

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Technical Committee
Fourth meeting
Beirut, 26-27 December 2010

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

**ONGOING PREPARATIONS FOR THE TWENTY-SIXTH
MINISTERIAL SESSION OF ESCWA****I. DATE AND VENUE OF THE TWENTY SIXTH MINISTERIAL SESSION**

1. Rule 1, paragraph (a) of the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia provides that sessions of the Commission shall be held normally every other year, at a time to be determined by the members of the Commission. In consideration of this provision, the secretariat proposes holding the twenty-sixth ministerial session of the Commission in Beirut on 17-20 May 2010, unless the secretariat receives a proposal from a member country to host the session. The Technical Committee is invited to consider and advise on this proposal.

II. THEMES OF THE TWENTY-SIXTH MINISTERIAL SESSION

2. The secretariat proposes the following two themes:

A. THE ROLE OF STATISTICAL INDICATORS IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT

3. Recent crises (including the international financial crisis and the food and fuel crises), have highlighted a gap between the point at which a crisis starts to impact upon vulnerable groups and the creation of an integrated analytical database available to assist decision makers in taking informed decisions and implementing appropriate measures. There is therefore a clear need for an efficient system of information and data transfer and analysis within a timeframe which is as close as possible to the "real time" unrolling of any event or development. Such data and information must stem from reliable sources and cover the full scope of weakness, vulnerability and exposure to the effects of the crisis in such a way as to enable the international community to respond in an appropriate, efficient and timely manner.

4. Recent experience has reaffirmed the need for real time evidence and data on how an international crisis affects the poorest and most vulnerable in society. Future statistics and economic analysis should be capable of anticipating any deterioration or development affecting the status of the poorest and most vulnerable social classes globally, thus raising the alarm so that any response will be appropriate and timely. Decision makers therefore need to be provided with sufficient information and analysis in real time so that

crisis-related decisions can take into consideration the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable people and countries. In the past, the focus has been oriented towards macroeconomic indicators, but in the future, the voice of the most vulnerable groups in society must be heard by global decision makers.

5. It is imperative that official statistics provide in-depth indicators on scientific and academic concepts, in order to produce information that can be applied as simply and as quickly as possible. The Global Impact and Vulnerability Alert System (GIVAS) initiative assists in the achievement of that target, proposing the adoption of three levels of statistical indicators for informed policymaking. Those indicators, which are of varying levels of depth, recurrence and availability, are as follows:

(a) *Context indicators*. These are slowly-collected indicators which add an additional level of structural analysis to those collected rapidly;

(b) *High frequency indicators*. These indicators are collected rapidly, enabling the system to be updated immediately with indications on poverty and vulnerability in geographical locations and non-geographical fields under observation in specific countries. Such data will constitute the core of the alert system and provide quantitative and qualitative evidence on the impact of external shocks on the weakest groups in society in as close to real time as possible;

(c) *Pulse indicators*. These are the most sensitive crisis indicators, producing early signs which can help to anticipate a major effect in a particular field or country. Such indicators are easily collectable at reasonable cost and can therefore be collected in periodical, recurrent and rapid patterns.

B. EMPOWERING YOUTH AND INTEGRATING YOUNG PEOPLE INTO SOCIETY

6. In 1995, the United Nations adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (WPAY). This programme provides guidelines for national action and international support to improve the status of youth and recommends the adoption of policies and procedures related to the development of young people, enhancing their personal capacities and providing them with appropriate opportunities. The programme constitutes an unprecedented initiative by the international community as an acknowledgment of the value of young people, who are not only a vital human resource, but also an essential factor for change and socio-economic development. The programme also provides a framework for decision makers when drawing up policies aimed at youth and defining priorities to ensure sufficient opportunities for young people of both sexes to fulfil their potential, both as individuals and as active partners in the development process. Such priorities help in empowering young people, mitigating social exclusion by harnessing their dynamism. The programme includes fifteen priorities of importance to youth, which were drawn up with the direct participation of young people. These are education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure activities, girls and young women, participation, globalization, information and communications technologies, HIV/AIDS, youth and conflict, and intergenerational relations. In a report submitted to the sixty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Secretary-General defined a broad set of indicators measuring and evaluating the progress made towards achieving the goals related to monitoring the development of youth within the framework of the fifteen priorities, thereby separating those priorities from their previous context within the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and indicators. It is anticipated that the set of standard indicators, with defined goals and a specific time frame, will facilitate the setting of a national agenda for youth development and provide better opportunities to evaluate progress made at the national level.

