

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

Technical Committee
Fourth meeting
Beirut, 26-27 January 2010

Item 8 (a) of the provisional agenda

**PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN IMPLEMENTING ACTIVITIES OF THE SECRETARIAT
ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT SINCE JULY 2009****Summary**

Under its programme of work, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) implemented the following activities since the third meeting of the Technical Committee (Beirut, 21-22 July, 2009):

- (a) The Fourth Session of the Committee on Women (Beirut, 21-23 October 2009);
- (b) The Seventh Session of the Committee on Social Development (Beirut, 26-27 October 2009);
- (c) The Arab Forum on Social Policy (Beirut, 28-29 October 2009);
- (d) The Thirteenth Regional Coordination Mechanism Meeting (Beirut, 3-4 November 2009);
- (e) Expert Group Meeting on Moving the Development Agenda Forward: Opportunities and Potential Gains (Beirut, 5-6 November 2009).

This document presents information on the implementation of these activities, presented to the Technical Committee for discussion and making proposals.

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I. THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN

1. The Committee on Women held its fourth session from 21 to 23 October 2009, pursuant to resolution 240 (d-22) of 17 April 2003 of ESCWA, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in its resolution 9/2003 of 18 July 2004, on the establishment of a committee on women within ESCWA.

2. The meeting was attended by representatives from Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Representatives from Tunisia and Djibouti attended as observers. Representatives of the councils, bodies and national committees and official departments dealing in women's affairs from Arab countries also attended. After the opening session, the President and members of the Conference Service Bureau were elected from among the representatives of the participating countries, the rules of procedure and agenda of the conference were adopted, and members of the Credentials Committee were elected. Six general sessions were held to discuss the topics on the agenda. The following paragraphs present the work of the session, the most important topics addressed, and the recommendations made.

A. TOPICS DISCUSSED

3. The work of the Committee on Women at its fourth session was divided into three main themes. Within the context of the first theme, participants discussed the Consolidated Arab Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action: Beijing + 15; key obstacles and challenges to and future prospects for full implementation of Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly were identified. Within the context of the second theme, participants discussed promotion of economic participation of Arab women and the obstacles encountered by women in the economic field, with a view to removing such obstacles and raising the level of participation of women in economic activity. The third theme focused on following up implementation of the recommendations of the third session of the Committee on Women, reviewing the report of the Executive Secretary on the progress made in the area of women advancement since the third session, and the proposed programme of work for the 2010-2011 biennium in the field of advancement of women.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

4. The Committee on Women approved a draft resolution on following up the implementation of the Platform for Action in the Arab region after fifteen years: Beijing + 15, and considered this resolution a recommendation by the Committee at its fourth session.¹ The Committee also adopted the Consolidated Arab Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action: Beijing + 15 issued by ESCWA and the League of Arab States. The meeting concluded with a set of recommendations presented to member countries, including emphasis on importance of political will in supporting and promoting gender equality, equity, and justness; gender mainstreaming in development policies, strategies and programmes; and giving priority to advancement of women at both the national and regional levels. The Committee requested the Executive Secretary of ESCWA to support the Centre for Women with additional human 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 empowerment of women.

II. THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

5. The Committee on Social Development held its seventh session at the United Nations House in Beirut on 26 and 27 October 2009. The following paragraphs present the topics discussed and the recommendations made.

¹ ESCWA, Report of the Committee on Women at its fourth session (E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/IG.1/7).

A. TOPICS DISCUSSED

6. The agenda of the Committee on Social Development consisted of a number of priority topics and items, including implemented programmes and activities in the field of social development since the sixth session of the Committee; reports on social-development priority issues, including social integration, participatory social development and youth in the framework of development policies; and the proposed programme of work for the 2010-2011 biennium in the field of social development.

