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PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN THE WORK OF THE SECRETARIAT

**IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN THE EVALUATION
OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL MECHANISM OF ESCWA
AND ITS SUBSIDIARY BODIES**

Summary

The secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) commissioned an external in-depth evaluation of its intergovernmental structure, which began in 2009. The final report, submitted to ESCWA in July 2010, yielded 15 recommendations and related proposals. The present report covers the progress made in implementing those recommendations and proposals. The Technical Committee is invited to take note of all measures implemented by the secretariat, with the aim of concluding the evaluation of the intergovernmental mechanism of ESCWA.

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I. BACKGROUND

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) resolution 291 (XXV) of 29 May 2008, concerning the frequency of the sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, called upon the secretariat to carry out an in-depth evaluation of the intergovernmental structure of ESCWA in the light of the programme priorities identified by member countries and ongoing United Nations reform. The secretariat commissioned an external consultant to conduct the requested evaluation exercise.
2. The intergovernmental structure of ESCWA is composed of the Commission sessions, the Technical Committee and seven subsidiary bodies: the Committee on Water Resources, the Committee on Energy, the Committee on Social Development, the Committee on Transport, the Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade and Economic Globalization in the Countries of the ESCWA Region, the Statistical Committee and the Committee on Women.
3. The evaluation exercise began in late 2009 and an interim report was presented by the evaluator during the twenty-sixth session of the Commission, held in May 2010. The full report containing the outcome of the evaluation of the intergovernmental mechanism was submitted to ESCWA in July 2010. It was subsequently presented to the fifth meeting of the Technical Committee held in April 2011 as a background document (E/ESCWA/2011/C.5/CRP.1).
4. The secretariat reviewed the findings and recommendations of the evaluation and submitted a response to the fifth meeting of the Technical Committee (E/ESCWA/2011/C.5/3). The secretariat took this action to enable member countries to consider, at the twenty-seventh session of the Commission, the conclusions of the evaluation report, the secretariat's views on contested items of the evaluation along with key and practical options and possible follow-up actions that may be undertaken by the secretariat, taking into account the operating environment and rules of procedure of ESCWA.
5. The present report covers the progress made in implementing the 15 recommendations and related proposals of the evaluation of the intergovernmental mechanism of the Commission. The secretariat did not fully concur with all of the recommendations and previous ESCWA reports provided guidance and suggestions on those areas.

II. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS AND RELATED PROPOSALS

6. The actionable recommendations of the evaluation, the ensuing response of the secretariat and follow-up actions are as follows:

Recommendation 1: Further strengthening of the current intergovernmental structure

The current intergovernmental structure of the Commission is based on continuous cooperation and liaison with focal points in member countries. Each division at ESCWA coordinates with the member country focal points. For matters of concern to the Commission at large, ESCWA coordinates and follows up directly with the national focal points and through the Technical Committee, which comprises high-level officials designated by the national focal points. Any issue related to the provision of technical advisory services is channelled to ESCWA through the Technical Cooperation Network. In more than half of the member countries, the national focal point is also part of the Technical Cooperation Network. To ensure consistent and integrated roles and responsibilities of the secretariat and member countries and avoid overlap, ESCWA will continue, to the extent possible, to streamline and clarify roles and responsibilities of members of the Technical Committee and members of the Technical Cooperation Network.

Therefore, ESCWA recommends that there be synergies in membership between the Technical Committee and the Technical Cooperation Network.

Recommendation 2: Establish programme activity centres in different member countries to mitigate the negative impact of instability

The volatile political and security situation in the ESCWA region continually raises the risk that the delivery of ESCWA programmes and services will be disrupted. Nevertheless, the secretariat continues to exert every effort to ensure that its intergovernmental processes are upheld, that the potential impact of instability is mitigated and that unforeseen setbacks do not compromise the meetings of intergovernmental bodies through early preparation, business continuity planning, contingency arrangements and ongoing coordination and follow-up with member countries. The secretariat did not support the recommendation to decentralize its work by establishing programme activity centres in different member countries and found that to do so would cause even greater disruption to the work programme. In addition, the small membership of ESCWA does not justify subregional arrangements.

