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Supporting the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals

Summary

The Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) comprises senior representatives of Arab national women's machineries. It was established at the request of the ESCWA Committee on Women at its seventh session, held Muscat on 20 and 21 January 2016. The request emphasized the significant role that national women's machineries are playing in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The present document reviews the activities undertaken by ESCWA during the period 2023–2024, in partnership with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the League of Arab States, in the context of building the capacity of Subcommittee members, based on its mandate and work priorities and the recommendations of the Committee on Women at its eleventh session (Beirut, 10–11 October 2023).

The Committee on Women is invited to review the implemented activities and propose ways to continue supporting the Subcommittee in the coming period.

Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1–3	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. Terms of reference of the Subcommittee and determinants of its work	4–7	3
II. Subcommittee support activities.....	8–17	4
III. Future prospects.....	18–19	5
IV. Conclusion.....	20	5

Introduction

1. Member states participating in the seventh session of the Committee on Women of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) recommended the formation of a subcommittee of senior representatives of national women's machineries to follow up on the implementation of issues related to gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to meet the needs of member States in fulfilling their commitments to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment.
2. Since the formation of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee on Women has recommended since its eighth session (Beirut, 4–5 October 2017) onwards to continue providing technical support to the Subcommittee, and to make available the knowledge and tools necessary to help member States accelerate the implementation of Goal 5 and its targets.
3. The present document reviews the activities carried out in the period 2023–2024 within this framework, and presents proposals to support the work of the Subcommittee in the future.

I. Terms of reference of the Subcommittee and determinants of its work

4. ESCWA serves as the secretariat of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and Sustainable Development Goals. In partnership with UN-Women and the League of Arab States, ESCWA supports the Subcommittee in implementing its activities, so as to enable its members to carry out the tasks assigned to them. The terms of reference of the Subcommittee include the following:
 - (a) Providing member States with the necessary tools and skills to formulate and review gender-related policies and plans to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
 - (b) Enhancing coordination mechanisms to identify and select national indicators to measure progress achieved in the implementation of SDG 5;
 - (c) Strengthening national monitoring abilities and data collection for reporting purposes;
 - (d) Developing a road map that brings together the gender-related targets of the 2030 Agenda and related indicators into various interdisciplinary clusters, so as to facilitate implementation and review efforts, and to promote comparability of national indicators;
 - (e) Establishing innovative regional knowledge sharing mechanisms to share experiences and best practices to advance gender equality;
 - (f) Formulating recommendations to improve women's status in the region, and promoting women's leadership in driving sustainable and inclusive growth;
 - (g) Coordinating efforts to follow up and review of the implementation of the gender dimension of the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels.
5. At its eighth session, the Committee on Women recommended that the secretariat expand membership of the Subcommittee to include all interested Arab States, with invitations to participate in the activities of the Subcommittee directed primarily to national women's machineries and other parties, as needed, including national statistical offices. The Committee on Women also requested to be provided with regular information on Goal 5 and its indicators, and to build the capacities of its members to enable them to implement Goal 5 and other related SDGs.
6. The Subcommittee's previous meetings provided opportunities for discussion between countries to exchange experiences and build national capacity on priority issues in the region, most notably women's

economic empowerment, unpaid care and care economies, gender equality and the law, the role of communications technology in implementing Goal 5, and estimating the costs of violence against women.

7. At its eleventh session, the Committee on Women made the following recommendation to the ESCWA secretariat: Organize a training programme for members of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals on how to translate the concepts of women's economic empowerment presented by the ESCWA secretariat at the current session into programmes related to the implementation of relevant SDGs and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

II. Subcommittee support activities

8. Several members of the Subcommittee participated in a [regional meeting](#) held by ESCWA in Beirut and online on 9 and 10 July 2024, in collaboration with the League of Arab States and UN-Women. The meeting addressed the topic of women's economic empowerment and providing them with decent work opportunities. It focused on the need to provide members of the Subcommittee with the knowledge, skills and tools necessary to enhance the status of women's economic empowerment, and to adopt best practices in that regard with a focus on safe access to resources and opportunities.

