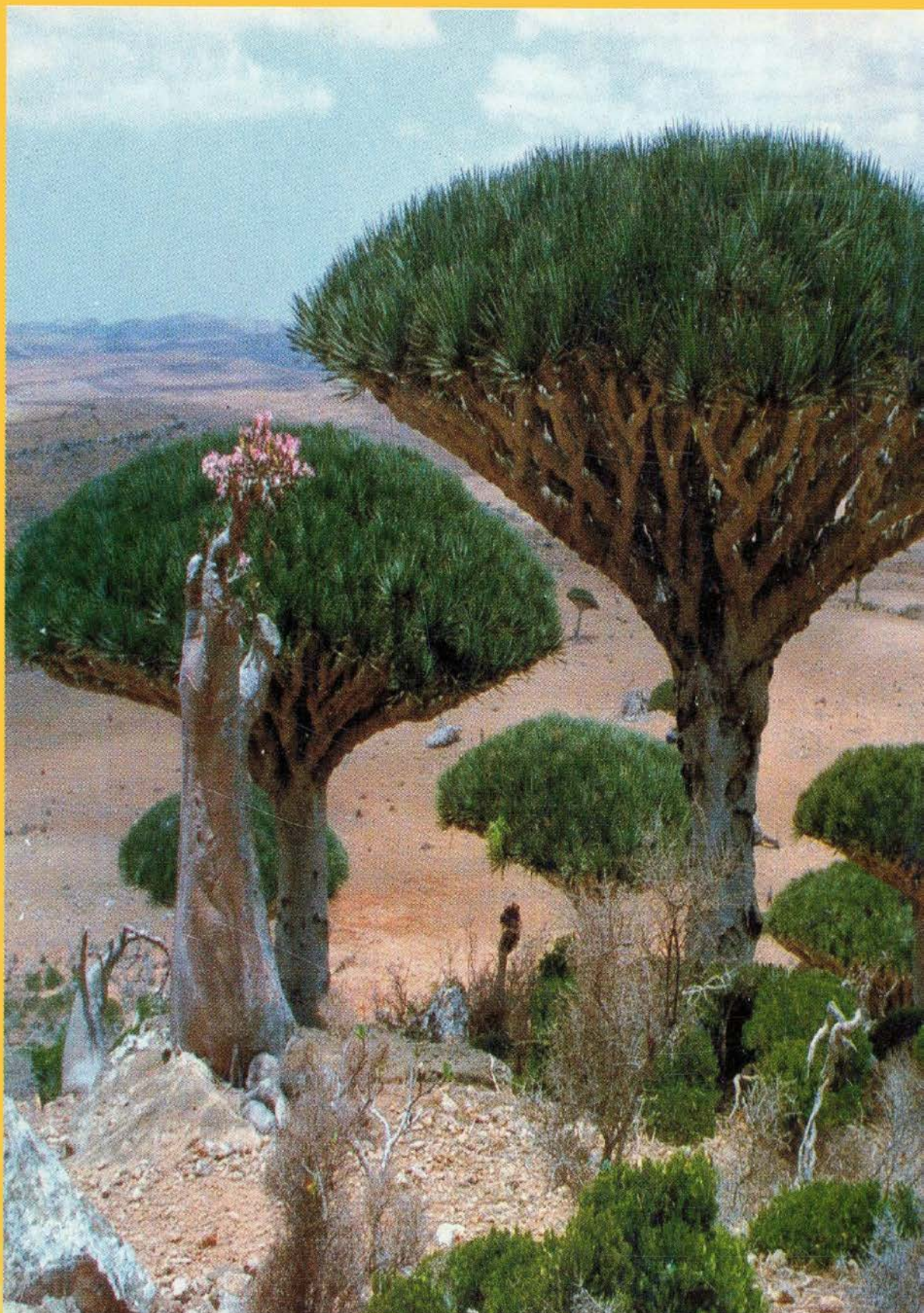


West Asia

UNEP in the REGIONS

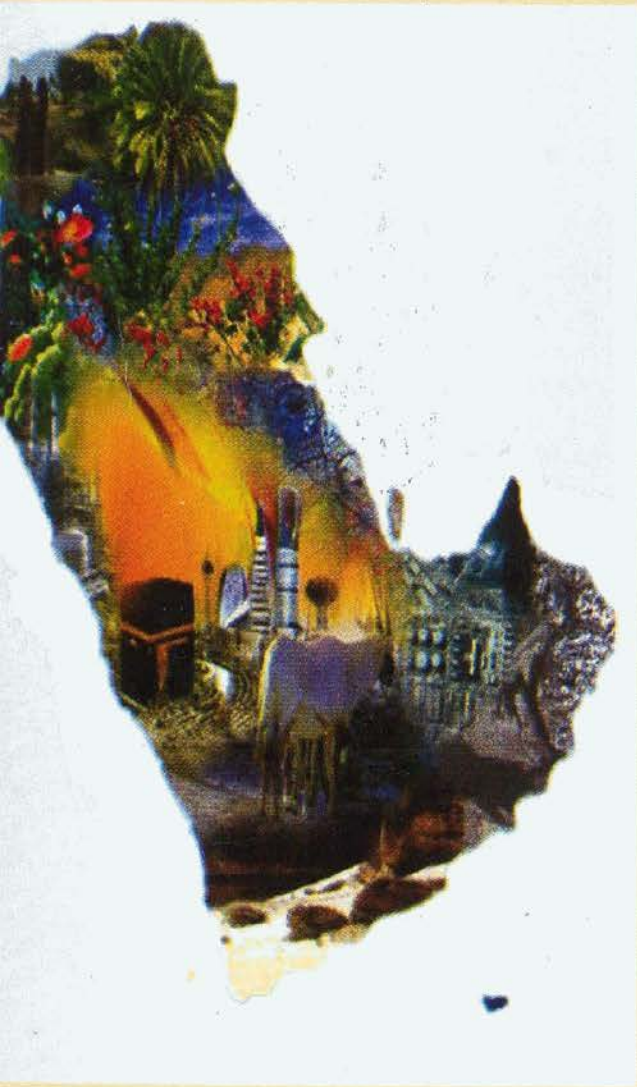


UNEP



UNEP in the REGIONS after WSSD

West Asia



Environment for Development

The mission of United Nations Environment Programme

is

"to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations"

About UNEP

UNEP, established in 1972 to be the watchdog of the environment, has its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The organisation follows the guidance and requests of the ministers of the environment of member-countries, sitting in the UNEP Governing Council.

