



**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/IG.1/7
13 November 2009
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

1. The fourth session of the Committee on Women was held from 21 to 23 October 2009, pursuant to Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia Resolution 240 (XXII) of 17 April 2003, which was endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in its Resolution 2003/9 of 18 July 2004 on the establishment of a Committee on Women in the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), to hold its meeting once every two years beginning in 2004, with its first founding session held before the end of 2003. The Committee held its first founding session in Beirut on 4 and 5 December 2003, its second in Beirut from 8 to 10 July 2004, and its third in Abu Dhabi on 14 and 15 March 2007.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AT ITS FOURTH SESSION

2. On the basis of General Assembly resolution 62/136 of 18 December 2007 on Improvement of the Situation of Women in Rural Areas, the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and the Beirut Declaration on Arab Women Ten Years After Beijing: A Call for Peace, adopted by The Committee on Women at its second session, the Committee on Women decided to adopt the resolution set forth below:

Annex

A RESOLUTION ON THE FOLLOW-UP TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION IN THE ARAB STATES AFTER FIFTEEN YEARS: BEIJING + 15

The Committee on Women in the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Recalling General Assembly Resolutions 60/140 of 16 December 2005, 61/145 of 19 December 2006 and 62/136 of 18 December 2007,

Recalling also the Economic and Social Council Resolution 2005/48 of 27 July 2005, on the Role of the Economic and Social Council in the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits,

Cognizant of the reports on the status of Arab women and the appraisal of the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action: + 15 in Arab countries, particularly the Consolidated Arab Report of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the League of Arab States,

Noting with appreciation the progress made by the region towards the implementation of obligations under Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, particularly in health and education, as demonstrated in their responses to the questionnaire addressed by the Secretariat of the United Nations to Governments in this regard,

Expressing satisfaction with the achievements made in recent years in the empowerment of women in the Arab region, which included new legislations to the benefit of women and the ratification of nineteen States of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the withdrawal of some states of their reservations on some provisions of the Convention,

Expressing grave concern with regard to the deteriorating security situation and continuing wars and armed conflicts, which adversely affect the status of women in general and empowerment and sustainable human development in particular,

Expressing grave concern also at the continuing low participation of women in the economic and political fields and the continuing challenges hindering empowerment of women, such as the prevalence of illiteracy, high dropout rates of girls from school, poverty, unemployment, violence against women, and discrimination against women in legislations, in addition to some negative cultural traditions and social customs,

Recognizing the need to intensify efforts to promote empowerment of women and gender equality at the level of Governments, civil society, and United Nations organizations,

1. *Adopts* the Consolidated Arab Report on the Progress Achieved in Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action: + 15 of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the League of Arab States, submitted to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York at its fifty-fourth session in March 2010,

2. *Calls on* member countries to:

(a) Emphasise the importance of political will in supporting and promoting gender equality, equity and justice, mainstreaming gender perspectives in policies, strategies and development programmes, and considering advancement of women to be a priority at both national and regional levels;

(b) Increase financial and human resources allocated to policies, programmes and national mechanisms for women, and link the budgets for these to the overall budget;

(c) Promote administrative reform and good governance in both public and private sectors, ensuring employment and job promotion of women;

(d) Coordinate among foreign financing entities to ensure a fair distribution of financing and resolve the various problems facing women of all strata;

(e) Build capacity of the national mechanisms for mainstreaming gender in national policies and engage men and train them in mainstreaming gender in development policies, as well as in women's rights in general;

(f) Network with parliament and enhance participation of women associations and the civil society in addressing problems facing women;

(g) Provide an enabling environment for the application of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, raise awareness to women's legal rights, and invite member countries to consider the possibility of acceding to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

(h) Continue to review and reform national legislations that discriminate against women, work towards enforcing existing laws, and train people working in legislative and law-enforcement bodies related to women's legal rights;

(i) Establish an information-and-data base disaggregated by gender, analyse and process indicators to identify gender gaps in various sectors, with the aim of making specific policies and strategies for advancing women;

(j) Examine the possibility of establishment of observatories and early-warning systems at the national level to track and analyse social phenomena relating to the status of women, so that societal problems may be remedied before they escalate;

(k) Enhance participation of women in post-conflict development, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and exercise due care towards psychological treatment, rehabilitation and inclusion of women victims of violence in Iraq, Palestine, the Sudan and Yemen, through adoption of local action plans to implement the provisions of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000);

(l) Encourage women to enter applied sciences and link their education to market needs, and update curricula and revise textbooks to remove images and ideas that discriminate against women and perpetuate a negative stereotypical image of women;

