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

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**REVIEW OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE TECHNICAL COOPERATION NETWORK****Summary**

Within the framework of its Technical Cooperation Network, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) conducts technical cooperation activities at the request of its member States, in all fields of its expertise. Funded through the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation, the United Nations Development Account or through extrabudgetary resources, these activities are implemented in an integrated manner, to better respond to the needs and priorities of member States.

This document presents the main technical cooperation activities conducted by ESCWA during the 2012-2013 biennium. It also proposes a way forward to further regional technical cooperation and enhance the technical services delivered by ESCWA to its member States.

## Introduction

1. The Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC) was established to provide advisory services and support to member States, with a view to addressing emerging socioeconomic development needs. RPTC activities are demand-driven and aim to respond to the development needs of the countries of the region.
2. The support provided to member States through RPTC takes the following forms:
  - Policy advice and technical support;
  - Capacity-building activities;
  - Fellowships and study tours;
  - Field projects.
3. To qualify for such support, an activity must meet several criteria. These include:
  - Delivering significant impact on the development process;
  - Reflecting global development priorities enunciated by the General Assembly and others entities;
  - Meeting the development needs and priorities of countries;
  - Promoting pilot innovations for possible wider application;
  - Making optimal use of limited resources.
4. Through RPTC projects and services, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is able to operationalize its normative and analytical work, help develop the capacity of member States and scale up innovative concepts to potential extrabudgetary projects, while enabling knowledge sharing. The programme aims to support member States in the formulation and effective implementation of national policies, strategies and programmes towards the fulfillment of global, regional and national development goals. ESCWA staff, regional advisors and consultants provide timely and substantive assistance in order to support the implementation of policies and government-led initiatives with practical solutions. ESCWA exerts every effort to ensure a coherent, interdisciplinary and results-oriented approach to providing services.
5. In order to maximize the impact of results and capitalize on ESCWA expertise, RPTC considers the following three points in determining the nature of its support:
  - Common development challenges facing more than one member country, where lessons learned in one may be relevant to others;
  - Cross-boundary issues where collaboration and the implementation of global and regional agreements can promote regional integration;
  - Emerging issues of a sensitive nature where ESCWA can assist in raising awareness, advocacy and negotiations.
6. ESCWA also implements additional technical cooperation activities funded through the United Nations Development Account (DA) and others through extrabudgetary resources. These activities are conducted in an integrated way, within the framework of the Technical Cooperation Network, which aims to strengthening coordination, networking, exchanging knowledge on advisory services, conducting training and capacity-building workshops and executing pilot technical projects. A fourth regular meeting of the Technical Cooperation Network is expected to take place back to back with the Technical Committee meeting in 2014.

7. This document presents an overview of the ongoing and completed technical cooperation activities within that network during the biennium 2012-2013.

## OVERVIEW OF TECHNICAL COOPERATION ACTIVITIES IN 2012-2013

### A. REGULAR PROGRAMME OF TECHNICAL COOPERATION ACTIVITIES

8. During the 2012-2013 biennium and until October 2013, ESCWA provided 89 technical advisory services to all member States in all substantive areas of its work. Based on defined strategic priorities and country plans, ESCWA also delivered 22 regional and subregional workshops, 46 national workshops and 5 fellowships and study tours. 1,200 officials, including 588 women, benefited from targeted training.

9. National technical cooperation focal points play a vital role at the country level in ensuring the effectiveness of the technical cooperation services of ESCWA. In addition to acting as a liaison between the Commission and various stakeholders, the focal points coordinate with partners to ensure appropriate follow-up to RPTC activities.

#### 1. *Ongoing technical cooperation activities*

#### **On the road to Rio+20 and beyond**

10. The years 2011 and 2012 were decisive for global commitments to development. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), convened in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, was one in a series of important global summits aimed at directing global approaches to development. The Conference was also an opportunity for Arab countries to come together, take stock of achievements and gaps in sustainable development and assess the value of new approaches. Working together with Arab countries, the League of Arab States and other United Nations entities, ESCWA dedicated substantial technical cooperation resources to ensure that a unified Arab position was formulated and presented at Rio+20.

