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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Technical Committee
Sixth meeting
Beirut, 1-2 December 2011

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
TECHNICAL COMMITTEE AT ITS FIFTH MEETING****Summary**

During the biennium, the Technical Committee typically holds three meetings, or four if agreed upon by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Committee chairperson. The Committee convenes one meeting during years when the session of ESCWA is held, and two meetings during years when the session of ESCWA is not held. The fifth meeting of the Technical Committee was held on 6 and 7 April 2011 at the United Nations House in Beirut, and was attended by representatives of ESCWA member countries. A set of recommendations and proposals were made at the end of the meeting with regard to the agenda items, such as the work of the Technical Committee and ESCWA, and ways to promote it.

The present document reviews actions and activities undertaken by ESCWA to implement the recommendations made by the Technical Committee at its fifth meeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE AT ITS FIFTH MEETING AND ACTIONS TAKEN FOR THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

The Technical Committee held its fifth meeting on 6 and 7 April 2011 at the United Nations House, and issued a set of recommendations and proposals based on the agenda items, such as the work of the Committee and ways to promote it.* This document reviews the recommendations of the Technical Committee and actions taken to implement them.

Organisational and procedural matters

Recommendation (a)

To limit ESCWA membership to Arab countries for the purpose of enhancing cooperation with the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other regional organizations, in accordance with ESCWA procedures.

Action taken

With a view to promote Arab regional integration and align the objectives, activities, and projects of ESCWA with those of the League of Arab States, GCC and other regional organizations, the ambassadors of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia were invited to attend as observers the meeting of the Advisory Committee of diplomatic missions on 3 November 2011, in Beirut. At the meeting, the Commission presented the requirements for requesting ESCWA membership. In addition, the Commission invited the ambassadors of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia to attend the sixth meeting of the Technical Committee as observers. Those steps were taken as part of ESCWA efforts to expand its scope of action, provide services for a larger number of Arab countries, strengthen regional integration, support the countries of the region to adopt successful development policies and strategies, promote interaction between Western Asia and the rest of the world, and unify the positions of Arab countries to better reflect regional priorities.

Recommendation (b)

To maintain the current frequency of the seven committee sessions.

Action taken

The Commission took this recommendation into consideration and maintained the current frequency of meetings held by the seven committees.

Recommendation (c)

To propose new and innovative ideas and develop clear and convincing programmes encouraging donors to provide ESCWA with extrabudgetary funds.

Action taken

Pursuant to this recommendation, the Commission began preparing three flagship publications to be issued in the coming years, namely “Arab Countries 2025”, “Prospects for Arab Regional Integration”, and “Transition to Democracy”. Those publications aroused the interest of a number of funding agencies, such as the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development, the International Centre for Research and Development, the Islamic Development Bank and other Arab agencies.

* ESCWA, Report of the Fifth Meeting of the Technical Committee (E/ESCWA/2011/C.5/8/Report). www.escwa.un.org.

In addition, the Commission developed several projects that caught the attention of funding agencies, and their implementation is expected to begin in 2012. The most important projects are as follows:

- A regional mechanism to better monitor and report water supply and sanitation services in the Arab region (MDG+), for a period of three and a half years. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) gave its preliminary approval to fund this project that serves all member countries of the League of Arab States. ESCWA will implement the project in cooperation with several international, governmental and non-governmental organizations under the auspices of the Arab Ministerial Water Council of the League of Arab States;
- A project on promoting knowledge and preparedness for extreme weather conditions to evaluate the impact of climate change on water resources and socioeconomic vulnerability in the Arab region. This project will be implemented over two years with SIDA funding. It will be implemented by ESCWA in cooperation with the League of Arab States and several international, governmental and non-governmental organizations;
- Several projects aimed at enhancing energy efficiency, adopting voluntary sustainability standards in the agriculture sector, strengthening regional cooperation and achieving integration with the programmes of action funded by the regular budget. Those projects are still under consideration. A further notable project aims to strengthen regional cooperation and capacity-building in energy networks. The commission is seeking funding through the European Union.

Recommendation (d)

To set a timetable for the execution of the demands of member countries approved by ESCWA.

Action taken

The Commission prepared an action plan for member countries in accordance with their requests and priorities for the year 2011. On 7 June 2011, the national focal points of the Technical Cooperation Programme were requested to send an action plan to beneficiaries to receive their feedback. Accordingly, the final version of the plan was adopted, and ESCWA began implementing it within the agreed upon time frame.

Recommendation (e)

To promote coordination and communication between the secretariat and the member countries.

Action taken

As part of the efforts to further coordinate with member countries, and pursuant to this resolution, the Commission has continued to send memoranda or direct correspondence to focal points and members of the Advisory Committee about all ESCWA activities, including intergovernmental meetings, expert meetings, workshops, seminars and so on. The Commission maintains contact with the Technical Committee members and embassy focal points to keep them abreast of activities and trainings organized by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, through direct correspondence and by e-mail.

Recommendation (f)

To convene meetings, whenever needed, between ESCWA and the official focal points in the member countries to organize national workshops in the ESCWA fields of specialization.

Action taken

ESCWA organized national workshops on its areas of competence and technical cooperation in the Sudan and Yemen. A similar workshop is expected to take place in Kuwait, on 20 and 21 December 2011. ESCWA will pursue the organization of national workshops on technical cooperation in Bahrain and Lebanon in the first quarter of 2012.

