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Technical cooperation activities

Summary

The present document provides an overview of technical cooperation activities implemented by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in the field of technology for development under the Statistics, Information Society and Technology Cluster since the second session of the Committee on Technology for Development, held in Beirut on 20 and 21 March 2019. Those activities were funded by the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation, the United Nations Development Account and extrabudgetary resources.

The present document focuses on examples of activities that highlight the interlinkages between the three functions of ESCWA as a research institution that produces studies aimed at supporting reforms at the public policy level, a house of expertise that provides technical guidance to policymakers, and a regional forum for consensus-building between member States on challenges they face and ways to overcome them. The present document also contains proposals on broadening the scope of technical cooperation activities undertaken by ESCWA in the field of technology for development.

The Committee on Technology for Development is invited to take note of implemented technical cooperation activities and the proposed areas of technical cooperation, and to comment thereon.

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Introduction

1.   The Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation (RPTC) is a fundamental tool for implementing the programme of work of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). Technical cooperation projects are designed in accordance with member States' requests so as to meet their needs. ESCWA technical cooperation is part of broader efforts aimed at achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. RPTC has continued providing technical support to the Arab region despite the worldwide health crisis owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, while adapting service delivery mechanisms and fields in line with member States' requirements to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

2.   Technical cooperation services provided by ESCWA are divided into the following three categories: advisory services to support countries in issues related to public policy; capacity-building workshops, study tours and fellowships; and pilot field projects in ESCWA specializations that are expected to be developed into larger projects with funding from extrabudgetary sources provided by donors. Technical advisory services complement other dimensions of support provided by the secretariat to member States, including generating knowledge on development challenges and building consensus to face them, then tackling them by providing direct support to member States.

3.   The ESCWA secretariat's work in the field of technology for development and regional integration covers digital technology and services, innovation, technology transfer and new technologies. The present document sets out the technical cooperation activities undertaken by ESCWA since the second session of the Committee on Technology for Development, held in Beirut on 20 and 21 March 2019, including advisory services, workshops and capacity-building activities. The present document also provides proposals for future technical cooperation activities in the field of technology for development.

I. Overview

4.   The ESCWA secretariat has provided several advisory services and held workshops in the field of technology for development, based on requests from member States, under RPTC and the United Nations Development Account.

5.   ESCWA has provided a total of 44 activities to 11 Arab countries since the second session of the Committee on Technology for Development, including 21 advisory services and 13 national workshops under RPTC,[*] and six advisory services and four workshops under the United Nations Development Account.

A. Advisory services

6.   Table 1 sets out the advisory services under RPTC undertaken by the ESCWA secretariat in the field of technology for development, categorized by recipient country. Table 2 sets out the advisory services provided through programmes funded by the Development Account. These services covered the following topics: enhancing the digital technology environment, proposing national policies to promote open government, using new technology, and submitting proposals to promote digital transformation and digitization. Some activities also included submitting proposals to strengthen national innovation systems, and suggested methods for developing digital platforms and making use of big data and measurement indicators.

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[*]   From 1 April 2019 to 30 November 2020.

Table 1. Advisory services under RPTC

Country	Number of advisory services	Area
Jordan	8	• Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship: review of a draft personal data law (2019); • Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship: review of cyber legislation with a focus on electronic applications (2019); • Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship: artificial intelligence policy proposal (2020); • Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship: Government cloud computing policy proposal (2020); • National Aid Fund: proposal to digitize the physical rehabilitation programme and the immediate aid programme (2020); • Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship: analysis of the performance of Jordan in the 2020 E-Government Development Index (2020); • Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship: proposed legal framework for e-participation (2020); • Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship: proposed implementation regulations for a personal data protection law (expected to be completed in 2021).
Syrian Arab Republic	4	• Ministry of Communications and Technology: proposed digital transformation strategy (2019); • Higher Commission for Scientific Research: status of the technology transfer and innovation system (2019); • Higher Commission for Scientific Research: proposed structure for a technology transfer system (2020); • Higher Commission for Scientific Research: comprehensive report on the technology transfer system (2020).
Sudan	1	• National Software Centre: proposed bylaws for the software incubator (Nabta) (2020).
Iraq	1	• Communications and Media Commission: cybersecurity policy review (2020).
State of Palestine	4	• Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology: proposed digital transformation strategy (2019); • Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology: review of the Government's cloud computing policy (2019); • Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology: review of the Internet of Things policy (2020); • Ministry of Communications and Information Technology: national readiness assessment for big data (2020).
Kuwait	1	• Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research: proposal to establish a technology business incubator (2020).
Lebanon	2	• Ministry of State for Investment and Information Technology: artificial intelligence strategy proposal (2020); • Lebanese Armed Forces: supporting the development of a national aid coordination platform (expected to be completed in 2021).
Total	21	

Table 2. Advisory services under the Development Account

Country	Number of advisory services	Area	Project name
Jordan	1	• Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship: Review of the open data policy of Jordan.	• Institutional development to enhance the provision of government services to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Western Asia (Project 1617AE).
Syrian Arab Republic	1	• Ministry of Communications and Technology: developing an action plan to launch a pilot project on open data.	• Institutional development to enhance the provision of government services to achieve the SDGs in Western Asia (Project 1617AE).
State of Palestine	2	• Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology: reviewing the draft open data strategy in the State of Palestine; • Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology: reviewing a report on government agencies' readiness to move towards open data.	• Institutional development to enhance the provision of government services to achieve the SDGs in Western Asia (Project 1617AE).
Lebanon	2	• Central Administration of Statistics: leveraging behavioural and humanitarian data sources to analyse development challenges faced by Syrian refugees and host communities in Lebanon (2020); • Central Administration of Statistics: making use of big data sources to evaluate and analyse policies in times of crisis (expected to be completed in 2021).	• Addressing the challenges of forcibly displaced persons and host communities in the Arab region (Project 1819AS).
Total	6		