7. The agenda also included items on the opening of the meeting, election of officers, adoption of agenda, setting the date and venue of the eighth session of the Committee on Social Development, and adoption of the report of the seventh session of the Committee.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

8. The Committee on Social Development adopted a set of recommendations² calling for the development of consultation mechanisms on integrated social policy, promoting utilization of ESCWA programmes for institutional and individual capacity building in participatory development, and strengthening national capacities in the formulation and monitoring of national policies targeting youth. The recommendations also called on member countries to prepare periodic reports on priority social issues to be presented to the Committee on Social Development in order to brief it on the roles of social actors and the capabilities to strengthen such roles, as well as exchange expertise and experiences on the results achieved.

III. THE ARAB FORUM ON SOCIAL POLICY

9. Within the context of the efforts aimed at increasing awareness of and concern for issues of integrated social policy and social protection among member countries, ESCWA held, in collaboration with the Community Development Authority (CDA) – Government of Dubai, the Arab Forum on Social Policy in United Nations House in Beirut, on 28 and 29 October 2009.³ The forum, mandated by ESCWA member countries under Resolution 277 (d-24),⁴ was attended by more than sixty participants representing government agencies and United Nations organizations, together with experts from civil society and academia at the regional and international levels. The objective of the forum was primarily to enhance national capacity for integrating social priorities in public policies, and to launch an ongoing mechanism for dialogue on social-policy and human-development issues.

A. TOPICS DISCUSSED

10. Work of the Forum was divided to five meetings structured along two main, interrelated and complementary themes. Within the context of the first theme, which addressed social policy planning and formulation, international, regional and local organizations and governments of member countries reviewed their experiences in developing frameworks and mechanisms for integrated social policy and its implementation, the best means for integrating social issues into effective economic and social policies, and the lessons drawn from some regional and global experiences. Within the context of the second theme, presentations and discussions addressed social protection, focusing on experiences of the participants in social insurance and social assistance, as well as in targeting different segments of society and restructuring social-protection systems. Interventions within the context of this theme also addressed promotion in the region of social-protection programmes characterized by respect for rights and provision of good services and social benefits to beneficiaries.

² ESCWA, Report of the Committee on Social Development at its seventh session (E/ESCWA/SDD/2009/IG.1/6).

³ ESCWA, Social development Division, Arab Forum on Social Policy, Information note (ESCWA/SDD/2009/WG.2/INF.10).

⁴ ESCWA, resolution 277 (d-24), Social Development Policies, 11 May 2006, paragraph 4.

11. Alongside work on agenda items, the Forum organized a knowledge fair; thus providing participants with an opportunity for presenting their work on social policy or social protection and to browse information and material such as publications, brochures, posters, or audio-visual displays.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

12. The meeting called on governments to work towards: integration of social objectives into national economic plans, while seeking to develop practical and coherent implementation plans that take into consideration cultural sensitivities; promotion of the participatory approach to planning and formulation of social policy; development of horizontal and institutional mechanisms for the promotion of integrated social policy; and adoption of comprehensive approaches to social services.

13. The meeting called on ESCWA to continue to promote moving away from a neoliberal market economy towards integrating citizen rights, equity and social justice within economic and social development plans; and to provide advice on development of plans and mechanisms for implementation of social-development strategies based on social-development indicators. The meeting requested looking into establishment of a database of social indicators, incorporating reliable easy-to-use information, and integration of the appropriate indicators in national statistics. It also requested establishment of a regional network of policymakers and researchers to build research capacity and form a collective institutional memory in the area of social policy and social protection, thereby providing an important platform for learning and knowledge sharing.

IV. THE THIRTEENTH REGIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM MEETING

14. The Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) held a joint meeting with the Regional Directors' Team (RDT) at United Nations house in Beirut from 2 to 4 November 2009. The meeting was chaired by Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, and attended by directors and officials of regional United Nations agencies, regional organizations, the League of Arab States and the Lebanese Minister of Education and Higher Education, Ms. Bahiya Hariri.