Since 1998, the organization has been under the leadership of Executive Director Dr Klaus Toepfer, of Germany.



UNEP is organized under divisions that reflect the various priorities of the organization – early warning and assessment, policy development and law, policy implementation, communications and public information, regional cooperation, trade industry and economics and support for multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs). Another division coordinates UNEP work as an implementing agency of the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

The Division of Regional Cooperation consists of the six UNEP regional offices – for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and West Asia – and a small coordination unit at headquarters. There are also a number of liaison offices under the relevant regional offices – in Addis Ababa, Brussels, Cairo (the Liaison Office for the League of Arab States (LAS), Moscow, Brasilia and Beijing.

What we do.

For the past thirty years, since the deteriorating state of the environment first came to world attention, UNEP has nurtured global collaboration on environmental issues. Some problems have been tackled - the loss of biodiversity, degradation of soil and deterioration of water resources, climate change, production and consumption patterns, the relationship between trade and the environment and environmental legislation, to name a few examples. At times UNEP seemed a lone voice, but over time the world community has taken more notice. More action has been taken – major environmental fora have resulted in action plans and programmes of activities – but with varying and often disappointing results. As the global environmental crisis deepens, more is expected from UNEP and the world community in the wake of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) of 2002 and the resulting Plan of Implementation.



"We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected"

United Nations Millennium
Declaration – 2000

Development Goals in the Millennium Declaration

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV / AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development



UNEP remains a leader in environmental initiatives, encouraging the adoption of multilateral environmental agreements, integrating the private sector into a new culture of environmental responsibility, creating space for the participation of civil society and fostering environmental policies and legislation. Capacity building and technology transfer are at the top of the UNEP agenda. Close partnerships with governments, international and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and others have been forged.

Intensive worldwide preparations for WSSD took place during 2000-2002. In the aftermath of the Summit, UNEP realigned programmes more closely to the resulting Plan of Implementation, but maintained an essential continuity with the UNEP priorities and programmes of the immediate past. New strategies for the regional programmes have been put in place as a blueprint for the way forward – strategies that are within the global priorities and mandates of UNEP, but that also respond to the different regional priorities and help fulfil the internationally agreed development goals in the Millennium Declaration.

West Asia

The West Asia Region is made up of two geographic subregions covering in total 12 countries: the Mashriq subregion (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Syria) and the Arabian Peninsula subregion consisting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) and Yemen. The region contains diverse terrestrial eco-systems, including vast deserts, mountains, forests, extensive coastal areas spread over three regional seas and two oceans, and fertile pastures.

West Asia in brief

- The region has a dry, harsh climate and limited natural resources of water, soil and vegetation - rainfall is erratic and droughts are frequent
- Levels of water scarcity are among the highest in the world
- The population of the Arab region is estimated at 312 million (2003) - 30 per cent is in West Asia - with a high percentage of youths
- The region is highly urbanized with 69 per cent of the population living in urban areas, but urban growth does not reflect major improvements in socio-economic conditions

- Over two-thirds of the population lives in low-income countries and 70 million live under the poverty line
- The economies of the Mashriq countries (plus Yemen) are based on agriculture, and those of the GCC countries on gas and oil.
- The agricultural sector does not support development and employment needs in rural areas - rural-urban migration is increasing
- Agriculture and food production contribute 12-13 per cent of regional GDP
- National land use plans and population distribution strategies are in place in many countries (e.g. Lebanon, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia)
- Large-scale government industries, especially in the oil, gas and petrochemicals sectors dominate - the small and medium-scale enterprises (SME) sector remains limited in most countries
- Economic growth is adversely affected by war and instability and lags behind the world average - continued instability in Iraq and the Occupied Palestinian Territories could have a direct impact on economic and social development
- Trade liberalization poses challenges for sustainable development efforts
- Unemployment reaches double figures in most countries, especially among females, - the average unemployment rate is 22 per cent, but with wide variations (up to 60 per cent in Gaza and the West Bank)
- Unemployment is rising, but so is a reliance on an expatriate workforce in some countries
- The war in Iraq of 2003 had major impacts on socio-political and economic stability, the environment and human safety, and health that could also affect neighbouring countries
- National security has been given great prominence in many countries because of the security situation, often to the detriment of attention to the environment
- In 2002, GDP in West Asia. (excluding Iraq, the West Bank and Gaza Strip) grew by only 1.9 per cent (2001 growth rate 2.5 per cent) reflecting a slowdown in the oil sector, low rates of economic activities and heightened political instability
- Privatisation is increasing - even the most conservative countries of the region are taking drastic measures to promote domestic private investment, and to attract foreign direct investment



Environmental challenges in West Asia

Land

- Serious overgrazing, inefficient water use, political instability and farmer's subsidies are key factors triggering degradation – many areas have four times as many sheep as the land can naturally support
- Erosion and loss of productivity have been aggravated by climatic factors, population growth, urbanisation and clearing vegetation for agriculture
- Much land is vulnerable to wind and water erosion – over 80 per cent of land in the Arabian Peninsula is degraded as a result of wind erosion
- Salinisation resulting from poor irrigation methods has left up to 40 per cent of the land area in West Asia degraded - about 30 per cent of the arable area of Iraq has been abandoned because of it

Action: Many countries are drawing up national action plans to tackle the problem and a Subregional Action Programme has been established within the framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD)

