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Item 3 of the provisional agenda



**Implementation of recommendations made by the Commission
at its sixth special session**

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its sixth special session in Amman, on 21 and 22 December 2019. It issued a set of recommendations to member States and to the ESCWA secretariat. The present document sets out action taken by the secretariat to implement the recommendations issued to it.

The Executive Committee is invited to take note of what has been accomplished and comment thereon.

Recommendations made by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) at its sixth special session to the ESCWA secretariat and action taken to implement them

Recommendation (a)

Continue preparing technical reports on regional and global developments in the field of financing for development, analysing their regional implications, and converting findings into brief policy notes, while highlighting some regional specificities such as the role of endowment institutions.

Implementation

The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed a new reality and unprecedented challenges worldwide and in the Arab region, especially regarding financing for development. Starting in February 2020, the ESCWA secretariat has worked on a proposal for a “[Regional Emergency Response to Mitigate the Impact of COVID-19](#)” of the pandemic on Arab countries, which sets out recommendations for economic and financial policies at the national and regional levels. Following the proposal, the secretariat worked on several sectoral papers that analysed the [economic cost to the Arab region of the pandemic](#), and its impact on various financing channels, including [trade and foreign direct investment](#), [financial systems](#) and capital markets, remittances, debt sustainability, and fiscal space. ESCWA also assessed the impact of the pandemic on [poverty and food insecurity](#), and on various [segments of the population](#), and suggested ways to mitigate those effects. This analytical work paved the way for the Secretary-General of the United Nations to prepare a comprehensive policy paper entitled “[The Impact of COVID-19 on the Arab region: An opportunity to build back better](#)” devoted to tackling the impact of the pandemic on the Arab region, which provides an integrated set of recommendations and measures to rebuild inclusive and resilient economies.

In 2020, the pandemic revealed itself as a transforming factor for the United Nations’ financing agenda, and its effects were prioritized in all global and regional technical discussions. The ESCWA secretariat participated in these discussions and prepared a note on public policy priorities for the Arab region for the Meeting of the Ministers of Finance, held on 8 September 2020 as part of the activities of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly. The secretariat sent this note to all Arab delegations participating in the meeting.

Alongside extraordinary efforts to avert the effects of the pandemic on financing development in the Arab region, ESCWA continued to work on this key issue within its regular programme. In 2020, it drafted reports on integrated national diagnostics and financing frameworks. These reports provide a detailed analysis of the financing tools, channels, and non-financial means available to support the implementation of nationally adapted goals and targets for sustainable development, and provide estimates of SDG implementation costs in the form of a dashboard. The reports also include the results of simulations to estimate financing needs until 2030, and an estimate of gaps and missed opportunities based on the Arab Financing for Development Scorecard that ESCWA launched and continually updates. Moreover, the reports identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) related to financing in each country, providing a basis for reform programmes.

The secretariat is developing an online platform on financing for development to complement these reports by presenting a statistical and analytical summary thereof, aimed at making the findings easily accessible to decision makers so as to facilitate evidence-based decision-making.

Recommendation (b)

Continue evaluating reforms of the various components of social protection systems, while maintaining an inclusive approach to these systems.

Implementation

Following a recommendation made by the Committee for Social Development at its twelfth session, which was held in Beirut on 8 and 9 October 2019, ESCWA established a governmental expert group to follow up on issues related to reforming social protection systems, and to exchange experiences in this field between Arab countries. In this context, the ESCWA secretariat organized two virtual regional meetings for the expert group, the first on 22 April 2020 and the second on 2 November 2020. The first meeting, which was organized in cooperation with the Regional Office for Arab States of the International Labour Organization, addressed policies for responding to the economic and social repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and Arab countries' efforts to provide social protection for vulnerable groups. ESCWA has developed an interactive tool that includes social protection policies, economic policies, and economic and social stimulus packages announced by most countries globally to tackle the pandemic. ESCWA presented this tool and its results to Arab countries at the first meeting.

The second meeting reviewed another practical tool designed by ESCWA to calculate multidimensional poverty and assist Arab countries in developing strategies to combat it, taking into account the principles of social justice, especially equality and social protection.