Recommendation 3: Improved cooperation between ESCWA and other United Nations entities

The United Nations is attempting to promote system-wide coherence on a global scale and unite efforts to achieve development goals. As the arm of the United Nations in the Arab region, ESCWA will continue to encourage, advocate and reinforce diverse forms of cooperation with United Nations agencies and other regional and international institutions. On an annual basis, ESCWA organizes the Regional Coordination Mechanism which is an inter-agency meeting that brings together 25 United Nations regional agencies and includes the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Representatives from regional agencies and national offices located in the host country participate regularly as observers in all Commission sessions and in the meetings of the seven specialized intergovernmental bodies. The meetings strengthen coherence between United Nations entities working in the region on issues of mutual concern and ensure that the intergovernmental processes of ESCWA are inclusive, dynamic and constructive.

Recommendations 4 and 5: Improved cooperation between ESCWA and the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council and Arab financial institutions

Several regional entities and intergovernmental organizations such as the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation are regularly invited to participate as observers in the sessions of ESCWA, and ESCWA has memoranda of understanding with many of them. Similarly, with the aim of building resilient partnerships, Arab financial institutions and other funding institutions active in the Arab region, in particular those that already have observer status with the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, are invited to participate in the intergovernmental meetings of ESCWA, as appropriate.

The mutually reinforcing relationship between ESCWA and the League of Arab States stands out as both organizations have been established with clear mandates to support regional cooperation and integration between their respective member countries. Since its establishment in 1974, ESCWA has cooperated extensively with the League of Arab States in promoting the economic and social development of the countries in the region. This cooperation has evolved and scaled up over the years, building on the comparative advantages of each organization and taking into account regional and global developments and the significant changes that have taken place during the past five years. It has also become more diversified both in terms of areas of cooperation and types of activities, and has contributed to promoting synergies and avoiding duplication. The League of Arab States and ESCWA are forging a strategic partnership based on a new framework of cooperation that identifies areas of cooperation, specific plans and projects and aims to establish joint implementation modalities. The new framework of cooperation shall guide future collaboration in a more structured and dynamic manner.

Recommendation 6: Improved implementation of intergovernmental meetings, enhanced negotiation and adoption of programme-related resolutions at all levels and effective management of meetings

The secretariat provides substantive and logistic services for the conduct of sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies. It also reports the outcome of those sessions to the appropriate intergovernmental governing bodies. For example, the outcome of ESCWA sessions is reported to the Economic and Social Council and the outcome of Committee sessions is reported to the secretariat of ESCWA for its consideration, action and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committees.

To this end, the secretariat exerted tremendous effort to improve the effectiveness of intergovernmental meetings through adequate management, collaboration and negotiation with member countries. In particular, the secretariat has adopted programme-related resolutions and focused on lessons learned from previous sessions.

In 2004, the secretariat initiated an evaluation of the conduct of sessions to assess the quality of the services provided to member countries. Since then, ESCWA improved the process of evaluating intergovernmental meetings to more effectively manage their conduct, substance and operation, which culminated in implementing a new evaluation policy based on the core principles of accountability, credibility and continuous learning. Effective management and use of evaluation findings is expected to contribute to programme planning, monitoring and evaluation processes, and ultimately enhance the performance of subprogrammes. The secretariat will continue to pursue such positive initiatives in the hope of further strengthening the entire intergovernmental process.

Recommendations 7 and 11: Establish regular meetings of the Commission bureaus of ESCWA and other regional commissions to promote cooperation and coordination

As the secretariat previously concluded, the existing scope and type of coordination between the five regional commissions, whether directly or through the Regional Commissions New York Office, is both sufficient and effective and covers numerous areas of common global and regional concern. Owing to the impracticability (in terms of timing, composition and resources) of the proposal to establish and institutionalize additional forums to enhance coordination, ESCWA has not supported the recommendation. No further action will be taken in that regard.