Water

- Rapid population growth is causing water stress and scarcity - demand is outstripping supply – over 80 per cent of the water is used for agriculture
- Groundwater is being mined causing saline intrusions into coastal aquifers
- Sanitation is a major challenge because of the rapid pace of economic and social development - over 154 million people in the region still had no access to improved sanitation facilities at the end of 2000
- Shared water resources between countries threatens stability and creates potential for conflict - in 2003, tension grew between Israel and Lebanon on the waters of Wazani and Hasbani Rivers in Lebanon
- About 60 per cent of water resources in the Arab region originate from outside the region - again creating tension

Action: The reduction of agricultural subsidies, more modern irrigation methods, wastewater recycling and metering groundwater supplies aim to reduce demand and boost efficiency in water use. Sanitation services and wastewater treatment are being improved. Recognition is growing of the need for conventions and agreements on sharing and managing water resources (including surface and groundwater)

NB. Many organisations and sources of statistics consider the Arab region as a whole i.e. they include the Arab countries of North Africa. Thus this text refers on occasion to the wider region to differentiate it from West Asia

Coastal and marine

- Over-fishing, habitat destruction, and increased coastal and marine pollution emanating from land-based sources as well as increased shipping traffic have resulted in a halving of fish catches
- Oil spills, dredging, wastewater discharges threaten the marine environment
- Coastal development has increased rapidly in many countries

Action: The Mediterranean, Kuwait and Red Sea action plans aim to protect and promote the sustainable development of coastal zones. New sewage works have been built in Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The GCC countries have introduced fishing licenses and closed seasons to conserve fish stocks

Forests and biodiversity

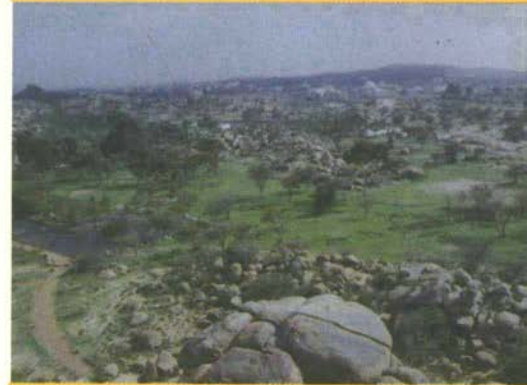
- Forest cover has decreased in many countries – by 50 per cent in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and by 17 per cent in Yemen
- Off road driving and excessive hunting threaten some species with extinction
- Habitat destruction, intensive agriculture and coastal pollution have led to a sharp decline of many other species
- Marine pollution threatens the wide variety of species found in the seas

Action: Tree planting schemes have increased forest cover by 32 per cent in the UAE and 20 per cent in Jordan. Captive breeding and re-introduction programmes are in progress in many countries. Most countries have ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity. There is a growing move towards establishing protected areas

Atmosphere

- The ageing vehicle fleet, with high emission levels, is a factor in declining air quality in the region
- Energy consumption is rising by 3.5 per cent a year, with significant increases in the emission of greenhouse gases
- Increasing rates of release of emissions, liquid effluents and solid (including hazardous) wastes are a major challenge for the rapidly growing industrial sector
- The health effects attributable to poor air quality cause significant economic losses, especially in large cities

Action: Awareness and interest in more sustainable forms of industrial production has resulted in progress in cutting emissions through the use of cleaner, more efficient energy technologies and higher air-quality standards. The movement towards unleaded fuels is gaining momentum



Working for the environment in West Asia

I. Regional and subregional cooperation

The Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE), established in 1978, is the major ministerial forum that develops, coordinates and follows-up on the environment programme for the region. It meets annually at the headquarters of the League of Arab States (unless hosted by a member state). It has a Bureau and is served by a Technical Secretariat and three permanent Steering Committees - for industry and the environment, land resources management (including water and biodiversity) and environmental education and awareness, and environmental law. A Joint Committee on Environment and Development for the Arab Region (JCEDAR) formulates a plan of work for approval by the Bureau and the Council. UNEP supports CAMRE by active involvement in the preparation and follow-up of the programme of work and by regular reporting on activities and progress in implementing the global environment programme.

Other regional and subregional intergovernmental mechanisms include the ministerial fora of the GCC, the two regional seas programmes - the Regional Organisation for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA) and the Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME) - and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). UNEP is a partner in their activities. In addition to cooperation with UNEP in the implementation of the regional programme, the GCC also provides logistical support to the Regional Office in Bahrain.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) coordinates regional activities as Chair of the Regional Coordination Group (RCG) – UNEP is one of the members. UNEP and ESCWA have a strong partnership; they provide technical support to CAMRE and individual countries, and cooperate jointly in the implementation of three major programmes – on water, trade and environment and energy. Together they played a major role with CAMRE in the preparations for WSSD, helping countries to develop a common vision for the region that culminated in the Arab Initiative for Sustainable Development launched in Johannesburg. With CAMRE they set up a Joint Secretariat to coordinate project development under the Arab Initiative.

Source: UNEP, Topham Picturepoint



The 1998-99 drought in the Mashriq countries had severe effects on the sheep population and their owners - many herders were forced to sell their flocks at cheap prices for want of grazing.

The Arab Initiative on Sustainable Development (AISD)

The AISD initiative :

- summarizes progress and underlines the challenges and obstacles facing Arab countries in achieving sustainable development
- asserts the commitment of Arab countries to implement Agenda 21 and fulfill the objectives of the Millennium Declaration
- emphasizes the principle of common but differentiated responsibility
- forms a framework for implementing programmes and activities through stakeholder partnerships, especially those involving civil society and the media
- calls for fair, non-discriminatory, and non-politically-motivated partnership initiatives among developing countries, between developed and developing countries and between the organizations of civil society and the private sector

The major thrusts of the initiative are:

- peace and security
- institutional frameworks
- poverty alleviation
- population and health
- education, awareness, scientific research, and technology transfer
- resource management
- production and consumption
- globalization, trade and investment

Initial priorities for project development:

- integrated management of water resources
- land degradation and combating desertification
- the integrated management of coastal zones and marine resources

The Arab initiative, various declarations and pan-Arab initiatives, reflect growing concerns about the sustainability of environmental and socio-economic development in the region. The inability to attract funding for environmental services and the difficulty of establishing local and external partners are constraints on sustainable development.