The work of the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform was part of the secretariat's efforts to assess the response of social protection systems in Arab countries to the shocks caused by the pandemic, and to adopt a comprehensive approach to social protection as a key tool to combat poverty.

The ESCWA secretariat is also currently designing a tool aimed at identifying and analysing gaps and deficiencies in policies that Arab countries consider as a priority in terms of their response to the principles of social justice. On the basis of this evaluation, the ESCWA secretariat will propose interventions and reforms to bridge gaps and correct processes for formulating social policies, such as poverty and social protection policies.

Recommendation (c)

Intensify normative efforts in monitoring and analysis to increase awareness of Israeli policies and practices and their direct and long-term repercussions for the Palestinian people, especially those aimed at consolidating Israeli control over the Palestinian territory and keeping the Palestinian economy dependent on Israel.

Implementation

The ESCWA secretariat prepared the note by the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan ([A/75/86-E/2020/62](#)), pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution [2019/29](#) and General Assembly resolution [74/243](#). The secretariat presented the note to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly for discussion. Subsequently, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolutions [2021/4](#) and [2021/5](#). The secretariat also prepared a summary of the note, which was circulated to all member States.

Recommendation (d)

Enhance support for the Palestinian people and their institutions to achieve justice and realize their inalienable rights, especially by supporting efforts aimed at ending Israeli violations of international law, by mitigating the economic and social impact of those violations on the living standards of the Palestinian people and on achieving sustainable development, and by mobilizing resources and building regional and international partnerships.

Implementation

The secretariat established an ESCWA fund to support the Palestinian people, aimed at strengthening and intensifying activities in complementarity with activities financed from the regular budget. The secretariat prepared programmes for activities that could be financed through this fund, and contacted various bodies to secure financial resources for it. The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development was the first to agree to allocate financial resources to the fund. The secretariat organized a number of activities aimed at raising awareness about the Palestinian cause, about ways to support the Palestinian people, and about the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian people, as part of activities to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People (29 November) in 2019 and 2020.

The ESCWA secretariat also continues to provide support to the Ministry of Women's Affairs in the State of Palestine at several levels to build its institutional capacity, and to enhance its efforts in developing strategies, action plans and necessary tools. In this context, the secretariat has undertaken the following:

- Providing training tools for analysing policies from a gender equality perspective, and developing policies that are sensitive to the strategic needs of both women and men;
- Analysing the impact of efforts to combat violence against women, and supporting the review of the national strategy to combat violence against women;
- Supporting the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in implementing a project to measure the economic cost of violence against women;
- Preparing a policy brief on increasing the participation of women in the security sectors in the State of Palestine;
- Drafting a periodic report on the economic and social situation of Palestinian women and girls, which analyses the impact of the occupation and crises on Palestinian women and girls.

Recommendation (e)

Continue to benefit from the analyses, findings, recommendations and services in the field of climate change provided by the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies and the RICCAR Regional Knowledge Hub, and refer to them when preparing policies, strategies, reports and research at the regional and national levels; and take note of efforts to mobilize financial resources to support the Centre's activities and call for intensifying those efforts.

Implementation

In 2020, the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies developed a series of strategic partnerships with specialized global bodies, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Global Centre on Adaptation, and banks that support sustainable projects, such as the Islamic Development Bank and the World Bank. The Centre has also made significant efforts to mobilize resources to support its activities.

The Centre signed a memorandum of understanding with UNFCCC on 9 September 2019 to enhance collaboration, and organized several regional meetings and workshops under the memorandum, including the following:

- A needs-based funding project for the Arab region;
- The Lima Adaptation Knowledge Initiative, implemented in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) since early 2020;

- The enhanced transparency framework of the Paris Agreement (early 2020);
- Strengthening the partnership with the Regional Collaboration Centre for the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia in Dubai, which is affiliated to UNFCCC; and holding several meetings and participating in regional events on climate change, the green economy and the role of young people in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;
- Building capacity on nationally determined contributions (in 2020).