Recommendation 8: Ownership of the decision-making process of the intergovernmental mechanism of ESCWA

The secretariat had previously suggested that the scope of functions of the Technical Committee could be expanded to function as a “preparatory committee” for the Commission sessions and convene at the senior officials level to undergo all substantive preparatory work for the sessions and review and transmit decisions taken by the intergovernmental subsidiary committees to the session. Nevertheless, that suggestion was not endorsed by the Technical Committee and, hence, no further action was taken.

Recommendation 9: Increase efforts to expand ESCWA membership to the eight additional countries which are members of the United Nations Development Group and the League of Arab States

The diligent and constructive efforts of member countries and the secretariat to expand its scope of work and membership, in particular to include the countries of the Maghreb, progressed significantly at the twenty-seventh session of the Commission, during which ESCWA adopted resolution 302 (XXVII) of 10 May 2012 concerning the membership request of Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. This resolution was endorsed by the Economic and Social Council at its regular session in July 2012.

The admittance of the three new member countries is an important step in the process of expanding the membership of ESCWA and providing a coherent platform for the integration of the whole Arab region. That expansion offers ESCWA the opportunity to support the economic and social development of the new member countries and to promote regional integration on a wider scale.

Moreover, resolution 302 (XXVII) of 10 May 2012 also requested the secretariat to invite all other Arab countries to become members of ESCWA and to coordinate with the relevant United Nations entities and the League of Arab States the redesignation of ESCWA to become the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for the Arab Region.

Accordingly, ESCWA will pursue its efforts and maintain this momentum towards fostering regional integration and expanding the scope and coverage of work and services to include the entire Arab region, in close coordination with United Nations entities and other regional counterparts such as the League of Arab States.

Recommendation 10: Fundraising

The secretariat does not find that the issue of fundraising is relevant to the scope and requirements of the evaluation exercise. Thus, no further action was taken in that regard.

Nevertheless, the secretariat requests the Technical Committee to take note of the following.

Despite the steady increase in the flow of extrabudgetary funds recorded in general over the years, the amount and level of those resources was minimal and by no means commensurate with the requirements and demands of member countries for policy advice, technical support and capacity-building.

At its twenty-third session, the Commission adopted resolution 263 (XXIII) of 12 May 2004 concerning promoting partnership and resource mobilization, which, inter alia, requested the secretariat to prepare a multi-year funding plan and submit it to the twenty-fourth session of the Commission.

Pursuant to that resolution, the secretariat presented a report to the twenty-fourth session in 2006 on mobilizing financial resources and funding, including a proposed multi-year funding plan. The report reiterated the need for member countries to take active part in the ESCWA Technical Cooperation programme as an expression of their commitment to the development objectives contained in the approved work programmes, thereby furthering regional cooperation and integration. Member countries in particular and donors in general were encouraged to facilitate the flow of extrabudgetary resources to ESCWA through financial and in-kind contributions. The report highlighted funding priorities and also outlined possible funding modalities and alternatives that would allow donors to finance normative and analytical work, or projects and activities at the regional or subregional level.

The twenty-fourth session culminated in the adoption of resolution 275 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 concerning technical cooperation, partnership development and resource mobilization, which approved the multi-year funding plan and requested member countries and donors, within and outside the United Nations system, to contribute through all funding modalities. The secretariat was also requested to prepare a plan of action for partnership development and resource mobilization. In response, the Action Plan for Partnership Development and Resource Mobilization was presented to the twenty-fifth session, which identified an institutional and strategic framework for expanding and improving the financial, technical and institutional resource base of ESCWA, in order to deliver more relevant, effective and timely services to member countries. The plan aimed to strengthen the ability of ESCWA to forge strategic partnerships with key players in the region and more effectively and efficiently raise, manage and disburse funds for operational activities under the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation, the United Nations Development Account and extrabudgetary resources.

Thus, through formal and informal initiatives, reports and plans of action to finance the greatest possible number of activities, ESCWA has exerted continuous and persistent efforts to raise extrabudgetary funds. The Commission has encouraged member countries to make the agreed voluntary contributions in a manner that suits their preferences and development priorities. To expand opportunities to mobilize funds using mechanisms that focus on consolidating cooperation and to forge resilient partnerships with

member countries to implement targeted development projects, ESCWA is proposing to convene a “Partner’s Forum” prior to every Commission session. The forum will propose operational funding measures to be undertaken in cooperation with member countries and partner organizations in the region, in order to achieve tangible results.