II. UNEP in the region

UNEP is a committed partner in the region's environmental initiatives. The WSSD commitments and newly-defined regional objectives, however, made a re-think of that support necessary and made 2003 an opportune time to design a new UNEP strategy for the region.

The UNEP Strategy in West Asia (2004-2005)

The strategy for 2003–2005 was defined to address the major environment-related challenges in West Asia:

- reversing the perception of the environment as a burden for development rather than an asset - this has led to weak environmental institutions, legal and policy frameworks
- managing the very scarce resources of arable land and freshwater in support of development
- ensuring sustainable industrial and urban development with focus on coastal and marine environments
- mobilizing resources for programmes in a region considered "rich" by donors

The elements of the strategy result from an analysis of areas where UNEP could provide clear value-added inputs and reinforce its role and image in the region. The strategy will be further developed and implemented in close cooperation with CAMRE, other regional partners, international organisations and civil society groups. Priority will be given to support for less developed countries (Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Syria and Yemen)

The UNEP strategy focuses on:

- **Reinforcing UNEP's position as the leader of environment for development in West Asia**, through
 - Strengthening CAMRE by further support to programmes and the secretariat
 - Facilitating the development of AISD, using existing partnerships and regional forums



- Developing a regional programme on environment for development in West Asia and the wider Arab region
- Taking the lead in establishing a process to ensure United Nations system support to environmental management in West Asia
- Working with OIC to promote the integration of environment within its processes
- **Building regional capacity for environmental management and sustainable development, through :**
 - Strengthening capacity building, technology transfer and technical assistance programmes
 - Integrating the environment into the reconstruction processes in post-conflict Iraq and the Occupied Palestinian Territories
 - Developing a youth programme for the region
- **Producing environmental assessments to set the agenda for regional and subregional decision-making processes, through :**
 - Strengthening and further developing key partnerships for the assessment process
 - Establishing a UNEP West Asian regional resource centre for environmental information, assessment and early warning in Bahrain, in partnership with the Arabian Gulf University (AGU) and others
 - Conducting an integrated environmental assessment for the wider Arab Region, West Asia and the two subregions, using Global Environment Outlook (GEO) methodology
 - Preparing a regional environment and health assessment, in cooperation with WHO - for a regional conference on environment and health in 2005
 - Developing a West Asia regional environmental data and information programme - within the UNEP global GEODATA programme - a contribution to the Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative (AGEDI)
- **Leading the development of key responses to major environmental challenges**
 - Developing and implementing an environment and water programme based on a strategic assessment of water and ecosystems in the region and also a coastal and marine environment programme
 - Strengthening the West Asia industry and environment programme
 - Developing a targeted programme on chemicals and a regional approach to the chemical-related conventions (Basel, Stockholm and





Rotterdam) - through the CAMRE Steering Committee on Industrial Pollution

- Addressing Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) goals and environmental energy in cooperation with OPEC/OAPEC (Annex I)
 - Maintaining the ozone programme, ensuring compliance and integrating Iraq and the Occupied Palestinian Territories into the process
 - Obtaining a political mandate from LAS/CAMRE and developing a regional biodiversity conservation programme - through CAMRE and with partners
 - Strengthening support for the implementation of the CCD in ongoing partnership with ICARDA, ACSAD and GEF (see Annex I) and develop relevant projects
- **Supporting relevant environment and sustainable development programmes, through:**
- Strengthening cooperation with civil society groups and the media for awareness raising, education and the implementation of the environmental citizenship programme - through CAMRE

The UNEP Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA) assists governments to respond adequately to national and regional environmental problems. The Office has an integral involvement in UNEP Headquarters' programmes. Activities in the region will be described under headings that reflect UNEP priorities.

Regional partnerships

As well as the activities related to regional coordination mechanisms, UNEP has been involved in the major activities and events related to sustainable development and environment in the region, such as the Environment and Energy Conference and Exhibition, 2003, in Abu Dhabi, and the Dubai International Conference on Atmospheric Pollution, 2004.

Cooperation with regional organizations - the Zayed International Prize for the Environment

The Zayed International Prize for the Environment - worth \$US 1 million - promotes and encourages long lasting environmental achievements in line with the environment and development vision and philosophy of the dedicated environmentalist, **H.H. Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan** - the father and President of the United Arab Emirates. The Zayed International Prize for the Environment was founded by General **H.H. Sheikh Mohamed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum**, Crown Prince of Dubai and UAE Defence Minister.

The **Zayed Prize Foundation** promotes sustainable development through various environmental initiatives in fields such as fresh water, biological diversity, the marine environment and coastal zone management, agriculture, pollution control, cleaner production and environmentally sound technology, environmental health, environmental education, the role of women in environment and development and environmental security.

UNEP cooperates with the Zayed Prize Foundation by actively participating in the Technical Advisory Committee responsible for searching out and screening nominees for the Prize. An International Jury (chaired by the Executive Director of UNEP) makes the final selection.

The Prize Foundation also organizes regional and international conferences, workshops, training seminars and forums on specific environmental issues. It publishes the monthly magazine, in Arabic and English, *Environment and Society*, as well as other materials including a magazine for children.

The main events for 2004 will include the award and presentation of the second Zayed Prize.



Assessment and early warning

UNEP works with governments, other partners and expert centres in the region, on a wide range of environmental assessment activities, providing information to support environmental management, decision-making and policy-setting, for example, on emerging issues, early warning and urban environmental management. Activities include:

- **Integrated environmental assessments** - using the methodology developed by the GEO process, that at whatever level - municipal, national, subregional, regional or global - aims to answer the four basic questions



State of Environment in the Arab Region A progress Report



United Nations Environment Programme
Division of Regional Cooperation
Regional Office for West Asia

on the environment: What is happening?, Why?, What is being done about it?, and What will happen if no action is taken?

