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**BUILDING CAPACITY OF MEMBER COUNTRIES: GOOD PRACTICE
IN TECHNICAL COOPERATION ACTIVITIES
AND REGIONAL ADVISORY SERVICES****Summary**

Technical cooperation activities of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) span the full spectrum of the Commission's mandated areas of specialization. The technical cooperation strategy unites the intergovernmental status and multidisciplinary staff of the Commission with its role as a regional advocate with a global perspective. Activities and initiatives of ESCWA technical cooperation respond to the needs of member countries as articulated in their national development plans.

This document highlights notable technical cooperation activities that took place during 2011 and 2012 along with improvements in the planning and management of technical cooperation at ESCWA.

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Introduction

1. Technical cooperation programmes, projects and services provide the means through which the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) operationalizes its normative work and creates a virtuous cycle of policy-oriented research, technical advice, implementation and knowledge exchange. At its core, technical cooperation seeks to support member countries in their capacity-development efforts using evidence-based knowledge acquired through the organization's normative and analytical work. It supports member countries and strengthens the formulation and effective implementation of national policies, strategies and programmes to achieve sustainable development. In implementing the technical cooperation programme, ESCWA staff, regional advisors and consultants work on the ground providing tangible and immediate assistance, finding practical solutions and supporting government-led policies and initiatives. The Commission exerts every effort to ensure a coherent, interdisciplinary and results-oriented approach.

2. Spanning the full spectrum of the Commission's mandated areas of specialization, technical cooperation initiatives are designed taking the following parameters into account:

(a) Common development challenges facing more than one member country, where lessons in one may be relevant to others;

(b) Cross boundary issues where collaboration and the implementation of global and regional agreements can promote regional integration;

(c) Emerging and new issues where ESCWA can assist in raising awareness about them and build capacity to address them.

3. Technical cooperation is composed of three distinct but interrelated funding modalities: Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC); Development Account (DA); and extrabudgetary resources (XB).

I. STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF ESCWA PROGRAMME OF TECHNICAL COOPERATION

4. The technical cooperation strategy articulates the comparative advantage of ESCWA, uniting its intergovernmental status and multidisciplinary staff with the organization's role as a regional advocate with a global perspective. It further emphasizes the role of ESCWA in translating its normative and analytical work into practical applications in the field through well-designed capacity-building programmes, expanded, reliable resources and more extensive, strategic partnerships. Finally, the strategy envisions that technical cooperation, combined with stronger institutions, should move beyond human resource development into a more interactive and focused range of services that emphasize both national ownership and sustainable results.

5. In recent years, ESCWA has worked hard to implement the strategy and achieve the highest level results from technical cooperation programmes, projects and services. These initiatives are guided by the strategic and policy objectives set by relevant international decisions and recommendations, including ESCWA intergovernmental meetings and are provided on the basis of the technical cooperation strategy of ESCWA. There is no "one size fits all" approach to the technical assistance needs of countries in the region, and ESCWA technical cooperation initiatives respond to the needs of member countries as articulated in their national development plans. Technical cooperation projects and services are predominately demand driven and tailor-made to beneficiaries' needs and requirements. In whichever form they are provided, the services seek to enhance the capacity of beneficiary countries in policy formulation processes.

6. In the process of planning and delivering its technical cooperation services, ESCWA seeks to develop and nurture strong strategic partnerships with international organizations and institutions in the region and the world. In line with global calls for greater coherence in the United Nations system, ESCWA systematically strives to coordinate and collaborate with United Nations development agencies at the global, regional and country levels to ensure greater impact and optimization of available financial and non-financial resources.

II. OVERVIEW OF TECHNICAL COOPERATION ACTIVITIES SINCE 2010

A. REGULAR PROGRAMME OF TECHNICAL COOPERATION SERVICES

7. Between January 2010 and August 2012, ESCWA provided a total of 187 technical advisory services to all member countries in all substantive areas of the Commission's work. Based on defined strategic priorities and country plans, ESCWA also delivered 27 regional and subregional workshops, 69 national workshops and sponsored 51 participants in fellowships and study tours.

B. DEVELOPMENT ACCOUNT PROJECTS

8. Within the framework of DA, and under the seventh and eighth tranches, ESCWA is leading 14 projects and participating in 26. Under the ninth tranche announced in August 2012, ESCWA has put forward seven regional and international projects for a total of more than US\$5 million. The projects focus on institutional capacity development in a variety of different areas including climate change, trade facilitation, gender mainstreaming, youth policies, migration and so on.