11. The regional preparations for Rio+20 involved:

- The production of a number of studies and reports to update the relevant Arab authorities on the situation of green economy and sustainable development in the region, profiling experiences and suggesting reforms and policy directives;
- The organization of over 10 regional, subregional and national meetings in cities across the Arab region;
- Consultations with a wide range of stakeholders and supporting dialogue between Governments, civil society, the private sector, regional organizations and development institutions;
- The negotiation of a set of recommendations emanating from the Arab region on the main themes of Rio+20.

#### **Helping member States comply with international standards in national accounts**

12. As Arab economies work towards enhanced policymaking, the need for available, reliable and comparable data is pressing. Governments must create the knowledge infrastructure needed to assess the availability and use of resources at the national level, in ways that are systematic, transparent and informative. At the regional level, there is a similar need for comparable data across countries and sectors.

13. Responding to the recommendations and priorities set by the Statistical Committee, ESCWA has placed emphasis on support to national statistical offices in the area of economic statistics in general, and national accounts in particular. Through national capacity-building workshops, advisory services and hands-

on support, the ESCWA Statistics Division is providing critical support to the statistics departments of Jordan, Kuwait and Palestine in the implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA). The 2008 SNA represents the international standard for the compilation and dissemination of national accounts. Its aim is to provide an integrated, complete system of accounts, enabling international comparison of all economic activity. The countries benefiting from ESCWA support will be able to use the 2008 SNA as a guide in constructing their own accounting systems, thereby enabling greater regional and international comparability. Moreover, countries will be able to improve the collection of data and the methodologies to generate accurate economic statistics in a timely manner, which is an important factor for policymakers in their planning.

## *2. Activities completed in 2012-2013*

### **Knowledge exchange between Palestine and Tunisia on environmental governance and management**

14. Within the framework of RPTC, a senior delegation from the Palestinian Ministry of Environmental Affairs visited the Tunisian Ministry of Equipment and Environment from 22 to 26 April 2013, in order to gain insight on the Tunisian approach to environmental governance and management, and exchange information in these areas. The visit concluded with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries. This document stipulated the establishment of cooperation between both ministries to carry out common projects, and specified the benefits of international cooperation and technical assistance.

### **Training course on specialized tools for geographic information systems (GIS) and hydrogeology in Oman**

15. A three day training course on Mathematical Methods in ArcGIS Applications for Analysis and Display of Hydrogeological Data and Information, was delivered between 22 and 24 September 2013 for the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources of Oman. The ESCWA training course aimed to improve the capacity of the ministry staff to prepare information on groundwater resources and hydrogeology in the form of regional maps, and to use adequate ArcGIS data analysis tools for the preparation of these maps. With the knowledge acquired, the ministry staff is better equipped to address water resource management challenges. The course also enabled the staff to appropriately address opportunities and constraints for the sustainable management of natural resources, in particularly the management of water resources at the local and regional levels.

### **Advisory mission to the National Information Center in the Sudan**

16. Based on two requests for advisory services received from the National Information Center in Khartoum, this advisory mission was implemented from 26 to 30 August 2013. The objectives of the mission were to support the Center staff in developing an e-learning strategy and to provide it with the international standards and good practices for establishing the national public key infrastructure. To support e-learning, several meetings were held with stakeholders in Khartoum in order to identify their needs, discuss the strategy and agree on the methodology. All stakeholders approved the proposed methodology and the way forward mapped out by ESCWA.

### **Advisory mission to the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation in Yemen**

17. As a response to an advisory service request on e-government projects, a mission was undertaken from 27 to 29 October 2013. The below proposals were discussed:

- The administrative structure of an e-government project;
- The detailed tasks of each unit in the suggested structure;
- The future plan for an e-government project in Yemen.

18. The Technical Committee in charge of the e-government project approved of the ESCWA approach, and a memorandum of understanding may be signed for long-term coordination and support for e-government in Yemen.

#### **Capacity-building services to the Ministry of Social Affairs in Lebanon**

19. The Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs requested the assistance of ESCWA in providing technical support for capacity-building among its staff, in the formulation of programmes and the writing of project proposals. The goal of this capacity-building activity was to better address the national agenda for social development and secure donors, in order to enable the Ministry to deliver social services and social assistance for both Lebanese citizens and Syrian refugees. The ESCWA Regional Advisor identified the needs of the ministry staff and designed a five-day training programme, which was delivered to 19 senior staff members.