- **Data management** - harmonising data collection, facilitating access to information and generating high quality data and indicators to address information gaps
- **Environmental vulnerability studies** - observing and monitoring changes, identifying and assessing emerging environmental threats that may affect the long-term vulnerability of people, ecosystems and the services they provide, in order to provide early warning

What we have done – recent programme highlights

- Published the annual State of the Environment (SOE) report for the Arab region (2003) – with CAMRE, AGU, ACSAD (AnnexI) and other collaborating centres
- Provided capacity building to countries for environmental assessment and reporting, the development of environmental indicators and the preparation of country profiles and the regional data portal

Where we are going - the Arab Region Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

The Arab Region Millennium Ecosystem Assessment forms part of the Global Millennium Ecosystem Assessment led by UNEP and the Millennium Secretariat.

The project, funded by the Kingdom of the Saudi Arabia, will be implemented in three sites in the Arab region, in cooperation with partners in the countries:

- the Assir National Park, Saudi Arabia
- the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt
- the Tafilalt Oasis, Morocco.

Where we are going - The Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative (AGEDI)

AGEDI launched jointly by ERWDA (see Annex I) and UNEP at WSSD, aims to bridge the environmental data gap between and within developing and developed countries and to provide direct and cost-effective access to environmental data. It also aims to upgrade the ways of monitoring environmental problems and to make policy recommendations at national and international levels.

Advanced technology such as remote sensing will be used to make the process of data collection much easier. Regular annual reports about each region will be produced as a basis for decision making.

The initiative is to be implemented in three stages:

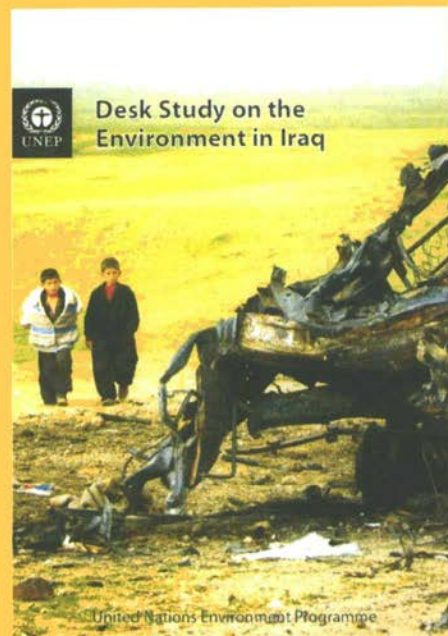
- Formulation of a Strategic Implementation Plan focussing on data collection, management, and dissemination at all levels and an evaluation of existing operational programmes
- Implementation of a regional pilot programme in West Asia - AGEDI will support the development of the UNEP assessment programme and establishment of a Regional Centre for Environmental Information and Assessment
- Implementation of a national pilot project at AGEDI headquarters in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi - as a model for replication – with a primary focus on the collection, verification, assessment and standardization of environmental data

Emergencies - extreme events

Increased vulnerability to natural disasters is a growing concern in the region. The intensity and increased frequency of extreme weather events may be a sign of environmental change. The years 2002-2003 were marked by flooding in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Sudan, Syria and Tunisia, severe dust and sand storms from Morocco to Oman and extreme temperatures in the summer. During the Iraq war, the use of off-road vehicles and tanks coupled with high wind speeds (Touz winds) caused sandstorms that obscured the skies for several days and caused increases in various respiratory diseases. Conflict remains the dominant preoccupation in the region.

What we have done – recent programme highlights

Established the Post Conflict Assessment Unit (PCAU) in Geneva to assist countries to assess environmental damage resulting from conflict and to consider different mitigation measures and capacity needs. Assessments were carried out in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Iraq





Desk Study on the
Environment
in the

Occupied Palestinian Territories

United Nations Environment Programme

The environmental situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

In 2003, UNEP prepared a desk study on the state of the environment in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and to identify major areas of environmental damage requiring urgent attention. The study was based on recent scientific reports, interviews with over 250 regional and international experts – from environmental official bodies, NGOs, municipal authorities, academic and research institutes, and international organizations. In addition, site visits took place in major towns and cities throughout the West Bank and Gaza. The study identifies environmental problems arising from the ongoing conflict, as well as those stemming from long-term inadequate resource allocation and environmental management :

- the rapid deterioration of water resources
- soil and groundwater pollution - due to agricultural practices, localized industrial activities, inadequate or improper disposal of wastewater and solid waste (including hazardous materials) and seawater intrusion to groundwater (especially in Gaza - caused by many years of over-pumping)
- fragmenting of ecosystems and the rupture of natural ecological corridors associated with the separation wall

The report also :

- notes the difficulties that the Palestinian Authority has had in carrying out its responsibilities on land-use planning as a result of military occupation - security demands mean that access is restricted to some designated waste sites
- recommends the urgent renewal of trans-boundary environmental cooperation - Joint Environmental Expert Committee activities have been on hold since the beginning of the present stage of the conflict.
- makes 136 recommendations on a broad range of environmental topics

What has been done

- Consultations on the next phase of implementation identified eight priority recommendations for initial implementation
- Trilateral technical meeting on environmental issues convened in Geneva in July 2003 - UNEP with Palestinian and Israeli delegations - to discuss UNEP actions under each of the eight priorities
- Capacity building training seminar on communication for officials of the Palestinian Environmental Quality Authority (Jordan, December 2003) – undertaken as one of the first activities

The Environmental Situation in Iraq

In April 2003, UNEP published a *Desk Study on the Environment in Iraq*, providing a overview of key environmental issues in the aftermath of the recent conflict. The study used published and online information sources, and satellite data. Despite these limitations, the report set out the general environmental context and provided guidance on the next steps for addressing key environmental challenges

The report the *Environment in Iraq: UNEP Progress Report* was published later in 2003, prior to a Donors' Conference in Madrid, to update information on the evolving environmental situation, and highlight priority areas for action. It is based on information from two UNEP fact-finding missions to Iraq in July and August 2003, and includes examples of industrial pollution 'hotspots' that need to be scientifically assessed and cleaned up as quickly as possible. It also includes an update on developments in the Mesopotamian Marshlands

A number of serious environmental problems require immediate attention, including:

