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Item 8 (b) of the provisional agenda

PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN IMPLEMENTING ACTIVITIES OF THE SECRETARIAT**FOLLOW-UP OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS
ADOPTED AT THE THIRD MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE****Summary**

The Technical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) holds its meetings every six months. It held its Third Meeting, which was attended by representatives of ESCWA member countries, at the United Nations House in Beirut, from 21-22 July 2009. The meeting made a set of proposals and recommendations, some related to the topics and issues on the agenda, others related to the nature of the work of the Committees, and ways of enhancing it.

This document presents the actions taken and activities carried out by the secretariat pursuant to the recommendations of the Technical Committee in its Third Meeting.

**RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
AT ITS THIRD MEETING AND ACTIONS
TAKEN TO IMPLEMENT THEM**

At its Third Meeting, held at the United Nations House in Beirut, from 21 to 22 July 2009, the Technical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) made a set of proposals and recommendations,¹ some related to the topics and issues on the agenda, others related to the nature of the work of the Committee and ways of enhancing it. This document presents the recommendations made by the Committee and the corresponding actions taken to implement them.

FOLLOW-UP OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE AND PROPOSALS ISSUED IN THE CONTEXT
OF THE TECHNICAL TOPICS ON THE AGENDA

Recommendation (a)

Consider the possibility of establishing, at the level of member countries, a fund for addressing the financial crisis, unify efforts and propose practical solutions to the financial crisis based on analytical studies prepared cooperatively by ESCWA and member countries. Such solutions should commensurate with the impact of the crisis on member countries, since the impact of the financial crisis varies from one country to another, depending on the economic situation, linkages to the global economy and capacity of various economic sectors.

Implementation follow-up

- (1) Since the outbreak of the financial crisis, ESCWA has attached importance to this issue within its work programme. In collaboration with other United Nations commissions, it prepared a joint report on the regional impacts of the financial crisis and the actions taken in response. Moreover, ESCWA organized a regional consultative forum on the impact of the financial crisis on the economies of member countries, attended by experts in various fields, and some members of the committee set up by the President of the United Nations General Assembly to look into reform of the international monetary and financial system
- (2) ESCWA prepared three studies on the impact of financial crisis on capital and oil markets and a number of other sectors. In July 2009, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), ESCWA prepared a study of the impact of the financial and economic crisis on, and challenges it poses to, the ESCWA region.
- (3) In the first half of 2010, a report will be issued on the progress achieved by member countries in implementing the recommendations of the Monterrey Consensus (Mexico, 2002) and on the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus (Doha, 29 November - 2 December 2008). The report will address the impact of the financial crisis on the economies of member countries.
- (4) When additional extra-budgetary financial resources become available, ESCWA will prepare studies on the impact of the financial crisis on a group of member countries that are similar in terms of their economic circumstances. The secretariat invites member countries to provide the financial resources needed for preparing three relevant analytical studies, estimated to cost about \$45,000.
- (5) The Expert Group Meeting on Regional integration in Financial Services (Beirut, 21-22 October 2009), discussed the issue of addressing the financial crisis and establishment of a fund to help the

¹ ESCWA, Report of the Technical Committee at its third meeting (E/ESCWA/2009/C.3/6), available at: www.escwa.un.org.

least developed countries and the countries suffering effects of wars and political problems to launch reconstruction and development. The meeting recommended studying the feasibility of establishing this fund. When the requisite extra-budgetary financial resources become available, ESCWA will carry out such a study.

- (6) Furthermore, ESCWA addressed the global financial crisis from a social perspective, organizing an Expert Group Meeting on the Global Financial and Economic Crisis: The Social Impact and Response in ESCWA Countries (Beirut, 8 December 2009). This meeting was organized in response to the call by the General Assembly in its Resolution 63/277 of 7 April 2009 for organizing regional consultations, and in line with the findings and resolutions of the Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its impact on Development (New York, 24-26 June 2009). The meeting, which was attended by a number of regional and international experts and representatives of United Nations organizations, discussed the social impact of the crisis on the various countries of the region, focusing on issues of employment, living conditions, poverty, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and social protection systems. The meeting reviewed ways for addressing the crisis at the policy level and the programmes aimed at alleviating the effects of the crisis on the poor and marginalized groups in the region, and made recommendations to ESCWA and its member countries within the framework of seeking a national and regional programme of action to tackle the financial crisis at the social level.

Recommendation (b)

Coordinate efforts and mechanisms and undertake research and field studies to propose solutions to the food-security crisis at both the national and regional levels, through capacity building, as well as through attracting investment from countries competent to countries that have the land and natural resources to benefit from these investments. And discuss ESCWA participation and representation of ESCWA member countries in the global events addressing food security, such as the conferences convened by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). In this context, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Sudan suggested holding a conference to discuss food security and ways of dealing with it, in particular through promotion of investment in agriculture in the Arab countries that have comparative advantages, following the example of the United Arab Emirates and the Sudan.