9. In this context, the meeting addressed the informal economy, the challenges it poses in Arab countries, and its impact on women's economic empowerment, especially since women's involvement in informal work exceeds that of men. The meeting also stressed the importance of implementing Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204) of the International Labour Organization, taking into account the specificities and circumstances of each country.

10. The meeting also addressed the climate crisis, which is closely linked to gender inequality; and highlighted the importance and necessity of women's engagement in the green and blue economies, given their contribution to enhancing women's economic empowerment and gender equality.

11. The meeting discussed the results of the first regional review of the Arab Women Development Agenda 2030, with a focus on progress made in the economic track in several national files of Arab countries that participated in the first regional review. The indicators used in the six pillars of the regional report were also presented, with a focus on economic indicators.

12. The meeting included a presentation on the use of Index Simulator for Policymakers in the Arab Region (ISPAR) to understand the impact of economic empowerment on countries' rankings and results in international indicators. ESCWA developed this tool to support member States in improving their rankings and scores on global indicators of gender equality, which include more than 22 global indicators linked to the SDGs.

13. The meeting addressed the importance of ensuring women's access to land, property and immovable assets, which enables them to obtain the necessary financing to establish or expand entrepreneurial businesses, thus contributing to poverty reduction, enhancing women's participation in the labour market, and reducing inequalities. The meeting resulted in recommendations that contribute to protecting women's rights, including preserving their legal rights to inheritance; taking the necessary measures to address the societal culture that pressures women to give up these rights; encouraging joint ownership arrangements; reforming land management policies to reduce the procedures, time and money required to register properties; encouraging the inclusion of women's names in land ownership documents; and working to raise women's awareness of their rights.

14. The meeting included presentations on unpaid work and its challenges in Arab countries and the future of the care economy in view of best practices, noting that unpaid care was the main reason behind the low rate of women's labour force participation in the region. Participants stressed the importance of adopting and implementing public policies related to care. They also discussed the importance of men's role in unpaid care and domestic work based on lessons learned.

15. The meeting tackled the issue of sexual harassment in the public sphere and in the workplace, especially in terms of the high economic cost it entails for both institutions and individuals. The meeting also provided an opportunity to present the experience of Lebanon in drafting, adopting and implementing law No. 205 on criminalizing sexual harassment and rehabilitating its victims, which may enhance the exchange of expertise between Arab countries.

16. Participants discussed safe, accessible, efficient and affordable transport systems as a means of women's economic empowerment. They also discussed gender-inclusive social protection policies, which are a key driver of women's economic empowerment, in addition to being a tool for combating poverty and narrowing gender gaps.

17. The meeting concluded by emphasizing the importance of strengthening the capacity of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals, especially since the regional meeting provided an opportunity to learn about useful models and experiences that can be transferred to other countries, so as to enhance women's economic empowerment and provide decent job opportunities. Participants agreed on the need to raise women's awareness of their rights, and promote a culture of women's rights issues in the Arab region.

III. Future prospects

18. The search for funding sources is still ongoing to support the capacity-building of Subcommittee members, so as to move forward in achieving the objectives of its establishment. These objectives include aligning national strategies for the advancement of women with Goal 5; strengthening capacity to prepare national reports; and providing qualitative and technical references and knowledge to assist in developing effective policies and programmes based on best practices and experiences.

19. ESCWA aims to establish more partnerships with various Arab and international organizations and bodies. This may help the Subcommittee achieve its objectives, and develop tools that help member States formulate policies and establish institutional mechanisms that support the role of national women's machineries in mainstreaming women's issues, within the framework of national efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda, with a focus on Goal 5. ESCWA is particularly interested in indicators and reports.

IV. Conclusion

20. The Committee on Women is invited to review efforts made by ESCWA and its partners to provide technical support and build the capacity of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals, and to reach an agreement on future steps, particularly regarding ways to increase technical support to enhance the work of the Subcommittee in the future.