Technical issues

Recommendation (a)

To ask the concerned parties in the member countries to take part in preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) on regional and international levels and to take ownership of the Arab initiatives adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment.

Action taken

This recommendation is addressed to member countries, to invite them to participate in high-level meetings. In 2011, ESCWA convened several advisory meetings in preparation for the Rio+20 Conference with the participation of representatives of governmental bodies, civil society, chambers of industry and commerce, agricultural cooperatives, non-governmental organizations and experts from the private sector and academia. High-level ministers, general managers and authorities attended the meetings. Below are the most important advisory meetings held by ESCWA to pave the way for the regional preparatory meeting by discussing relevant topics and engaging all stakeholders:

- A meeting on Economic Policies Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy in the Arab Region (Beirut, 20-21 July 2011), held in cooperation with the League of Arab States and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Lebanese Institute of Finance (also known as the Basil Fuleihan Institute for Economy and Finance);
- A workshop on Voluntary Sustainability Standards (Beirut, 27 September 2011), organized by ESCWA in cooperation with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), under the auspices of the Lebanese Minister for Agriculture;
- A conference on Green Industries for Economic and Social Development in Arab countries (Beirut, 28-29 September 2011), organized by ESCWA in cooperation with the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme/Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA), GIZ, and the League of Arab States;
- A regional workshop on the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 3-5 October 2011), held under the auspices of Meteorology and Environmental Protection Administration of Saudi Arabia, in cooperation with the League of Arab States and UNEP.

ESCWA also provided technical and organizational support in preparation for the following conferences:

- Regional Multi-Stakeholder Consultation for Civil Society Organizations in the Arab Region (Beirut, 12-13 October 2011). Participants agreed upon a plan of action to be presented by civil society representatives to the Rio+20 Preparatory Committee and to the Conference. This

meeting was held with the support of SIDA, Diakonia (a Swedish organization for human rights), UNEP/ROWA and the League of Arab States;

- Regional Training Workshop for Major Groups (Cairo, 15 October 2011). The Rio+20 secretariat organized this workshop as part of its efforts to raise awareness about the conference topics, and to build the capacity of major groups and other stakeholders.

Recommendation (b)

To ask the secretariat to prepare a report on the progress achieved in preparation for the Rio+20 Conference and to submit it to the Technical Committee during its sixth meeting. The report should include a proposal for a draft resolution on the green economy in the Arab region to be adopted at the twenty-seventh ESCWA session.

Action taken

Following the fifth meeting of the Technical Committee, ESCWA continued to play a key role in the Arab regional preparations for the Rio+20 Conference, in cooperation with other regional stakeholders, namely the League of Arab States and UNEP/ROWA. Preparatory activities are aimed to strengthen coordination with public and private stakeholders and civil society organizations, to reach a clear and coherent Arab position regarding the topics and outcome of Rio+20.

The Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for Rio+20 (Cairo, 16-17 October 2011) allowed for an extensive debate to reach an Arab consensus on some items of the Rio+20 agenda. The meeting recommendations were submitted to the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region. The Committee approved and submitted those recommendations to the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, which will hold its twenty-third session in December 2011. ESCWA prepared the report of the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting, which included the following major recommendations:

- To consider the green economy as a tool to achieve sustainable development and not as a substitute for it; to adopt suitable policies to ensure a gradual transition to the green economy in compliance with national economic and social specificities; and to highlight the importance of evaluating opportunities, challenges and ways to achieve the green economy including funding, transfer and national adaptation of the right technology, capacity-building and technical support for developing countries;
- To recognize that the institutional framework of sustainable development is not an objective *per se*, as it depends on resolutions to be agreed upon at Rio+20 in June 2012. The framework should incorporate the three dimensions of sustainable development without imposing any additional charges, trade barriers, or conditions on developing countries. Therefore, the existing international institutional framework should be strengthened by dealing with its gaps; a new institutional framework should be developed at the national and regional levels; the existing regional institutional structures of sustainable development should be promoted, including such regional committees and offices as ESCWA and UNEP;
- To evaluate the progress achieved and gaps that remain in the implementation of key conference outcomes related to sustainable development. Arab countries made progress in several areas of sustainable development, such as education and health. However, they are still facing challenges in eradicating poverty, generating employment opportunities, upholding the right to development, promoting social cohesion and women's rights, ensuring access to information, meeting the needs of youth, liberalizing trade, transferring technology and adapting it nationally, developing funding mechanisms and building the capacity for sustainable development. One major reason for the

failure to achieve sustainable development is that developed countries are not fulfilling their commitments towards developing countries in accordance with the resolutions of previous international conferences. Conflicts, occupations and aggressions are major obstacles to sustainable development, and special assistance should be provided for populations living under such conditions. Developed countries should fulfil their obligations towards developing countries by providing adequate funding, transferring the right technology and building the capacity to achieve sustainable development;

- To address emerging challenges that includes climate change, the impact of the financial crisis on developing countries and unprecedented demographic growth and urbanization. Those challenges draw the attention of countries to social issues and development priorities and the need to achieve social justice, create new employment opportunities and reduce what is referred to as the “brain drain” and youth migration.

Recommendation (c)

To ask the member countries to forward their remarks about the programme of work for the biennium 2012-2013 within three weeks from this date (7 April 2011) and to ask the secretariat to make the appropriate amendments and to return the final version to the member countries.

Action taken

The recommendation was applied, and no changes were introduced to the programme of action for the biennium 2012-2013.
