assistance	UN-DDSMS/DESA State Planning Commission Central Bureau of Statistics	RBA/95/003 RBA/97/005	\$US 37,000	1/8/98
Organisation of the National Forum	UN-DDSMS/DESA State Planning Commission UNDP	RBA/95/003 RBA/97/005	\$US 5,000	1/9/98
Formulation of the National Strategy	State Planning Commission	Poverty Strategy Initiative	\$US 15,000	30/11/98
Presentation of the Strategy	State Planning Commission	Poverty Strategy Initiative	\$US 5,000	30/12/98
Implementation of support activities	State Planning Commission/UNDP	Poverty Strategy Initiative	\$US 100,000	1998/99