(m) Enact legislations to raise marriage age, tackle problems that cause girls to drop out of school in order to alleviate female illiteracy and poverty, develop literacy programmes, and enhance qualification and vocational training of women, particularly in rural areas;

(n) Raise the proportion of individuals using computers through promoting programmes aimed at teaching girls to use computers and the internet and develop their computer skills;

(o) Increase the rate of participation of women in the public sector and in administrative and official positions, qualify and train women to assume leadership positions, and enhance their performance;

(p) Increase rate of participation of women in decision-making positions by various means, including through quotas, training women to run for elections, and working towards increasing the number of women ministers;

(q) Provide and develop microfinance and soft loans for women to enable them to support themselves and their families, insure financial risks in order to encourage women to start small projects, provide markets for them, and build their project-management capacities;

(r) Develop health-awareness programmes and health and social insurance schemes for poor women, strengthen and develop social safety nets, and expand provision of protection and rehabilitation services for battered women.

3. *Requests* from ESCWA secretariat the following:

(a) Support the Centre for Women with additional human and financial resources, in order to upgrade it to the level of a division, alongside other divisions of ESCWA, with the aim of doubling efforts to assist member countries with empowerment of women;

(b) Strengthen the capacity of national mechanisms for mainstreaming the gender perspective in policies, plans and programmes, through capacity-building, training, technical assistance and consultation, preparation of studies, and provision of possibilities for inter-communication, and exchange of experiences and lessons of successful experiences;

(c) Strengthen capacity of member countries to implement and monitor the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, through capacity-building of national mechanisms, members of parliament, judicial institutions, civil society and the media, help States to withdraw their reservations on the Convention, and continue to raise awareness of decision makers of the Convention;

(d) Cooperate with the Arab Women Organization to implement a regional strategic plan for advancement of women, and promote the need for reviewing and amending laws to comply with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

organizations are a way out of this impasse. However, the limited values of the loans they provide and

rates. The participants stressed the need for establishing an economic observatory for Arab women to monitor changes and formulate appropriate policies.

B. IMPACT OF THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS ON WOMEN IN THE ARAB REGION
(Item 5 (b) of the agenda)

13. Ms. Yemen Hamaki presented document E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/IG.1/4, which is a study that examines the impact of the global financial crisis on women in the Arab region. By way of introducing the main theme of implications of the crisis on the Arab countries in general and Arab women in particular, Ms. Hamaki started with a summary of the causes of the global financial crisis, how it moved from the United States to other economies around the world, and the plans adopted to address it.

14. Ms. Hamaki pointed out that, like all other countries, the Arab region has been affected by the economic crisis due to its linkages with the economic superpower (i.e United States of America). However, the effects were varied and concentrated primarily in the Gulf region. The most significant of the repercussions was the increase of unemployment rates in the Arab countries, which adopted a policy of financial expansion, in an attempt to stimulate demand, reduce layoffs and increase investments.

15. Ms. Hamaki went on to point out that women were more affected by repercussions of the crisis than men, because the level of unemployment among women is essentially higher than for men. She attributed the severe effects on women to several reasons including: (a) increase in laying women off, since redundancies normally fall mostly on weaker groups; (b) contraction, due to the decline of external demand, of the economic sectors that employ women, such as the spinning and weaving industry; (c) significant decline in demand for the products of the informal sector, which employs women workers; (d) lower remittances from workers abroad, on which women rely primarily for supporting their families. The cumulative effects of these developments reduced the ability of women to secure food for themselves and their families, and impacted education and health services negatively, leading to exacerbation of malnutrition, dropping out of school, and health problems.

16. The situation worsened due to the failure of policies fashioned to deal with the economic crisis to take gender into account, as well as due to their lack of focus on the advancement of women. Most of the resources that were pumped into the economy were directed towards basic facilities such as electricity, water and sanitation sectors. Since these are controlled by men, increased expenditure on them created new job opportunities for males but not females. Moreover, reduction of interest rates by central banks had negative impact on women who rely heavily on interest on their savings.

17. In conclusion, Ms. Hamaki presented several proposals aimed at enhancing the role of women in facing the financial crisis, including: (a) building a comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date database to monitor the extent to which women are affected by the global financial crisis; (b) facilitating micro-lending, since micro-enterprises are extremely important in dealing with the challenge of poverty; (c) coordinating among the various institutions dealing with empowerment of women; (d) exchanging experiences among countries in the region; (e) developing plans for training that take into account the capacities of women and are appropriate to their reproductive health.