- environmental contamination by nuclear and toxic materials
- the destruction of the Mesopotamian Marshlands
- pollution from the oil and chemical industries

Six roundtable meetings on the environment in Iraq have been held to coordinate activities and exchange information on the development and progress of projects in Iraq

Environmental law, policy and conventions

UNEP supports environmental policy design, and environmental legislation formulation and enforcement in the region through:

- technical assistance to governments
- assistance to national parliaments in designing and formulating environmental legislation
- capacity building and training on environmental law and implementation of MEAs
- dissemination of information



Marshes Satellite Images: USGS/
EROS Data Centre
Photograph: Nik Wheeler



What we have done – recent programme highlights

- Coordinated with the Arab Regional Centre for Environmental Law (ARCEL, Kuwait University) to develop a regional environmental law programme - in cooperation with CAMRE. The elements include:
 - integrating environmental concepts into university curricula
 - training judges and legislators in environmental law
 - training law enforcing agencies in the implementation of MEAs
 - review of national legislations with a view to their harmonization with MEAs

Multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs)

The interest and political commitment in the region to MEAs is reflected in the level of ratifications and accessions to over 64 international and regional environmental conventions and agreements – chief among them the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), the CBD, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This interest is not matched by the rates of implementation which remain modest – most success is associated with the implementation of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and with regional seas agreements. UNEP actively strives to improve this situation.

Ozone action

So far 20 Arab countries (10 of which are in West Asia) have ratified the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and most of the amendments. In 2002, UNEP set up the Compliance Assistance Programme (CAP) to respond more effectively to the evolving needs of developing countries during the compliance period.

Chemicals and waste management:

Public concern over the management of solid and hazardous waste has markedly increased over the past few years. The signing and ratification of relevant MEAs, including Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions are an active goal in the region.

What we have done – programme highlights

- Involved through CAMRE in the development of an integrated regional strategy on chemicals and waste management - as part of the Arab Technical Team concerned with MEAs relevant to chemicals and waste management (Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions)

- Coordinated the development of the Yemen's National Hazardous Waste Strategy and Action Plan (Basel Convention)
- Supporting activities of the Regional Basel Convention Centre of Training and Technology Transfer for Arab Countries
- Regional and subregional workshops towards the preparations of national implementation plans (NIPs) and Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) strategies under the Stockholm Convention

Regional seas

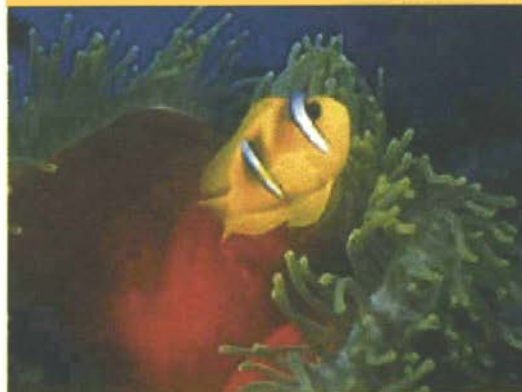
UNEP support to activities in this area is based on regional Action Plans, related to a common body of water, and implemented, in most cases, in the framework of a legally binding regional seas convention and its specific protocols. In West Asia; two such cooperative agreements led to the setting up of PERSGA and ROPME.

UNEP supports both PERSGA and ROPME in activities within their stated goals:

- Sustainable use and management of living marine resources
- Development of a regional network of marine protected areas
- Integrated coastal zone management
- Environmental assessment
- Public awareness and participation
- Control of land-based activities
- Regional legal instruments
- Reduction of navigation risks and marine pollution

What we have done – recent programme highlights

- Draft Protocol on the Conservation of Biological Diversity and the Establishment of Protected Areas prepared for the PERSGA and ROPME regions
- Draft Protocol on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Sources of Pollution in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden prepared and sent for review by member states
- Supported the establishment of a Marine Environment data base and digital database system in 2004 (ROPME)
- Reviewed the State of the Marine Environment report (ROPME)
- Support for activities on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (PERSGA)
- Coordinated Global International Waters Assessment (GIWA) activities in the ROPME and Jordan Valley subregions



- Assisted in the regional implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA)

Technology and industry

- are cleaner and safer
- utilise natural resources in an efficient manner
- ensure an adequate management of chemical products
- incorporate environmental costs
- reduce contamination and decrease risks for human beings and the environment.

As well as supporting the implementation of relevant MEAs, UNEP focuses on:

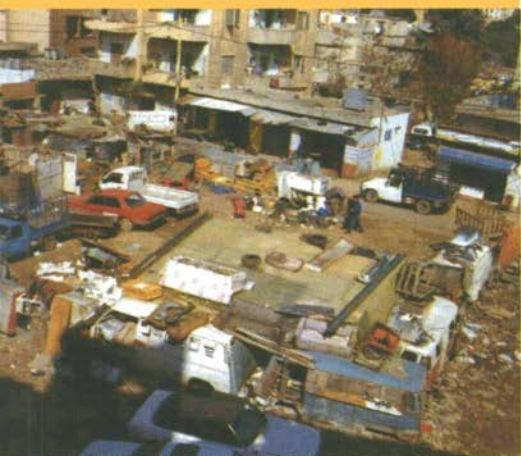
Sustainable production and consumption

Natural resources have been depleted and environmental degradation has risen dramatically with the increased scope and intensity of industrial (and urban) activities. Correspondingly, awareness has grown of the diverse and complex environmental problems caused by industrialisation and their impacts. Prevention is increasingly used by Arab industry as a control for environmental pollution, with the result that support for national cleaner production centres (NCPCs) has grown. NCPCs have been set up in Jordan and Lebanon and are at the planning stage in the United Arab Emirates and Syria. Many voluntary initiatives in industry are also underway.

UNEP supports activities to raise awareness and build capacity in government agencies, industrial support agencies and industry, and offers technical support and training to small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) to improve environmental management systems (EMS) and performance.