The ESCWA secretariat has regularly updated the information on the website of the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies, and linked it to the Regional Knowledge Hub of the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR), which includes a data portal on scientific findings from projection models in the Arab region. The content of the Centre's website is in both English and Arabic, and can be accessed via www.unescwa.org/arab-centre-climate-change-policies.

In partnership with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the ESCWA secretariat continued implementing the Regional Initiative for Promoting Small-Scale Renewable Energy Applications in Rural Areas of the Arab Region (REGEND) (2017-2021) and implementing its extension on water and food security (2019-2021).

With regard to the partnership with the World Bank, the ESCWA secretariat agreed a joint work programme for the Mashreq until December 2022 on shared water resources, agriculture, the circular economy and statistical data.

Recommendation (f)

Continue to strengthen integration in funding projects using extrabudgetary resources, the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation and the ESCWA regular budget to support the work of the secretariat.

Implementation

ESCWA continues to adopt an integration approach in its management of financial resources, whether from the United Nations regular budget, the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (which forms part of the regular budget), or extrabudgetary sources. Undoubtedly, 2020 was an exceptional year, with most activities shifting online, thus altering the nature of programme implementation. The secretariat took advantage of this transformation to launch a process for preparing a wide range of tools for member States, in various fields, including establishing the multidimensional poverty calculator; tracking economic and social measures taken in over 170 countries worldwide to mitigate the effects of the pandemic to share knowledge; calculating the cost of violence against women; assessing the extent to which policies comply with the principles of social justice; and developing other practical tools that were welcomed by ESCWA subcommittees in various fields. ESCWA also began developing knowledge portals in Arabic and English. The first portal provides educational and training courses in Arabic. The second portal offers various knowledge products on the Sustainable Development Goals and related training materials in Arabic. The third portal is a search engine under design, which will secure access to over 160 United Nations websites and to all decisions, official documents, reports, research and resources on sustainable development in one place.

The integrated approach to managing resources and the radical changes brought about by the pandemic have allowed unprecedented flexibility in selecting projects and financing them in line with the principles of ESCWA reform, which were approved by the Executive Committee at its sixth meeting held in Marrakech, Morocco, on 15 and 16 June 2019, and by the Commission at its sixth special session held in Amman on 21 and 22 December 2019.

Recommendation (g)

Update the technical cooperation website to allow countries to review completed activities, and develop the internal electronic system of ESCWA to follow up on technical cooperation requests with member States.

Implementation

The ESCWA secretariat developed an internal electronic system to follow up on requests for technical cooperation from member States. It has made efforts to include all requests in the system and to ensure that they are received through official channels. It has also developed automatic notifications, enabling the system to notify the party requesting technical cooperation and focal points in the relevant country when a request is registered. Electronic notification aims to ensure coordination and the exchange of information and complement direct communication between the secretariat and focal points following a technical cooperation request from a country.

The secretariat has also developed a method within the system to notify United Nations country teams of technical cooperation requests that ESCWA receives from a country, in an attempt to avoid duplication of efforts by United Nations entities. The notifications are complemented by bilateral meetings with resident coordinators to enhance collaboration in meeting requests for technical cooperation.

In addition, the secretariat recently added a new component to the system, aimed at incorporating the implementation plan of each request, thus enabling the system to track progress and send notifications of delays in delivery or implementation of stages of an implementation plan. The secretariat hopes that the system in its current form will help improve follow-up and exchange of information on technical cooperation activities carried out by ESCWA.

In its current version, the system allows extraction of quantitative information on the number and types of requests and their implementation progress. It is the source behind a report prepared by the secretariat on technical cooperation activities in 2020, which is presented to the Executive Committee at its seventh meeting under item 4 of the agenda.

The secretariat had prepared new components for the technical cooperation page on the ESCWA website, but has decided to update the entire site, not just the part devoted to technical cooperation, to facilitate browsing and access by all beneficiaries of ESCWA work to information, reports, tools, pictures and videos, among other things. It has prepared a new structure and layout for all pages, but the update process is not yet complete. The new ESCWA site is expected to be launched in early 2021.