Implementation follow-up

- (1) ESCWA participated in the meeting of the United Nations Regional Coordinating Committee, and held consultations on food security in the ESCWA region with FAO. ESCWA launched an ongoing consultation process with FAO on ways to address this issue, as well as on the requirements for a regional conference to arrive at practical results and mechanisms for enhancing regional coordination and integration aimed at achieving food security.
- (2) Accordingly, ESCWA carried out an overall assessment and developed an action plan comprising the following four stages:
- (a) Evaluation of actual conditions, capacities and needs, in close cooperation with member countries and other stakeholders;
 - (b) Based on the results of assessment, preparation of a regional working paper dealing with requisite and possible policies and programmes for enhancing food security;
 - (c) Organization of a regional conference on the basis of the regional working paper to review the results of the assessment process and establish and endorse the required steps;

- (d) Follow-up and implementation of the outcomes of the regional conference, including preparation and implementation of the requisite public-sector capacity-building programmes.

Recommendation (c)

Conduct studies to assess the impact of climate change on water resources, as well as on coastal areas, and identify projects to help adaptation to climate change and presenting them to the Special Climate Change Fund established by the Global Environment Facility.

Implementation follow-up

- (1) Within the framework of implementation of the above recommendation, and pursuant to Resolution No. 281 (d-25), Addressing Climate Change Issues in the Arab Region, adopted by ESCWA in its twenty-fifth session, the issue of climate change was included in the joint programmes of the League of Arab States, the United Nations and its competent organizations dealing with climate change, in preparation for carrying out an assessment of the impact of climate change on land and water resources. All parties emphasized the need for collaboration, since this assessment requires multiple competencies.
- (2) Within the framework of the efforts to accomplish the above assessment, ESCWA held an Expert Group meeting on assessing vulnerability of water resources in the Arab region to climate change² to discuss an action plan to be followed in the preparation of the assessment and the role of each of the partners. The meeting agreed to implement the following core activities:
 - (a) Collection of the main available data on climate and water resources and their incorporation into a knowledge management system;
 - (b) Determination of an analytical model of climate change corresponding to the specificities of the Arab region and preparation of the assessment on the basis of this model;
 - (c) Raising awareness and dissemination of information about relevant issues, particularly with regard to areas most vulnerable to effects of climate change;
 - (d) Provision of technical support to member countries in building capacity and strengthening institutions in the areas of modelling climate change and assessing its impact.
- (3) A core working group was formed to follow up on the implementation of what ESCWA provides to the Regional Office for West Asia, United Nations Environment Program (UNEP/ROWA), the Regional Office for the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), and the Arab Centre for Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), and some representatives of member countries.
- (4) On the occasion of World Environment Day in 2009, ESCWA issued a publication that called for concerted efforts to combat climate change.³ The publication presented the potential effects of climate change on various sectors and measures of adaptation and mitigation, in addition to the services that can be provided by ESCWA in various sectors. The publication also highlighted the collaboration mechanisms available through the United Nations Convention to Combat Climate Change.

² ESCWA, Report of the Technical Committee at its third meeting (E/ESCWA/2009/C.3/6), available at: www.escwa.un.org.

³ ESCWA, World Environment Day, Unite to Combat Climate Change, 2009.

Recommendation (d)

Adopt the new communications strategy that was presented to the Committee, which suggests new lines of communication between ESCWA and member countries, among member countries, and between ESCWA and other organizations working in the region, particularly the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Implementation follow-up

The secretariat initiated application of the new communications strategy through promotion of direct communication between ESCWA and the focal points in member countries, as well as through the channels of communications among the countries themselves, by means of electronic messages and clear strategic messages.

Recommendation (e)

Work with member countries to review and develop the strategy on women that has come out of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in order to incorporate the MDGs and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in accordance with the specificities of the region, and work towards implementing this strategy.

Implementation follow-up

- (1) ESCWA continues to work with member countries for the advancement and empowerment of women at every level and for mainstreaming the gender concept in national policies, programmes and plans. ESCWA works with national committees on women, providing them with technical and technological assistance, including preparation of the requisite studies and organization of specialized workshops.
- (2) In preparation for the international review and assessment efforts of states to implement resolutions of the Fourth World Conference on Women, after fifteen years, ESCWA followed up with member countries on the preparation of national reports reviewing progress at the national level in implementation of areas of critical concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. These reports have contributed to the preparation of the “Unified Arab Report on the Progress Achieved in Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action: + 15” prepared by ESCWA in collaboration with the League of Arab States and presented at the expert group meeting organized by the two parties.⁴ Experts and representatives of the participating Arab countries arrived at a number of relevant recommendations addressed to member countries and the ESCWA secretariat.
- (3) ESCWA held the Fourth Session of the Committee on Women, during which the overall work carried out since the Third Session of the Committee on Women was reviewed, the “Unified Arab Report on the Progress Achieved in Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action: + 15” was adopted, and the main obstacles, challenges and future prospects identified. Representatives of member countries made a number of recommendations, including requesting the ESCWA secretariat to support the Centre for Women with additional human and financial resources, in order to upgrade it to the level of division, alongside other divisions of ESCWA, with the aim of doubling the efforts to assist member countries with the empowerment of women.
- (4) In relation to the development of specialized studies on empowerment of women in the region, as part of a series of studies on Arab women and Development, ESCWA prepared a study on women’s control over economic resources and their access to financial resources (E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/2).