What we have done – recent programme highlights

- Supported Arab industries to integrate environmental considerations into industrial development and implementation, for example
 - The Arab cement and building materials industry (through the Arab Union of Cement and Building Materials Board Council) has just adopted the new international initiative on Sustainable Building and Construction



- The Arab oil and gas and refining industry (through the involvement of OAPEC) has just adopted the WSSD Clean Fuel Initiative (CFI).
 - Arab SMEs have incorporated the components of EMS into day-to-day operations - over 70 companies have recently been trained on EMS, and the majority of them committed themselves to pursue an EMS in line with the requirements of International Standards Organisation (ISO) 14001
- Supported NCPCs in Jordan, Palestine, UAE and Lebanon in advancing EMS in the region in 2003

Where we are going – the way forward

- UNEP, with leading institutions in the region, proposes to establish regional centres of excellence for energy efficiency, renewable energy and Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies on the Local Level (APELL) for industrial areas and ports

Energy and Transport

The per capita consumption of energy in some Arab States is among the highest in the world, giving rise to high emissions of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) and particulate air pollutants. UNEP supports the region to develop new policy approaches related to promoting less polluting fuels, such as unleaded fuel and natural gas alternatives, as part of a global Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles (PCFV) established at WSSD. UNEP hosts the Clearing House for this initiative. All GCC countries and several other Arab States phased out leaded gasoline during 2003. More sustainable fuels for power generation are also being promoted. UNEP also catalyses policies and programmes that promote energy efficiencies, cleaner technologies and renewable energy in industrial, urban and other sectors.



What we have done – recent programme highlights

- Took the lead in drafting an Arab Energy paper - the basis for debating the Arab Energy programme with CAMRE, ESCWA, OAPEC and OPEC. A declaration on Energy was adopted by Arab States in Abu Dhabi in 2003

Sustainable tourism and eco-tourism:

The Arab region is rich in tourism resources including archaeological, natural, religious and scenic sites. Approximately 24 million tourists come to the region annually (3.4 per cent of the world total) with a rate of growth of about 9.4 per cent.

What we have done – recent programme highlights

- Supported sustainable eco-tourism initiatives by developing a guidebook on regional eco-tourism with emphasis on tour operators and hotels. Other guidebooks on sustainable tourism are planned for 2004

Trade and Environment

The establishment of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area represents a major effort by the League of Arab States to address the challenges of globalization and world trade liberalization.

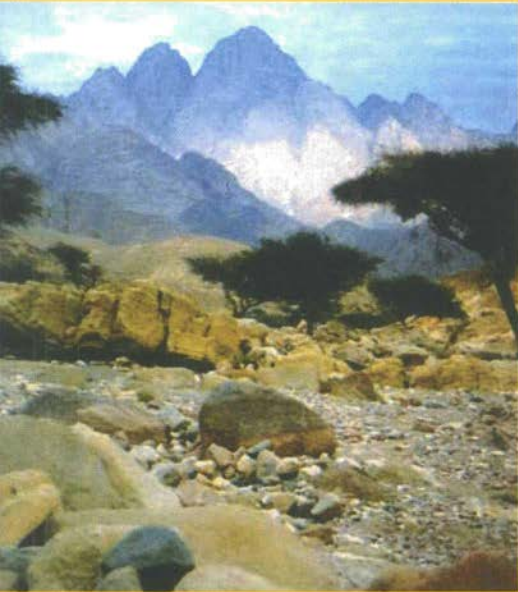
What we are doing – recent programme highlights

- Developing a 5-year regional trade and environment capacity building programme - in partnership with CAMRE and ESCWA - whose key objective is to enhance the competitiveness of Arab goods in the global market, while satisfying environmental protection standards
- Coorganised with CAMRE a regional workshop on Arab Bilateral trade Liberalisation in Environmental Services

Natural resources

Land

UNEP helps countries to combat this scourge of the drylands through supporting the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD). In particular, UNEP supported the development of the regional action plan.



Subregional Action Programme (SRAP) for West Asia

In 2000, the West Asian countries endorsed the subregional programme and agreed to strengthen cooperation in this field.

The SRAP focuses on two strategic domains:

- water resources and their sustainable management - a key issue for future development
- vegetative cover, particularly rangelands and the small areas of forest

The SRAP operates through two thematic networks :

- Sustainable Water Management
- Sustainable Management of Vegetative Cover

UNEP support, through a grant from the Convention secretariat, involves:

- inventory studies
- preparing a regional database on sustainable water and vegetation cover
- preparing pilot projects on sustainable, environmentally friendly and socially acceptable interventions to combat land degradation

Start-up activities are underway - in Lebanon and Yemen for the mountainous areas, and Syria and Jordan for rangeland rehabilitation.

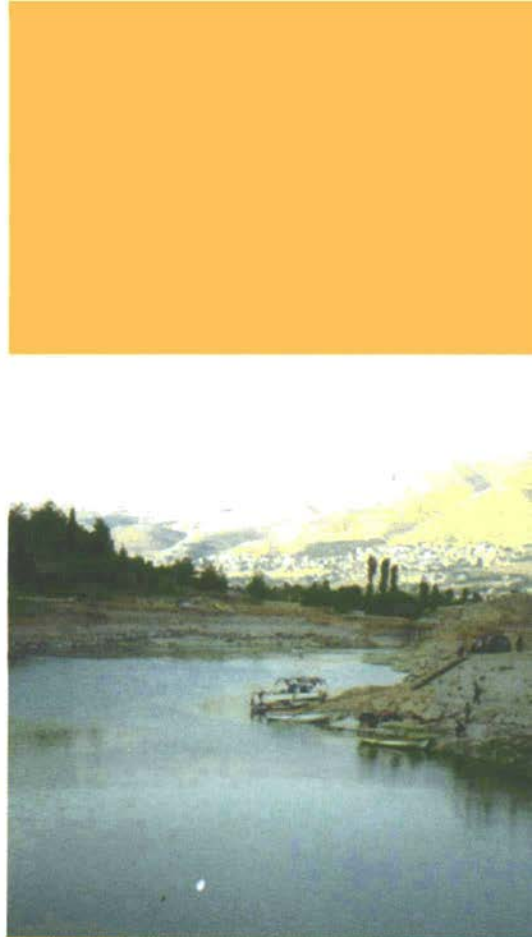
Fresh Water Resources

In view of the scarcity of water resources and the high priority given by countries to the development and management of these resources, UNEP assisted the countries of the region to develop national water plans in accordance with the provisions of Agenda 21.