On another level, the Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Division is currently undergoing restructuring in response to the findings of an external evaluation of its functions. The division will now consist of two sections: the Strategic Planning and Monitoring Section and Strategic Directions and Partnerships Section. The latter will be responsible for interdisciplinary initiatives, resource mobilization, partnerships and evaluations. The functions of the section will include the following: coordinating strategic and interdisciplinary initiatives; formulating a resource mobilization strategy; providing donor-relations support; supporting partnership development with key regional and international partners; supporting regional-level United Nations coordination, including the Regional Coordination Mechanism and United Nations Development Group; and organizing think tank and Civil Society Advisory Board meetings.

Recommendation 12: Establish a policy manual for the intergovernmental processes to help the secretariat in preparing substantive documentation and assist stakeholders in understanding the respective roles of the intergovernmental mechanism and the secretariat

In addition to the terms of reference and rules of procedure which organize and guide the conduct of all its intergovernmental processes, ESCWA is currently preparing a handbook of protocols and practices or a “*modus operandi*” specifically designed to steer and support country delegates and ESCWA staff in their work prior to and during intergovernmental processes. The handbook will be tailored to the roles of delegates and ESCWA staff members to ensure that both are prepared for their tasks in the meetings of the intergovernmental bodies.

Recommendation 13: Training of representatives of Governments and new ESCWA staff in conference diplomacy should be mandatory

With the aim of upgrading professional and diplomatic skills and enhancing the knowledge of representatives of the diplomatic corps in Beirut, ESCWA is currently arranging for a training on drafting resolutions. The training was initially planned to take place in Beirut in conjunction with the seventh meeting of the Technical Committee to ensure wider participation of Committee members. Although the Technical Committee meeting was not held in Beirut, the training will still be held in Beirut targeting the diplomatic corps and will be specifically tailored to further promoting their contributions to the work of ESCWA.

Recommendation 14: The Executive Secretary should engage the cabinet in a process of “rethinking ESCWA” and “reposition” it as a relevant, useful and effective United Nations presence in the region

The mission of ESCWA is to support its member countries in the achievement of inclusive and sustainable development, support governments in the formulation and effective implementation of socioeconomic and sectoral policies, strategies and programmes, and foster multilateral dialogue and knowledge sharing through providing a platform for reaching common positions among member countries on regional and global challenges.

The year 2011 was by far a year that changed the Arab region, a year of reform and far reaching popular expectations that resulted in the birth of new opportunities and the emergence of new socioeconomic development challenges. In the light of recent changes, the Executive Secretary embarked on an extensive process of internal and external consultation to reposition ESCWA. In particular, to ensure that the priorities and programmes of the Commission effectively address the emerging needs of member countries and the aspirations of their citizens, ESCWA reshaped its vision and focus and revised its strategy and approach to regional development. Thus, it formulated a four-year development vision and articulated a framework for effectively implementing its work around three strategic pillars: (a) equitable growth and sustainability;

(b) regional integration; and (c) good governance and resilience. Those pillars serve as guiding principles in addressing the three cross-cutting issues of partnerships, knowledge management and gender equality.

Recommendation 15: Establish an intergovernmental task force to consider the recommendations of the evaluation report and review ESCWA positioning in the region with a view to relating it in a positive way with principal actors at the regional level

Neither the member countries nor the secretariat supported that recommendation and no action was taken in this regard.

III. CONCLUSION

7. With the aim of concluding the evaluation exercise of the intergovernmental mechanism of ESCWA, the Technical Committee is invited to take note of all measures taken by the secretariat, bearing in mind that all recommendations made by the evaluator have been either effectively implemented, as appropriate, or deemed beyond the scope of the evaluation exercise. From this point on, the evaluation exercise will be considered completed and any additional issue that may be raised by member countries in relation to the intergovernmental structure of ESCWA will be taken up on a case-by-case basis, unless otherwise decided by the Commission.