#### **Assistance in the preparation of the tenth National Development Plan in Saudi Arabia**

20. ESCWA responded to a request from Saudi Arabia to assist in the preparation of its tenth National Development Plan. To that end, ESCWA prepared nine policy papers covering topics ranging from the regional and international role of the country; to its competitiveness and productivity; the role of women, family, children and civil society; its water resources; the environment; information communication technology; culture; and the media. Currently, ESCWA is continuing its collaboration with the Ministry of Economy and Planning through the implementation of a joint support project with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the preparation of key performance indicators for state actors. It also aims to build the capacity of the Ministry in following up on the implementation of that plan and communicating it to the general public. This 2.3 million United States dollars (US\$) project will be funded by the Ministry of Economy and Planning of Saudi Arabia.

#### **Technical assistance in macroeconomic planning and poverty reduction in Egypt**

21. Given the complex and interlinked challenges facing Egypt, the implications and trade-offs involved in policy choices must be considered. Coherence must be ensured between macroeconomic policies and planning and development objectives in order to achieve balanced and inclusive development. In this context, a request for technical support was received in the area of macroeconomic planning and poverty reduction from the concerned Egyptian authorities. ESCWA support in this area focuses on macroeconomic analysis through a structural transformation assessment using two different modeling techniques: one macroeconomic model and a computable general equilibrium model. In addition, the ESCWA approach takes into account the concept and measurement of human development, poverty and food security, and employment and social protection, and the linkages between economic policy and human development outcomes. So far, ESCWA has prepared a technical paper on the Macroeconomic Implications of Political Stalemate in Egypt, which will be used as a background paper for the upcoming technical assistance services to be provided to Egypt.

#### **Technical assistance in the preparation of a poverty reduction strategy in Jordan**

22. Fighting poverty and unemployment are major priorities of the Jordanian Government. As a result, the country has been undertaking and developing its poverty reduction strategy, in cooperation with international agencies. At the request of UNDP in Jordan and the government authorities, ESCWA prepared a paper on the Profile of the Working Poor in Jordan. Based on the Household Income and Expenditure Survey conducted in 2010 in the country, the paper was presented during a meeting on poverty assessment in Jordan in December 2012 and contributed to the preparation of Jordan's poverty-reduction strategy.

B. ACTIVITIES FUNDED THROUGH THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT ACCOUNT

23. The 2012-2013 biennium represents the seventh tranche of DA, the theme of which is “Support to addressing key global development challenges to further the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, through collaboration at the global, regional and national levels”.

24. ESCWA has secured funding for five new projects under the eighth tranche to begin implementation in 2012-2013. The theme of this tranche is “supporting Member States to accelerate progress towards achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, in the context of the multiple and interrelated development challenges”. Taking this into account, the five new projects were developed in the areas of green technology, water resources, women in conflict, information and communication development, and remittances for development.

25. With the launch of the ninth tranche of DA under the theme of “Supporting Member States in designing and implementing strategies and policies towards sustainable, equitable and inclusive development”, ESCWA has developed projects in the areas of sustainable development, regional integration and inter-regional trade, among others. In total, ESCWA currently manages 15 DA projects with a total budget of US\$8 million.

C. ACTIVITIES FUNDED THROUGH EXTRABUDGETARY RESOURCES

26. ESCWA raised approximately US\$4.4 million in the biennium 2012-2013 to implement national and regional activities under its seven subprogrammes. These activities and projects respond to the needs of the region in different sectors, including water, environment, statistics, technology and innovation, social and economic development and gender. In addition, new projects were developed to respond to the emerging needs of member States in transition. The major donors in 2012-2013 included the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the German Government, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), the Jordanian Government, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) fund and the Norwegian Embassy in Beirut.

**Way forward**

27. As part of its commitment to better respond to technical cooperation requests and maximize the impact of its services, ESCWA plans to develop strategic alliances with regional institutions towards the goal of a sustainable regional fellowship programme and cooperation framework. These partnerships will also allow ESCWA to benefit from existing expertise in the region to ensure faster response rates to the technical cooperation requests of member States. ESCWA also plans to regularly organize national workshops to develop and update technical cooperation country plans. This will help member States to focus on anticipated priorities and will enable the promotion of multidisciplinary approaches to better assist them in addressing interdependent challenges. In response to feedback from technical cooperation focal points and Technical Committee recommendations, ESCWA has prepared concise procedures and guidelines for requesting its technical assistance and has updated the Technical Cooperation Portal to enhance the quality of interactions between focal points and those making service requests.

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