Water - institutional reforms and a shift towards demand management

The West Asia region is one of the most water-stressed areas in the world, and its long-term water situation is becoming increasingly uncertain. Water balances either have already slumped into serious deficit, or are moving steadily in that direction. Water management is the main challenge

The fragmentation of water authorities is a major constraint on water resources management. Oman, Yemen, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Saudi Arabia, have recently established single water ministries responsible for all aspects of water resources. For example, in Saudi Arabia



one ministry replaced three ministries dealing with different aspects of water resource management and development.

In the GCC countries the “GCC Water Cooperation Committee” was established in 2002 to enhance water management at subregional level. The committee’s main agenda is the integration and harmonization of the water sector. The second major step was the coordination of research and development in desalination. The GCC have more than 60 per cent of total world desalination capacity - desalinated water is the principal source of drinking water in urban centres. It is hoped that this move will help reduce the unit production costs of desalination and treatment



Settlement in the Mesopotamian Marshlands

Water returns to the desiccated Mesopotamian Marshlands

Positive signs of environmental recovery in the parched Mesopotamian marshlands have been seen from new satellite images, taken in May 2003, examined by UNEP.

Streams and waterways that shrank and dried over the past decade have come back to life and drainage canals were swollen by an exceptional increase in water flows. Dry areas have been inundated as floodgates are opened, embankments and dykes breached and dams emptied upstream. Heavy rains have also contributed to the rising water levels.

Piecemeal interventions to modify control structures and earthworks, including those by the Marsh Arabs themselves, confirm their belief in the power of nature to heal itself. A coordinated management of the returning waters is needed urgently to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Marshlands.

Marine and Coastal Areas

To meet the growing demand for urbanization and recreational activities, dredging and land reclamation has intensified and will continue to do so. The marine environment is increasingly threatened by land-based sources of pollution.

What we have done – recent programme highlights

- Cooperated with PERSGA and ROPME – see section on regional seas
- Prepared an overview of the socio-economic aspects related to the management of municipal wastewater in West Asia, and developed projects for funding

Biodiversity

The unique and highly vulnerable biodiversity of the Arab Region is at serious risk from degradation and/or destruction of habitats and the loss of species caused by population growth, agricultural and urban expansion, unsustainable use of biota, and industrial pollution.

What we have done – recent programme highlights

- Produced a feasibility study on the establishment of a regional Gene Bank - in cooperation with CAMRE and ICARDA
- Began to develop a regional programme on biodiversity - in cooperation with ACSAD and the Federal Environmental Authority of the UAE

The urban environment

The Sustainable Cities Programme, a joint UNEP-HABITAT initiative, aims to assist cities to achieve more environmentally sustainable growth and development. It supports local authorities in capacity development through the Environment Planning and Management (EPM) approach that develops city environment profiles prior to developing strategy and action plans and defining appropriate institutional arrangements. The SCP also tries to replicate local experiences and integrate them into national policy and legal frameworks. Within the Arab region, three cities in Egypt are part of the programme.

Global Environment Facility (GEF) activities in West Asia

UNEP, as one of the three implementing agencies of the GEF, is supporting a growing portfolio of national and regional projects in West Asia. In addition, some global projects addressing global environmental issues in biodiversity, climate change, land degradation, persistent organic pollutants and international waters involve countries of the region.

UNEP is supporting countries to implement MEAs through GEF funded “national enabling activities” on climate change (Bahrain), persistent organic pollutants (Lebanon, Jordan, Oman, Syria, Yemen), biosafety (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen). UNEP also supports project implementation in many countries.

UNEP/GEF projects in biodiversity are in *Yemen* (on wetlands and migratory birds), *Lebanon* (on cedar Forests and on conserving wild plants) in *Jordan*, *Kuwait* and *Syria* (on biodiversity in arid and semi-arid zones).



Urban development in Iran



UNEP/GEF projects on international waters in *Lebanon* and *Syria* and in *Jordan*, *Saudi Arabia* and *Yemen* are concerned with the strategic action programmes for the neighbouring seas. A project on integrated natural resources management for combating desertification in West Asia is under preparation.

All the countries of the West Asia region are included in the UNEP/GEF global environmental assessments, including the Global International Waters Assessment (GIWA), the Regionally Based Assessment of Persistent Toxic Substances, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and the Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA).

Communications and public awareness

This is the channel by which UNEP makes itself visible in West Asia and brings to regional attention matters of global environmental importance, encouraging links with governments, civil society and institutions interested in environmental topics. The UNEP message is put out through the printed word, electronic means, and the organisation of events. The International Year of Mountains, the International Year of Freshwater and World Environment Day in 2002 and 2003 provided ample opportunity for media coverage and information dissemination. For more information and a list of publications visit www.unep.org.bh

What we have done – recent programme highlights

- Activities included:
 - training programmes
 - environmental contests
 - environmental clubs
- Established a Regional Youth Council - Youth and children participated more in activities both within and outside the region
- The involvement of the media in the regional activities increased
- Celebrated World Environment Day in Beirut – a first for the Arab world. The year's theme "Water - Two Billion People are Dying for It" was extremely relevant to the region, as one of its top concerns is water scarcity

UNEP partners in the region

Governments in the region

United Nations system organisations

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia - ESCWA

Subregional organisations :

The Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment - CAMRE

League of Arab States - LAS

Organization of the Islamic Conference - OIC

Regional Organisation for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden - PERSGA

Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment - ROPME

Others

Arabian Gulf University - AGU

Arab Regional Centre for Environmental Law - ARCEL, Kuwait University

Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries - OPEC

Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries - OAPEC

International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas - ICARDA

Arab Centre for the Study of the Arid Zone and Drylands - ACSAD

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