C. EXTRABUDGETARY ACTIVITIES

9. During the biennium 2010-2011, ESCWA raised around US\$8.7 million to implement national and regional activities under its seven subprogrammes. Projects under XB funding are diverse and relate to areas such as water resource management, local governance, economic and social challenges of transition and the statistical International Comparison Programme.

10. Detailed information on the technical cooperation programme during 2010 and 2011 may be found in the report of the Executive Secretary on the "Technical Cooperation Programme and Regional Advisory Services" submitted to the twenty-seventh session of the Commission, held in Beirut from 7 to 10 May 2012.

III. HIGHLIGHTS OF ESCWA TECHNICAL COOPERATION ACTIVITIES

11. The technical cooperation activities and services of ESCWA are as diverse in form as they are in substance. They take their cue from the regular programme of work which is reviewed and endorsed by the Commission's highest intergovernmental body, and respond to the expressed needs of member countries. All technical cooperation activities are designed to complement the normative and analytical work of ESCWA, both by putting policy and programme recommendations into practice and by feeding into the analytical discourse.

12. The examples provided in this section illustrate and showcase the diversity of ESCWA technical cooperation activities, and the potential for scaling up and replicating good practice.

A. GREEN ECONOMIES IN THE ARAB REGION: RIO+20 AND BEYOND

13. During 2011 and 2012, many global commitments to development were evaluated and renewed. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012, and was one in a series of important global summits aimed at directing global approaches to development. Rio+20 provided an opportunity for Arab countries to come together, take stock of

achievements and gaps in sustainable development and assess the value of new approaches. Working together with Arab countries, the League of Arab States, and other United Nations entities, ESCWA dedicated substantial technical cooperation resources to ensure that an Arab message was heard at Rio+20. This preparatory process involved:

- (a) Producing a number of studies and reports to update Arab countries on green economies and sustainable development in the region, profiling experiences and suggesting reforms and policy directives;
- (b) Organizing more than 10 regional, subregional and national meetings in cities around the Arab region, from Amman and Beirut to Cairo, Damascus, Dubai and Jeddah;
- (c) Consulting with a wide range of stakeholders and fostering dialogue between Governments, civil society, the private sector, regional organizations and development entities;
- (d) Negotiating a set of Arab recommendations on the main themes of Rio+20.

14. These multiple efforts had the following strategic goals: to ensure, as much as possible, a coherent Arab position on issues relevant to Rio+20, and to safeguard regional interests in ways that are conducive to sustainable development. These efforts came together when ESCWA and its partners facilitated the negotiation of a regional outcome document at the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting held in Cairo in October 2011 and then submitted it to the Rio+20 secretariat. The regional outcome document articulated the common concerns and aspirations of Arab countries: a focus on the green economy as an element of and not an alternative to sustainable development; a call for developed countries to honour their commitments to the developing world; and an emphasis on sustainable development that is adapted to the specificity of the region. The regional outcome document was adopted by the Arab Group at the intercessional meeting of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in New York in December 2011 and was reflected in the zero draft of the global outcome document.

15. The preparatory process for Rio+20 brought different Arab countries and stakeholders together to gain a common understanding of sustainable development issues and set strategic objectives for safeguarding the region's interests in a global forum. Work is already underway for new studies and workshops and ESCWA is again working with United Nations agencies and other partners to strengthen the regional position in advance of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP18), which will take place in Doha in November 2012.

B. CYBERLEGISLATION IN THE ARAB REGION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

16. Most countries in the Arab region are still in the early stages of developing legal frameworks for regulating information and communication technologies (ICTs). The importance of cyberlegislation stems from the need to regulate the use of online applications and protect users. Laws must be enacted to ensure that e-government, e-commerce and e-health services protect private, individual and institutional information. Cyberlaws should build user confidence and promote an enabling environment for the growth of ICTs and information societies. They must also rein in cybercrime and the misuse of cyberspace.

17. Within the framework of a regional DA project entitled "Regional Harmonization of Cyberlegislation to Promote the Knowledge Society in the Arab World", ESCWA is responding directly to members' needs. It is partnering with the League of Arab States and the Economic Commission for Africa to enhance regional integration and strengthen the capacity of countries to build a strong and sustainable ICT sector through the development of appropriate legal and regulatory structures.