B. Workshops and capacity-building activities

7.   Table 3 sets out national workshops implemented under RPTC and the areas they focused on. In total, 13 workshops were implemented since the second session of the Committee on Technology for Development. Table 4 sets out the workshops organized under programmes funded by the Development Account, totalling workshops. These workshops covered the following topics: digital transformation, new technology, national innovation systems and technology transfer, and measurement indicators.

Table 3. National workshops under RPTC

Country	Number of workshops	Area
Syrian Arab Republic	4	• Ministry of Communications and Technology: proposal for a digital transformation strategy (Damascus, 8 July 2019); • Higher Commission for Scientific Research: status of the technology transfer and innovation system (Damascus, 21 August 2019); • Higher Commission for Scientific Research: legal framework and proposed structure for an office for technology transfer (Damascus, 12 February 2020);

Country	Number of workshops	Area
		• Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour: technology for persons with disabilities (Damascus, 29 January 2020).
Sudan	1	• National Information Centre: digital technology (Khartoum, 27-28 November 2019).
Iraq	1	• Communications and Media Commission: digital transformation strategies (Baghdad, 15-16 April 2019).
Qatar	2	• Ministry of Transport and Communications: digital transformation strategies (Doha, 30 October 1 November 2019); • Ministry of Transport and Communications: blockchain technology (Doha, February 26-27, 2020).
Lebanon	1	• Ministry of Labour: digital technology and employment (Beirut, 14-16 October 2020).
Egypt	1	• Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, in collaboration with the Regional Office of the United Nations Development Programme: digital transformation strategies (Cairo, 20-21 November 2019).
Morocco	1	• Agency for Digital Development: digital transformation strategies (Rabat, 12-13 December 2019).
Mauritania	2	• Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Information and Communication Technologies: open data policies (Nouakchott, 9 April 2019); • Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Information and Communication Technologies: policies for the internet of things and smart cities (Nouakchott, 10 April 2019).
Total	13	

Table 4. National workshops under the Development Account

Country	Number of workshops	Area
Jordan	1	• Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship - Ministry of Planning: workshop on open government and open data (Amman, 24-25 March 2019).
Syrian Arab Republic	2	• Ministry of Communications and Technology: workshop on open government and open data (Damascus, 9 July 2019); • Ministry of Communications and Technology: technical training workshop on open data (Damascus, 24-25 November 2019).
State of Palestine	1	• Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology: capacity-building workshop on open government and open data (Ramallah, 29-30 January 2020).
Total	4	

II. Proposed areas of technical cooperation in the field of technology for development

8.   The ESCWA secretariat has adopted a comprehensive planning approach to technical cooperation activities by establishing bilateral frameworks for technical cooperation with countries, so as to improve effectiveness, increase impact, and enhance transparency and accountability. The secretariat has also signed a number of these frameworks in the past two years, and proposes the following areas for technical cooperation with member States:

(a)   *Digital transformation and digital and open government*

- Formulating and developing national strategies, policies and action plans, including digital accessibility policies, to enable all individuals, including persons with disabilities, to benefit from digital platforms;

- Adopting best practices for developing digital government services and digitizing paperwork;

- Assessing national readiness for digital government;

- Enhancing open government to optimize technology use to increase transparency, effectiveness and participation;

- Integrating digital technology and innovation in national development strategies to achieve the SDGs;

- Monitoring relevant international and regional indicators, and submitting proposals to strengthen the performance of member States;

- Building national capacity in the areas of digital and open government.

(b)   *New technology*

- Formulating and developing national strategies, policies and action plans on cloud computing, big data, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of things;

- Assessing national readiness to use new technologies, such as big data, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and the Internet of Things;

- Building capacity in the area of new technology;

- Monitoring international and regional indicators of new technologies, and submitting proposals to strengthen the performance of member States.

(c)   *Innovation and entrepreneurship*

- Helping to strengthen and develop intermediate institutions, such as incubators and accelerators;

- Strengthening the innovation environment and related legislative and regulatory frameworks;

- Improving the match between supply and demand in the field of technology and innovation at the regional level;

- Strengthening technology transfer systems at the national and regional levels;

- Monitoring international and regional indicators of innovation, and submitting proposals to strengthen the performance of member States.

III. Concluding proposals

9.   The ESCWA secretariat invites member States to take note of the implemented technical cooperation activities and the proposed areas of technical cooperation, and to follow up on the implementation of technical cooperation frameworks and update them to ensure that they contain a technology component, in line with national priorities.

10.   The secretariat encourages member States to make use of its advisory services, in line with the proposed areas for technical cooperation and in accordance with national needs. In that regard, the secretariat proposes the following to member States:

- Present proposals and projects on technical cooperation, aimed at employing technology and innovation in implementing the 2030 Agenda and mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic;

- Encourage focal points and specialized bodies to submit proposals to the ESCWA secretariat on technical cooperation priorities, and to add new areas of cooperation in line with emerging national priorities.