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Executive Committee
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Beirut, 13-14 December 2017



Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda

Follow-up issues**Implementation of recommendations made by the
Executive Committee at its third meeting****Summary**

The Executive Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its third meeting in Rabat, on 6 and 7 May 2017. Participants made a number of recommendations, some addressed to ESCWA member States and others to the secretariat. The present document features the measures taken by the secretariat to follow up on the recommendations addressed to it.

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AT ITS THIRD MEETING AND FOLLOW-UP MEASURES

At the close of its third meeting held in Rabat on 6 and 7 May 2017, the Executive Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) issued a set of recommendations and proposals, some addressed to member States and others to the secretariat. The present document reviews the latter and the measures taken to follow up on them.

Recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat

Recommendation (a)

To continue assisting member States in implementing the Doha Declaration [on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab States] at the national level;

Action taken

ESCWA has continued to extend support to member States in implementing the Doha Declaration through the adaptation of the 2030 Agenda to their national and local contexts. It has carried out a number of activities and has issued several publications to that effect (for further details, see E/ESCWA/2017/EC.4/3(Part II)).

Recommendation (b)

To prepare introductory material and provide technical support to assist member States in implementing the New Urban Agenda in the economic, social and environmental fields, especially countries affected by and recovering from conflict;

Action taken

ESCWA has published two technical papers on the above-mentioned subject, one on slum upgrading in the Arab region and the other on social housing policies in Arab countries.

Recommendation (c)

To welcome activities implemented by ESCWA to build the capacity of Arab negotiators in the climate change field, and urge their continuation to ensure effective Arab participation, with special focus on providing training on preparing proposals for funding from international climate change funds;

Action taken

ESCWA organized the Ninth Regional Workshop on Capacity Development for Climate Change Negotiations for the Arab Countries from 9 to 12 October 2017 in Cairo, in preparation for the twenty-third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP23). The workshop was held in cooperation with the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Cairo Office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The goal was to prepare the Arab Group for negotiations at COP23. Participants reviewed the status of global negotiations on the Paris Agreement, focusing on finance and technology, assessed the implications of the withdrawal of the United States of America from the Paris Agreement on emissions and discussed the resulting legal and financial challenges.

Recommendation (d)

To prepare a comprehensive vision on establishing an Arab climate change centre within the secretariat, similarly to other regional commissions, covering the desired goals of the centre, funding sources and potential activities, to be presented at the next meeting of the Executive Committee;

Action taken

ESCWA has prepared a proposal for the establishment of an Arab climate change centre contained in document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.4/4(Part IV) presented to the Executive Committee. The proposal outlines the goals, structure and potential funding sources for the centre.

Recommendation (e)

To continue supporting Arab countries in ensuring that their national plans include methods to harness and invest technology for development, so as to promote sustainable development and encourage a shift towards the digital economy, smart societies and youth innovation for inclusive growth, with special focus on young people; and to present a progress report thereon at the fourth Executive Committee meeting;

Action taken

ESCWA convened an expert group meeting on "Innovation and Technology for Achieving the 2030 Development Agenda", from 5 to 7 December 2017 in Beirut. The objective of the meeting was to formulate an integrated approach to innovation and technology for Arab countries, which could be employed to further progress in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 9 on fostering innovation and Goal 17 on the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Focus was placed on the role of innovation and technology in advancing economic growth, enhancing productivity, creating decent jobs and addressing societal challenges. The meeting also tackled Goals 3 (health), 5 (gender equality), 8 (sustainable economic growth and decent employment) and 10 (inequality reduction) and the technological means that can help to further progress towards those Goals.

Recommendation (f)

To ensure that ESCWA programmes and activities in the region cover youth issues and empowerment;

Action taken

In partnership with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), ESCWA has implemented a regional project funded through the United Nations Development Account on "Strengthening the capacity of governments in the ESCAP, ECA and ESCWA regions to respond to the needs of youth in formulating inclusive and sustainable development policies". The main objective of the project is to increase the participation of youth in the formulation of such policies. In this context, ESCWA has prepared a training manual on the subject, which has been tested in workshops held in Jordan, Kuwait and Tunisia targeted towards young leaders, decision makers and representatives of civil society organizations. ESCWA has also prepared background material to feed an electronic platform on youth participation and empowerment. The platform will also feature presentations on successful experiences in the empowerment of young people, technical reports and training materials from the Arab region.

ESCWA secured the engagement of the regional board member of the World Youth Parliament for Water in the High Level Conference on Climate Change Assessment and Adaptation in the Arab Region, which was held in Beirut from 26 to 28 September 2017 in the framework of the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-economic Vulnerability in the Arab

Region (RICCAR). The meeting discussed opportunities for increasing the engagement of young researchers and professionals in the activities of the Arab Integrated Water Resources Management Network (AWARENET).

Recommendation (g)

To hold a workshop on best international and regional practice regarding digital transformation strategies and policies, and how the Arab region can benefit therefrom;

Action taken

ESCWA convened the Arab High-level Forum on WSIS (World Summit on the Information Society) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Beirut, from 8 to 12 May 2017. The outcome document, entitled “Beirut Consensus on Transformation and the Digital Economy in the Arab Region: Towards the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, highlighted tight links between technology and sustainable development. An expert group meeting and a conference were held under the themes of shaping the digital future in the Arab region and digital technologies for the SDGs.

ESCWA also prepared a paper entitled “Perspectives on the digital economy in the Arab region”, suggesting priority areas for the enhancement of the digital transformation of countries, which is a critical step in the realization of the SDGs.

Work is under way on a study on digital technologies within the Arab Horizon 2030 series. Finally, ESCWA is preparing a policy advice paper on digital money and block chain technologies for the Arab countries.