18. To date, ESCWA has produced a set of directives designed to assist Arab countries in the development of national cyberlaws and to harmonize cyberlegislation on a regional level, covering areas including the following: personal data protection; e-communication and freedom of expression; e-signature and e-transactions; e-commerce and consumer protection; intellectual property; and cybercrimes.

19. Within the project, ESCWA developed a regional report on the status of cyberlegislation in the Arab region and the way forward based on research in 18 Arab countries. In addition, ESCWA organized several regional workshops to train participants on the use and application of the directives for the formulation of national cyberlaws or the review and adjustment of existing ones. The project also offers member countries access to tailored advisory services on the development of regulatory and legal frameworks.

C. HELPING MEMBER COUNTRIES COMPLY WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS IN NATIONAL ACCOUNTS

20. As Arab economies work towards enhanced policymaking, there is an urgent need for available, reliable and comparable data. Governments must create the knowledge infrastructure to assess the use and availability of resources at the national level in ways that are systematic, transparent and informative. At a regional level, there is an equal need for comparable data across countries and across sectors.

21. Responding to the recommendations and priorities set by the Statistical Committee, ESCWA has emphasized support to national statistical offices in the area of economic statistics in general and National Accounts in particular. Through capacity-building workshops, advisory services and hands on support, the Statistics Division of ESCWA is providing critical support to national statistics departments of Kuwait, Jordan, and Palestine in implementing the United Nations System of National Accounts 2008 (2008 SNA). This system represents the international standard for the compilation and dissemination of national accounts. Its aim is to provide an integrated, complete system of accounts enabling international comparison of all significant economic activity. The countries benefiting from ESCWA support will be able to use 2008 SNA as a guide in constructing their own accounting systems thereby enabling greater regional and international comparability. Moreover, countries will be able to improve data collection and methodologies to generate accurate economic statistics in a timely manner, an important factor for policymaking and planning.

D. SUPPORTING LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325 (2000)

22. In addition to ongoing occupation and conflict, recent political upheavals in the region have shown the importance of recognizing and facilitating the role of women as actors and agents of change at local, national, and regional levels. While women and men struggle together with the effects of conflict and are unified in their call for better economic and social rights, countries in the region recognize the importance of legal and institutional structures that empower women as agents of constructive change. Likewise, Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) concerning women and peace and security calls on member countries to: increase the participation of women at all decision-making levels in peace processes; protect the rights of women in conflict situations; integrate women in peacebuilding, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction processes; and include gender training in peacekeeping operations.

23. During 2010 and 2011 ESCWA limited its support of the resolution to regional and national training activities. In 2012, ESCWA scaled up its support and initiated a regional project within the framework of DA. Having identified weak legislative capacity as a limiting factor in the protection and empowerment of women, the project targets parliaments and legislative authorities at the national level, supporting them to amend discriminatory legislation and enact new laws to promote women's participation in political processes. The project is a natural extension of ESCWA efforts to assist member countries in formulating national action plans to respond to the Security Council resolution and is being implemented in partnership with the Economic Commission for Africa and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. With a focus on conflict-affected and transitioning countries (Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine and Tunisia), project activities include targeted training, advisory services and the establishment of a regional knowledge network of parliamentarians.

E. DESIGNING AND BUILDING MODELS TO SUPPORT SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

24. Governments throughout the Arab region are facing the challenge of adapting economic development planning to emerging needs and turbulent, transitioning contexts at the national, regional and global levels. Within increasingly constrained fiscal space, Governments must make difficult choices, carefully evaluate the cost and impact of different policies and achieve more with less.

25. As part of its regular work programme, ESCWA has initiated a large-scale project on economic modelling to forecast economic activity and propose economic policies that are inclusive and sustainable. An underlying theme of the project is that integration is not limited to political expedience; regional integration is an economic and social imperative for development.

26. At the national level, ESCWA is supporting the efforts of several Governments to apply modelling tools to national development planning. In Saudi Arabia, the tenth five-year national development plan has benefited from ESCWA support for the development of the overall framework of the plan and the design of a socioeconomic model to assist policymakers in identifying appropriate policy and programmatic responses to development challenges. Similar support is being provided to the Sudan, where ESCWA has proposed to develop an action plan for job creation and an integrated model that can link policy to poverty, employment and diversification.