15. The Regional Coordination Mechanism aims to improve coordination among the regional bodies of the United Nations, within the context of addressing a range of priority areas agreed upon by participations. The following paragraphs present the topics discussed and the main recommendations made.⁵

A. TOPICS DISCUSSED

16. The agenda consisted of three thematic sessions:

(a) Regional responses to global crises, during which coordinated regional responses to the recent crises were assessed;

(b) Strategic regional challenges and priorities, focusing on priority areas for RCM and RDT and raising pressing issues;

(c) Human rights in the Arab world; new developments and old challenges, adoption of the Arab Human Rights Charter, and election of the Arab Committee on Human Rights.

17. The participants discussed potential challenges to coordination at the regional level and specific areas within the work of agencies. They called for the identification of common priority areas for RCM and RDT that could benefit most from coordinating the efforts of these two teams at the regional level.

⁵ ESCWA, Report of the Regional Coordination Mechanism meeting (E/ESCWA/OES/2009/RCM.13).

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

18. The meeting adopted recommendations calling for coordination of work between RCM and RDT on the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), food security, climate change, and youth. It also called for coordinating work in these areas horizontally to serve the image of the United Nations and build statistical capacity. The conferees also called for the establishment of an advisory group of civil society from within the ESCWA region, for supporting governments in the preparation of reports on international declarations and their implementation, and for promoting and mainstreaming the human-rights approach in the work of United Nations agencies.

V. EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON MOVING THE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA FORWARD: OPPORTUNITIES AND POTENTIAL GAINS

19. An expert group meeting on Moving the Development Agenda Forward: Opportunities and Potential Gains was held in Beirut on 5 and 6 November 2009. The following paragraphs present the topics discussed and the main recommendations made.⁶

A. TOPICS DISCUSSED

20. The meeting was held to discuss key global and regional development issues that directly affect the future of the region. Studies presented to the meeting and subsequent discussions focused on three main themes. Within the context of the first theme, which addressed climate change and sustainable management of natural resources, participants focused on integrated management of water resources, adaptation to climate change, and strengthening the role of the energy sector in achieving sustainable development and mitigating effects of climate change. The second theme dealt with youth and opportunities for investment and employment, focusing on the growing youth population, the demographic opportunity, and investment in the development of youth skills and youth employment. Within the context of the third theme, discussion centred on regional integration for the purposes of social and economic development, addressing building partnerships, implementation of international agreements concluded under the auspices of ESCWA, and promotion of social and economic development in ESCWA member countries through cooperation and regional integration. In addition to these important regional and global issues, the participants discussed the development priorities of the region that could be focussed upon during the 2012-2013 biennium.

21. The meeting comprised seven sessions, each addressing a special topic within the above-mentioned themes. At each session, a leading expert presented a discussion paper, another commented on the paper, and an open debate by participants followed.

22. The meeting brought together a selection of regional and international specialists with high level of expertise in various fields of economic and social development, leading academics, representatives of regional and international organizations, think-tanks institutions, research centres, non-governmental organizations, and representatives of civil society and the private sector.

23. The results of the dialogue will help in setting priorities and key issues of concern to member countries and main issues on the agenda of ESCWA, and in directing the activities and programmes of ESCWA for the 2012-2013 biennium.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

24. The meeting concluded with a set of recommendations on climate change, sustainable management of natural resources, youth and opportunities for investment and employment, and regional integration for

⁶ ESCWA, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. Expert Group Meeting on Moving the Development Agenda Forward: Opportunities and Potential Gains, Beirut, 5-6 November 2009 (E/ESCWA/OES/2009/WG.1/3).

economic and social development. Furthermore, the participants adopted a set of proposals for the future, calling for strengthening the communication strategy with member countries in order to facilitate data exchange and dissemination of information on ESCWA and its activities; reconsideration of the approach to statistical work adopted by ESCWA; and cooperation with member countries to face obstacles and challenges by strengthening their sense of genuine participation in projects, benefiting from best practices and preparation of studies to diagnose problems and propose practical solutions. The participants requested that ESCWA issues an Arab annual report that focuses in each issue on a specific topic of concern to the area and its countries.