Recommendation (h)

To update the secretariat’s quantitative study on the impact of the transport and logistics sector on sustainable development in Arab countries;

Action taken

ESCWA is updating its work on the impact of transport on sustainable development in the framework of the project on “Developing a strategic vision for multimodal transport in the Arab region”. The project, detailed in document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.4/4(Part IV) presented to the Executive Committee, consists of a three-year plan that includes the formulation of the vision for multimodal transport in support of regional integration and sustainable and inclusive socioeconomic development; the adoption of tools to assess the related financial needs; the reform of transport policies in Arab countries; and the assessment of the environmental impacts of transport across the region.

Recommendation (i)

To continue supporting Arab countries in multidimensional poverty reduction, and present a progress report thereon at the fourth Executive Committee meeting;

Action taken

ESCWA released the first *Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report*, in partnership with the League of Arab States, the United Nations Children’s Fund and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. The aim is to support member States in their efforts to combat poverty and achieve the 2030 Agenda. The report adapts the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index to the context and needs of Arab countries and analyses the results obtained. It also offers practical recommendations to eradicate multidimensional poverty

in the Arab region by 2030. A summary of the report is presented to the Executive Committee in document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.4/4(Part V).

Recommendation (j)

To support member States emerging from and affected by conflict in conflict-prevention efforts, and assist them in facing development challenges and conflict-related burdens during their rebuilding process, by promptly implementing agreed projects and programmes undertaken by the secretariat, such as the project on rebuilding, institutional development, capacity-building and reconciliation; institutional and socioeconomic development in post-conflict Libya; and the National Agenda for the Future of Syria, and to build those countries' capacity in the field of modelling;

Action taken

ESCWA has prepared a document on support to member States emerging from conflict, which tackles the difficult task of achieving the 2030 Agenda despite conflict, occupation and terrorism. The document highlights the impact of conflict on human development and proposes the establishment of technical dialogue platforms and the reform of institutional governance practices in the post-conflict phase as means to address the repercussions of conflict. It is presented to the Executive Committee in document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.4/4(Part VI).

ESCWA is also implementing a project entitled "Fostering institutional development for participatory approaches towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in Western Asia", designed to support member States in the achievement of SDG 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The project analyses institutional gaps in the Arab countries that are facing crises and studies the potential of a structural transformation in contributing to recovery and the attainment of better development outcomes. It includes the production of a series of national capacity-building modules based on a handbook. The first draft of the handbook will be reviewed in an expert group meeting to be held in January 2018. Three workshops will follow in 2018 to train civil servants on the application of the proposed methodology and analysis of findings.

Recommendation (k)

To continue fully evaluating the impact of conflict, crises and occupation on affected member States, including measuring short-term effects and the impact on future generations, so as to strengthen the capacity of those countries, their institutions and populations to face challenges; and strive, in the long term, to enhance their institutional capacity to evaluate threats, analyse the effects of crises and conflict, and identify institutional shortfalls;

Action taken

ESCWA is working on a study on the employment opportunities of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to assess the impact of the limitations of their access to the labour market on their human development. The study will be based on data from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). It will serve as a tool to guide policy reform in that area.

ESCWA is drafting the yearly Secretary-General's note on the "Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan". In addition, it is preparing a report that will assess the long-term cumulative impact of the Israeli occupation on the socioeconomic development of the Palestinian people, which will consider the period since 2000.

ESCWA will soon publish Issue V of the report on *Trends and Impacts in Conflict Settings*, which addresses the impact of conflict on human development from birth to adulthood. It presents evidence on the impact of conflict over the life cycle using micro-data for the Arab region and attempts to understand the relation between exposure to violence and developmental and social outcomes through the life-cycle approach. In addition, the study examines the drivers of youth radicalization and its links to poor labour market performance in the region.

ESCWA has also produced the third issue of the *Arab Governance Report*. The report suggests strategies and policy recommendations that countries in conflict or post-conflict phases can adopt and implement immediately after the cessation of combat. These responses address short- and longer-term priorities, as well as and long-term processes such as reconciliation, reintegration, re-building of State institutions and development.

Finally, a project on addressing the challenges of forcibly displaced people and their host communities is in the pipelines. It is aimed at establishing a regional observatory on forced displacement, based on inputs from national working groups. The working groups will analyse existing data and research to assess the multidimensional impact of forced displacement in selected Arab countries. A capacity-building handbook for senior civil servants will be produced and training workshops will be organized in the countries most affected by the Syrian crisis, namely Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. Project implementation will begin in February 2018.

Recommendation (l)

To confirm the implementation of ESCWA resolution 321 (XXVIII) on redesignating the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia as the “Economic and Social Commission for Arab States”; and to present member States with a working paper on progress in this area so as to expedite the resolution’s implementation, in full coordination with the leadership of the Executive Committee and the Arab Group in New York;

Action taken

Efforts have been made to sensitize member States on the issue in briefings by the Executive Secretary of ESCWA to Permanent Representatives of Arab States at United Nations Headquarters.

Recommendation (m)

To take note of the secretariat’s report on financing for development, and to present a report on key international and regional developments in this area at the next Committee meeting.

Action taken

The secretariat is presenting two documents to the Executive Committee on the above-mentioned subject: (a) document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.4/4(Part I), which summarizes the overall results of the Arab financing for development scorecard, taking into account the cost of conflict and displacement, domestic public resources, domestic and international private finance, international development cooperation, international trade, and debt and debt sustainability; and (b) document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.4/4(Part II) on the implementation mechanisms of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which highlights global commitments versus Arab priorities in the field of financing for development.