18. The presentation was followed by a discussion in which the participants commended the study and its important conclusions. However, they expressed the wish that similar studies focus in the future on Gulf countries, since these were the most affected by the crisis, and have adopted specific policies to address its consequences, as in Kuwait, for example. In addition, participants stressed that the lack of coordination among countries, institutions and organizations at local and regional levels leads to some waste in both funds and efforts spent on studies. They stressed the need for putting an end to this waste, through coordination among countries, and called on ESCWA to take a lead on this issue.

19. The participants concluded with a set of recommendations on alleviating the consequences of the financial crisis on Arab women, added to those made by the report, namely: (a) the need for institutions that provide flexibility in the labour market; (b) the need for coordination among local, regional and international donors to mitigate the effects of the global financial crisis; (c) in view of the importance of consumption, adoption of policies on both the supply and demand sides, rather than on the supply side only.

20. Ms. Hamaki ended by stressing that a lesson to be drawn from the global financial crisis is the need for Arab integration to avoid the effects of similar crises in future.

C. CONSOLIDATED ARAB REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION: + 15
(Item 4 of the agenda)

21. ESCWA Consultant, Ms. Fatima al-Khafaji, presented document ESCWA/ECW/2009/IG.1/3, which included a presentation of the Consolidated Arab Report on the Implementation of Beijing Platform for Action: + 15, prepared on the basis of the responses of Arab countries to the questionnaire addressed to Governments.

22. Ms. Khafaji presented an overview of the main achievements of the Arab countries, and the obstacles and challenges encountered, in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. The major achievements include: (a) amendments to some legislations to effect gender equality; (b) accession of three new Arab countries to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; (c) development of national strategies to eliminate violence against women; (d) conduction of media campaigns on the rights of women; and (e) provision of services to battered women. These accomplishments have been achieved through political will in Arab countries and activities of civil society organizations working on women's issues. Ms. Khafaji also outlined the challenges and obstacles, which are: the gap between law and reality, information-media deficiencies, practice harmful to the health of women, absence of women-related statistics, and armed conflict.

23. The Consultant proceeded to present progress made in implementation in the main areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the initiatives and measures specified by the Final Document of the twenty third special session of the General Assembly. She presented examples of the achievements of Arab countries and some of the lessons learned. In addition, she mentioned obstacles and challenges that still impede the implementation of the main areas of concern: (a) burden of poverty on women; (b) education and training of women; (c) women and health; (d) violence against women; (e) women and the economy; (f) women in authority and decision-making positions; (G) women's human rights; (h) women and the media; (i) women and the environment; (j) girl-child.

24. In the third part of her report, Ms. Khafaji dealt with institutional development in the Arab countries. She focussed on the national mechanisms established in the Arab countries to work on achieving gender equality, and enumerated some of the achievements, namely: (a) collecting various data on participation of women and gender-based gaps in many fields; (b) identification of focal points, with the aim of influencing ministries and government administrations; (c) implementation of decentralization in addressing women's issues, by establishing branches of the relevant national mechanisms. Moving on to consider the obstacles and challenges faced by the national mechanisms, she pointed out to: lack of monitoring and follow-up mechanisms, poor coordination between these mechanisms and non-governmental organizations, and not dealing with relations between men and women. She stressed the need for strengthening coordination among mechanisms, supporting exchange of experiences and expertise on the advancement of women at the national and regional levels, and effective cooperation with the civil society organizations active in this area.

25. In the fourth and last part of the report, Ms. Khafaji presented four main challenges to the advancement of women facing Arab countries, describing each and the plans adopted to deal with it. The

first challenge is posed by negative cultural traditions and legislative gaps that continue to impede advancement of women and progress towards gender equality and the gap between legislation and practice. The second challenge is poverty and its impact

30. The presentation reviewed the studies prepared by the Centre for Women, the meetings and training courses organized by it for member countries and non-governmental organizations, as well as the brochures, newsletters, and information material produced to enhance communications with all bodies concerned.

31. The presentation then reviewed the technical and training consultancies provided by the Centre for Women to member countries on strategic planning and gender mainstreaming in programmes, as well as on preparation of national reports on the implementation of the Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

32. The presentation was followed by an enumeration of the major accomplishments achieved with assistance provided by ESCWA to member countries in relation to advancement of women. These were manifested in the increasing demand for technical assistance, advisory services and capacity-building. The presentation concluded by referring to the main fina

between the central administration and member countries, so that they be informed of meetings and aware of what is addressed.