⁴ ESCWA, Expert group meeting for the review of the Progress Achieved in Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the Arab Region: Beijing + 15.

The study was reviewed in the Expert Group Meeting on Women's Economic Participation (Beirut, 18-19 August 2009), as well as during the Fourth Session of the Committee on Women (21-23 October 2009).

- (5) Generally, demand by member countries for technical assistance on gender issues has increased, including requests for assistance in preparing national reports on CEDAW; in mainstreaming the gender concept in development plans, programmes and projects; in gender-responsive budgeting; and in other issues related to social, political and economic empowerment of women.
- (6) As for the role of ESCWA in following up Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), ESCWA prepared a regional study and case studies on Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon aimed at identifying ways of enhancing participation of women in conflict resolution and peace building. ESCWA held an expert group meeting on Means to Strengthen the Role of Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding (Beirut, 13-14 November 2009). The meeting, which was attended by experts from the countries concerned, as well as from the Sudan and Yemen, was an opportunity for discussing studies, disseminating lessons learned, and making the necessary recommendations.
- (7) ESCWA participated in the expert group meetings of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) aimed at measuring violence against women,⁵ and contributed to a proposed survey model and methodology. With the assistance of member countries ESCWA will contribute to the implementation of this proposal.

Recommendation (g)

Set up a working group within the Technical Committee to study establishment of an advisory committee on emerging and development issues during crisis, with the objective of enhancing the role of ESCWA in peacebuilding and mitigating the impact of crises on development and submitting a recommendation thereon to the twenty-sixth ministerial session of ESCWA.

Implementation follow-up

A working group to study the establishment of a subcommittee on emerging and development issues during crises was set up. Representatives of 10 ESCWA member countries, namely, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic joined the group. In order to facilitate communication, the working group adopted e-mail and fax as a practical mechanism for its work. The secretariat prepared a draft resolution on the establishment of a governmental subcommittee dealing with emerging and development issues during crises. Based on observations and suggestions from members of the working group, several amendments were made to the draft. The secretariat will present this draft resolution to the twenty-sixth ministerial session of ESCWA, to be held in April 2010, for appropriate action to be taken.

FOLLOW-UP ON RECOMMENDATIONS BY DELEGATES ON THE NATURE AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

Recommendation (a)

Modify the frequency of meetings of the Technical Committee, by holding three meetings per biennium, and a fourth if necessary following consultation between the secretariat and the Committee Bureau, in order to give member countries and the secretariat enough time to follow-up resolutions adopted by ESCWA and provide a comprehensive report to the Technical Committee.

⁵ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. *Expert Group Meeting on measuring Violence against Women* (Geneva, 28-30 September 2009).

Implementation follow-up

The secretariat took note of this recommendation, which shall be implemented from 2010. In view of the twenty-sixth ministerial session of ESCWA being scheduled for April 2010, the fifth meeting of the Technical Committee will be held in early 2011, instead of late 2010, and the sixth meeting in late 2011. Thus the total number of meetings of the Technical Committee during the 2010-2011 biennium will be three, instead of four.

Recommendation (b)

Review the functions of the Technical Committee approved at the first meeting to clarify its role in following up implementation of the resolutions adopted by ESCWA, and present the proposed new functions of the Committee to its members at its next meeting.

Implementation follow-up

The secretariat reviewed the jurisdiction of the Technical Committee and functions entrusted to it, especially with regard to the follow-up of resolutions adopted by ESCWA member countries. Document E/ESCWA/2010/C.4/3 incorporates the proposed amendments and is presented to the assembled company for discussion and possible approval. The secretariat will prepare a draft resolution on this matter to present to the twenty-sixth ministerial session of ESCWA.

Recommendation (c)

Allocate to the Technical Committee a home page on the ESCWA website where issues addressed by the Committee and information relating to its functions and activities will be presented.

Implementation follow-up

The secretariat has allocated to the Technical Committee a home page on the ESCWA website, and established an electronic forum⁶ on this page to facilitate communication and intensification of consultations among member countries on various issues of concern. The page and forum will be launched during the Fourth meeting of the Technical Committee.

⁶ Available at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/tc>.