7. Against this backdrop, ESCWA has abandoned the traditional approach based on developing unsustainable programmes for youth in favour of one that adopts integrated national policies that target youth as a distinct socio-demographic category with specific needs and challenges. A number of steps have been taken to encourage member countries to commit to the implementation of WPAY. These include the following:

- (a) Encouraging member country Governments to develop comprehensive or combined policies for youth within the framework of priorities defined by WPAY;
- (b) Evaluating implementation on a regular basis by providing support to member countries in preparing national reports, defining youth issues and monitoring their evolution within the context of WPAY priorities;
- (c) Organizing, within the limits of available resources, regional consultations with member countries on WPAY implementation;
- (d) Carrying out a regional survey to identify the extent to which member countries are responding to WPAY and highlighting any obstacles hindering implementation;
- (e) Encouraging member country Governments to introduce national policies on youth by developing institutional capacity and helping to define appropriate mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of such policies. In support of member countries in this regard, ESCWA has prepared a project to enhance national capacity in formulating policies and national action plans for youth.

C. MOBILIZING FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO ACCELERATE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

8. Accelerating socio-economic development requires both funds and resources. Higher and more sustainable growth in output can only be achieved when both public and private investment activities are enhanced. Expanding and upgrading social provision requires the allocation of higher levels of funding from the public sector.
9. Primary responsibility for achieving growth and equitable development lies with developing countries themselves. This responsibility includes creating the conditions necessary to secure the financial resources that are needed for investment. Actions by domestic policymakers largely determine the state of governance, macroeconomic and microeconomic policies, public finances, the state of the financial system and other basic elements of the economic environment of a country.
10. While countries must harness their domestic assets effectively, several Arab countries, in particular those categorized as least developed, require funds in excess of those available to their respective Governments. Governments must therefore create an enabling environment in which they can operate freely and adopt the policies necessary to ensure that financial resources are available. Furthermore, regional frameworks and structures that foster intraregional cooperation must be promoted and utilized in order to ensure a continuously expanding intraregional flow of public and private funds and resources to countries that have serious financial gaps.
11. Steps must be taken to augment the flow of resources to the developing world and ensure that developing countries receive the financial resources they need. The debate will revolve around such issues as the kind of policies that should be adopted, the type of help from the industrialized world that will be of greatest use to developing countries and whether international and regional institutions are fulfilling their role. By examining the development resources available from all sources, what really matters and what really works can be identified. However, the approach to mobilizing the resources needed for development must reflect current global financial realities, while focusing on the joint national and regional efforts that are required.
12. It is important for countries that have had successful development experience to contribute to policy formulation in developing countries and demonstrate that development can be achieved. The central challenge to increasing the volume and effectiveness of development financing is to create a stable foundation to mobilize, attract and use good resources, beginning with those available within developing countries.

III. PROVISIONAL AGENDA

1. Opening of the twenty-sixth session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
4. Consideration of requests by States Members of the United Nations and its specialized agencies that are not members of ESCWA to participate as observers at the twenty-sixth session of the Commission.
5. Public policy issues in the ESCWA region.
6. Report of the Executive Secretary on the activities of the Commission:
 - (a) Programme performance report for the biennium 2007-2008;
 - (b) Follow-up to implementation of the resolutions adopted by the Commission at its twenty-fifth session;
 - (c) Technical cooperation programme and regional consultative services;
 - (d) Financial status of the Commission;
 - (e) Reports of ESCWA subsidiary bodies on their sessions.
7. Management issues:
 - (a) Streamlining the work of the Commission;
 - (b) Results of the evaluation of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission;
 - (c) Proposed amendments to the work programme for the biennium 2010-2011;
 - (d) Draft strategic framework for the biennium 2012-2013.
8. Date and venue of the twenty-seventh session of the Commission.
9. Other matters.
10. Adoption of the report of the Commission on its twenty-sixth session.
13. The secretariat proposes discussion of the following topics in round tables and invites member countries to adopt one of the topics or suggest others that they consider to be of central importance to their countries. The suggested topics for discussion are as follows:

A. FOOD SECURITY: ADEQUATE POLICIES AND MITIGATION MEASURES

14. With heavy reliance on food imports, increasing food prices and relatively limited coordination between member countries towards developing sustainable strategies to ensure that national and regional food needs are met, food insecurity is one of the most important issues affecting socio-economic development in the ESCWA region. Indeed, the region is currently experiencing both food insecurity and a food crisis. A food crisis is normally viewed from a supply side perspective and is defined as deterioration in agricultural capacity resulting from mismanagement, climate change, water scarcity, natural disasters or armed conflict. Food insecurity, by contrast, is viewed from the demand side. People may be food insecure in

the absence of a food crisis, food secure despite a food crisis, or food insecure because of a food crisis. Such distinctions are important for the creation of appropriate policies and mitigation measures. For example, the current focus on the food crisis has fuelled the widespread view that climate change and biofuel are major drivers of food insecurity, yet that is only part of the picture. It is indisputable that both are serious problems, but population growth is likely to prove a serious contributing factor to food insecurity and one worthy of closer examination. With population growth rates running at some three per cent, the population will double approximately every 23 years. Unless substantial investment is made in agricultural technology, seeds, storage capacity, the expansion of arable land and sound macroeconomic management, the pressure on food security is bound to increase significantly. To overcome the challenges associated with food security, a concerted regional approach is required that builds on the various complementary characteristics of ESCWA member countries.

B. CLIMATE CHANGE AND GENDER

15. Climate change is one of the main challenges faced by the world today. In the absence of efficient strategies to mitigate this phenomenon, the impact of climate change affects agriculture, thus putting food security at risk, and leads to an increase in sea water levels, growing soil erosion in coastal areas, an increase in natural catastrophes, extinction of species, spread of insect-borne disease, and variable rainfall patterns. Climate change is an environmental problem with both political and developmental constituents, yet the impact of climate change is not restricted to material and economic damage (in the case of natural catastrophes), but includes social and cultural effects, which threaten environmental patterns in many regions of the world. Developing countries are disproportionately affected, since the effect on the poor is invariably more extensive, leading to even greater inequities in health, the availability of food, clean water and other resources.

16. Following the tenth session of the Conference of Parties in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Buenos Aires, 14 December 2004) (COP10), gender was mainstreamed in climate change programmes. Climate change is not an equitable process, as women are more susceptible to harm from the impact of change, since they form the majority of the poor and are primarily dependent on endangered natural resources for their survival and that of their families. In addition, disparities in ownership rights and access to information, and gender discrepancies in cultural, social and economic roles, combine to produce a difference in the impact of climate change on men and women.

17. Studies have shown that men and women experience climate change differently in terms of adaptation, response, vulnerability and ability to mitigate its effects. The effects of climate change on the gender balance are not only limited to direct impact, but also include changes in gender relationships. Consolidating traditional roles prevents changes that would empower women to assume other roles. In times of crisis and environmental degradation, women primarily assume a caring role, which not only aggravates their burdens, but also slows their freedom of movement.

18. Given the failure of most climate change policies and programmes to take gender into account, the integration of a gender perspective into policies and tools for mitigating the effects of climate change is clearly necessary. ESCWA therefore seeks to define and discuss a number of matters relating to this issue. These include the following: (a) defining patterns of use for gender-based resources; (b) studying gender-based effects of climate change in the ESCWA region; (c) integrating gender issues into the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change in the ESCWA region; (d) integrating a gender perspective into decision-making in the field of climate change; (e) defining the capacity of women to deal with climate change in the ESCWA region; and (f) studying the direct impact of climate change in the ESCWA region from a gender perspective.

C. HUMAN AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING

19. Capacity development, and more particularly human and institutional capacity development, has proved to be a central element of all peacebuilding efforts, through the promotion of good governance

principles and practice within public sector institutions, both at the local and central levels. This approach is based on the rationale that advancing governance within the public sector, or public governance, contributes to ensuring adequate provision of essential services, thus directly improving the living standards and livelihoods of all citizens and reducing the potential for conflict and instability.

20. It is generally recognized that effective public governance ensures the efficient, transparent and accountable provision of services and management of public resources, which in turn offers a solid basis for peace and stability. There is thus a clear need to use and build upon existing local capacity with a view to improving and enhancing the capacity of the State to address development challenges and achieve the MDGs. Member countries should identify and address capacity gaps within their public institutions in order to draw up strategies to improve the provision of essential services and improve the livelihood of their people.