G. DATE AND VENUE OF THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN
(Item 8 of the agenda)

38. The meeting agreed to hold the fifth session of the Committee on Women in ESCWA headquarters in Beirut in October 2011.

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emphasizing the United Nations full support for the efforts of Governments and civil society organizations in the Arab region for ensuring full implementation of the Beijing Declaration + 15.

45. In his speech, Mr. Badr Al-Dafa, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Executive Secretary of ESCWA, thanked the First Lady of Lebanon for her sponsorship of this session. He paid tribute to the big strides made by the Arab societies in promoting the role of women in health, education, and social affairs, and pointed out the need for three elements to keep pace with international trends in empowerment of women, namely: legislations; financial support to ensure continuity of policies and programmes for women and work on implementing international conventions; and cooperation, in the work for advancement of women, among the public sector, the private sector, and local and international agencies.

46. Ms. Najwa Nasser, representing the First Lady of Lebanon, Mrs. Wafa' Michel Suleiman, who sponsored this session, gave a speech enumerating achievements in the field of women empowerment in Lebanon, thanks to the tireless efforts of the Lebanese Women Organization, chaired by the First Lady. These achievements cover education, legislation, politics, society and networking. In conclusion, Ms. Nasser stressed that women's issues should be presented to both women and men, and emphasised the need for securing real, and not just theoretical, support from men for women's demands.

47. At the opening session of the meeting, a documentary film on achievements of Arab women and challenges they face was presented. The film showed a sample of four successful women who occupy leadership positions in the professions, services, agriculture and the judiciary, highlighting the ability of women to prove themselves in areas that have always been the preserve of men and to play an active role in promoting the economies of their countries.

C. ATTENDANCE

48. The session was attended by representatives of Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Representatives from Djibouti and Tunisia and representatives of boards, bodies, national committees and official departments specializing in women in the Arab region also attended as observers.

49. The session was also attended by representatives of the Regional Bureau for Arab States of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, and representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations, national and regional programmes, and research centres and institutes. Experts on women's issues also attended as observers. The list of participants is given in Annex I to this report.

D. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

50. Pursuant to Article 18 of the Rules of Procedure of ESCWA, which provides that member countries shall assume the presidency of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission on a rotating basis, in Arabic alphabetical order, established by the United Nations, Ms. Najwa Kassab Hassan, head of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, presided over the fourth session of the Committee on Women.

51. The Committee unanimously elected as Vice-Chairpersons, both Ms. Lulua Al-Awadi, Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Women in Bahrain and President of the third session and Ms. Khadija Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad, Director General, Directorate General for Women and Family Affairs in the Ministry of Social Welfare and Women and Children Affairs in the Sudan. Also elected as Rapporteur was Mr. Yahya bin Mohammed bin Zaher Al-Hinai, General Director of Family Development in the Ministry of Social Development in Oman.

E. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND PROPOSED
ORGANIZATION OF WORK

52. In the second meeting of its fourth session, the Committee on Women adopted the proposed agenda, after amending document E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/IG.1/L.1, to postpone the fourth item, which dealt with the Consolidated Arab Report on the Implementation of Beijing Platform of Action: + 15, to the fifth meeting held on Friday, 23 October 2009. The following is the agenda as adopted:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational issues.
4. Promoting the economic participation of Arab women.
 - (a) Women and development series: Women's control over economic resources and access to financial resources;

Oman (continued)

Ms. Jamilah Bint Salem Gdad
Deputy Director of Family Development
Ministry of Social Development

Mr. Al Muatasem Bin Hilal Bin Sultan
Al Housani
In charge of the Department of International
Relations
Ministry of Social Development

Palestine

Ms. Rabiha Diab Hussain Hamdan
Minister of Women's Affairs
Ministry of Women's Affairs

Ms. Marlene Bsharah Nazzal Al Rabadi
Director General of Communication and
Information Department
Ministry of Women's Affairs

Qatar

Ms. Noor Abdallah Al Maliki
Secretary-General
Supreme Council for Family Affairs

Ms. Rasmiah Al Jamali
Expert in International Affairs
Supreme Council for Family Affairs

Ms. Hayat Hamad Al Manai
Deputy Director and Officer-in-charge
Department of Family Development

Ms. Mariam Al Mohanadi
Wife of Ambassador of Qatar to Lebanon

The Sudan

Ms. Kadiga Abo El-Gassim Hag Hamed
Director, General Directorate for Women and
Family Affairs
Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Child
Affairs