27. The Maquette for Millennium Development Goal Simulations (MAMS), a dynamic, country-level computable general equilibrium model, is being used in Jordan and Bahrain. The model generates outcomes in terms of growth, Millennium Development Goals, the educational make-up of the labour force and the interaction of these outcomes with other aspects of economic performance.

F. SUPPORTING STUDY TOURS AND FELLOWSHIPS TO PROMOTE SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

28. Study tours and fellowships are an important complement to advisory work providing beneficiaries with hands-on knowledge and practical experience. As part of its capacity-building activities, ESCWA sponsors study tours and fellowships of government officials. Since the beginning of January 2010, ESCWA has sponsored 51 such visits aimed at promoting intraregional learning and knowledge exchange. One such example focused on water harvesting techniques. Following two advisory missions to the Sudan, ESCWA organized a study tour for Sudanese officials of the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources to the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources in Oman. The purpose of the study tour was to build the technical and policy-related knowledge of the Sudanese officials in the field of water harvesting and water resource management. The study tour involved site visits to water harvesting stations and structured discussions of the two countries' policy and programme initiatives in the area of water harvesting, monitoring, resource assessment and management. As a result of the study tour, Sudanese officials have been exploring the possibility of adapting techniques from Oman to their context in the Sudan.

IV. FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

29. The Commission is consolidating and building on the achievements of its technical cooperation programme to put the best international experiences at the service of member countries. Examples of recent and ongoing improvements in the planning and management of technical cooperation at ESCWA are listed below.

A. INTEGRATED PLANNING

30. In recent years, ESCWA has intensified its efforts to synchronize the regular programme of work with the technical cooperation programme to ensure synergy, complementarity and the maximum impact of

interventions. This is evident in the integrated planning of all activities during the preparation of the 2014-2015 Programme Budget. ESCWA subprogrammes have set out to plan activities for the new biennium collectively, regardless of the source of funding. In this way, technical cooperation projects and activities are designed early on to support and complement regular programme outputs, such as publications, intergovernmental meetings, expert group meetings and technical materials, and contribute to the overall expected accomplishments and strategic framework. This approach will ensure that the work of ESCWA has a greater impact at the national, regional and global levels.

B. INTERDISCIPLINARY SUPPORT

31. By its very nature, ESCWA is home to experts from many different academic and professional disciplines. This mix of expertise allows the organization to give member countries a holistic, interdisciplinary perspective on complex development challenges. Moreover, ESCWA has actively sought to create interdisciplinary teams, where possible, to address member country requests. For example, a recent high-level mission to the Ministry of Economy and Planning in Saudi Arabia included experts in the fields of economic planning and modelling, social development and sustainable development. In preparation for this mission, several meetings and consultations were held with experts from each ESCWA subprogramme, including gender experts, statisticians and ICT practitioners. Similar processes have been adopted in responding to requests from Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

C. REGIONAL ADVISORS

32. In the light of unfolding events in the region and the resulting development challenges, ESCWA initiated a review in 2012 of the technical cooperation needs of member countries and the kind of services ESCWA should provide. Regional advisors are one element of the dedicated advisory service that ESCWA provides to member countries. In particular, the review considered the ability of ESCWA to deliver policy and technical assistance in line with the strategic priorities of the organization as identified in the strategic frameworks of 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 and the organization's vision for 2020. The review also took into account emerging needs and trends, significant upcoming global events, and the comparative advantage of ESCWA. As a result of this review, ESCWA identified the following focus areas for regional advisors for 2012-2013: Water and Environment; Social Policy and Protection; Regional Integration and Economic Modelling; Transportation; ICT Policy; National Accounts and Economic Statistics; Gender Mainstreaming and Women's Political Participation; and Democracy and Governance in the Context of Transition. The Commission will undertake regular reviews of the focus areas of regional advisors while drawing upon a wide pool of national, regional and international experience and continuing to provide services within the full spectrum of its mandate.

D. NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS

33. National technical cooperation focal points play a vital role in ensuring the effectiveness of ESCWA technical cooperation services. In addition to acting as a liaison between ESCWA and many different stakeholders, the focal points also coordinate with partners and ensure adequate follow-up to RPTC activities. To support the work of national focal points, an ad hoc meeting of the Technical Cooperation Network was held in Beirut on 11 May 2012 following the twenty-seventh session of the Commission. The fourth regular meeting of the Network is expected to take place either back-to-back with the seventh meeting of the Technical Committee or during the first quarter of 2013.