Ms. Mahasen Abdulrahim Saleh
Deputy Director
Ministry of Finance and National Economy
Mr. Al Hadi Sadeeq Ali Numeire
Deputy Head of Mission and Advisor
Embassy of the Republic of the Sudan in Lebanon

Syrian Arab Republic

Ms. Najwa Qassab Hassan
University Professor and Expert on Women's
Affairs

Ms. Hadia Qawiqji
Expert on Women's Affairs
Syrian Commission for Family Affairs

United Arab Emirates

Mr. Mohamad Ibrahim Mansour
Consultant
General Women's Union

Yemen

Ms. Nouryah Abdul Quader Ali Ahmad Shuja'
Al Din
General Director of Partners Department
National Council for Women

Ms. Imam Abdallah Al-Hamami
General Director of Women's affairs and Gender
Ministry of Planning and International
Cooperation

Ms. Hana Abdul Ruhman Huwidi
General Director of Development
National Council for Women

B. ARAB COUNTRIES NON MEMBERS OF ESCWA

Djibouti

Mr. Omar Ahmad Arah
Consultant
Ministry of Women, Welfare and Social Affairs

Tunisia

Ms. Salwa Darghouth
Director General for Women and Family Affairs
Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Elderly
Affairs

C. UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATIONS AND SPECIALIZED AGENCIES

Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women

Ms. Rachel Mayanja
Assistant Secretary-General
Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the
Advancement of Women

United Nations Development Fund for Women- Arab States Regional office

Ms. Dina Assaf
Regional Director

Ms. Shereen Choukri
Programme Manager

Ms. Ounoud el Majali
Assistant Programme Manager

D. GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

League of Arab States

Ms. Sima Bouhouth
Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs

Ms. Hanaa Srour
Director of Women's Department

Ms. Oumnia Hulmi
Expert in the Management of Women's Affairs

Ms. May Abd El Aziz
Assistant, Programmes of Women's Department

Arab Labour Organization

Ms. Iman Abd El Maksud
Consultant

Arab Women Organization

Ms. Wadouda Badran
Director General

Ms. Ala Abd El Aziz
Director of Planning and Programmes

Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad)

Ms. Bjorg Skotnes
Assistant Director General

Department of Informatics and Humanities

Ms. Cecilia Bersburgh
Guest Professor
Department of Informatics and Humanities

E. EXPERTS

Ms. Mona Murad Kamar
Vice Director, Lebanese Council of Women
Lebanon

Ms. Lina Abu Habib
Executive Director
Collective for Research and Training on
Development-Action
Lebanon

Ms. Elham Kallab el Bassat
Head of the Committee on Youth
National Commission for Lebanese Women
Lebanon

Ms. Fadia Kiwan
Head of the Faculty of Political Sciences
Saint-Joseph University
Lebanon

Ms. Iman Kabbara Chaarani
Head of the Lebanese Council of Women
Lebanon

Ms. Fatima Abd El Mahmud
Head of the UNESCO Chair, Women, Science,
Technology and Development
The Sudan

Ms. Fatima Muhamad El Maneh
Independent Researcher
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Ms. Sonia Ibrahim Atiya
Appeal Lawyer
Lebanon

Ms. Amina el Sadek Badri
Vice Director of the University for Scientific
Affairs
Ahfad University for Women
The Sudan

Ms. Mary Rose Zalal
Lawyer
Lebanon

F. EXPERTS HAVING PREPARED THE MEETING PAPERS AND DOCUMENTS

Ms. Fatima Khafaji
Board Member of the Alliance for Arab Women

Ms. Yaman El Hamaki
Professor and Head of the Economy Department
at the Trade Faculty in Ein Shams University,
Member of the Egyptian Shoura Assembly

Ms. Mona Chmali Khalaf
Expert

G. ORGANIZERS

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Ms. Afaf Omar
Chief of the Center for Women
Lebanon

Ms. Rania Al-Jazairi
Responsible for Social affairs
Lebanon

Ms. Carla Moussa
Administrative Assistant
Lebanon

Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

| Symbol | Item | Title |
|-----------------------------|-------|---|
| E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/IG.1/INF.1 | | Information note |
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| E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/IG.1/L.2 | 3 | Organization of work |
| E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/IG.1/3 | 4 | Consolidated Arab Report on the implementation of Beijing Platform of Action: + 15 |
| | 5 | Promoting the economic participation of Arab women |
| E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/2 | 5 (a) | Women and development series: Women's control over economic resources and access to financial resources |
| E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/IG.1/4 | 5 (b) | Impact of the global financial crisis on women in the Arab region |
| | 6 | Progress achieved in the field of advancement of women since the third session of the Committee on t |

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