



**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/SDD/2009/3
24 June 2009
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

OF THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON REINFORCING SOCIAL EQUITY: INTEGRATING YOUTH INTO THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS ABU DHABI, 29-31 MARCH 2009

Summary

The Population and Social Development Section at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized, in collaboration with the Family Development Foundation in the United Arab Emirates, the Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process in Abu Dhabi, from 29 to 31 March 2009. The Meeting was held in order to contribute towards improving decision-making and to guide national efforts towards the adoption of strategies aimed at integrating youth issues into the development process. It also aimed at reducing social and economic exclusion among youth by promoting the policy framework of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (WPAY), and by inviting member countries to commit themselves to youth-related goals, targets and indicators.

The Meeting discussed current issues facing youth in the Arab region and factors affecting their economic, social, cultural and political performance. It also addressed existing approaches tackling the role of youth in the development process, in addition to existing challenges, primarily the gender gap among youth, and such emerging challenges as the youth bulge. The Meeting assessed the responses of Arab countries to the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly in relation to the World Programme of Action for Youth by reviewing national reports that highlighted problems as well as practical and institutional constraints that prevent youth integration into the process of policy formulation and implementation. Participants discussed the project proposal prepared by ESCWA, entitled Strengthening National Capacities to Formulate Youth Policies: Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth, which aims to improve the situation of youth and integrate them in the development process.

The Meeting issued a set of recommendations with respect to the need for political commitment to youth issues and the adoption of a new strategy aimed at targeting youth in policy formulation and decision-making. This report includes a presentation on recommendations issued and topics discussed at the Meeting.

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Introduction

1. The Population and Social Development Section at ESCWA organized, in collaboration with the Family Development Foundation in the United Arab Emirates, the Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth in the Development Process (Abu Dhabi, 29-31 March 2009). The Meeting was held pursuant to resolution 60/2 adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 6 October 2005, in which the General Assembly urged United Nations regional commissions to organize consultations with member countries and youth organizations within available resources in order to assess the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. The Meeting was also held upon recommendations of ESCWA in relation to the need for member countries to give demographic changes, especially the youth bulge, the importance they deserve in the process of formulating development policies and programmes.

2. The Expert Group Meeting constituted phase II of the regional project conducted by ESCWA with a view to Strengthening National Capacities to Formulate Youth Policies: Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth. During the last quarter of 2008, ESCWA began, in collaboration with national Governments, the implementation of phase I of the project, which consisted of conducting an inquiry to assess the responses of member countries to the World Programme of Action for Youth, and to identify obstacles that reduce the effectiveness of those responses and prevent countries from abiding to their commitments. In that framework, ESCWA organized the Workshop on Reinforcing National Capacities in Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth: National Reports and Systematic Documentation of Accomplishments (Beirut, 17-18 December 2008). Participants reviewed the outcomes of the inquiry and discussed a unified approach aimed at ensuring the consistency of national reports on follow-up to the Programme of Action for Youth. The unified approach could also help turn these national reports into a reliable reference in youth policy formulation, and they could become a source for the exchange of experiences and lessons at both national and regional levels.¹

3. Participants examined a set of priority issues in the field of youth development and assessed the outcomes of the interventions that member countries had committed themselves to undertake. The objectives of the meeting included the following:

(a) Mobilize the efforts of decision makers to adopt a strategy aimed at integrating youth into the development process, with a view to reducing social and economic inequality in its various forms;

(b) Urge decision makers to adopt the policy framework, goals and targets of the World Programme of Action for Youth;

(c) Exchange experiences in the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth by presenting related national and regional experiences, and highlighting the technical and institutional factors that prevent the formulation and implementation of youth policies and programmes;

(d) Exchange knowledge, especially in relation to the interlinkages between youth and development, by discussing factors affecting the economic, social, cultural and political performance of youth;

(e) Advocate for developing a national list of indicators that help to measure and monitor progress made in implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth;

(f) Identify frameworks for cooperation, coordination and partnership between member countries and ESCWA in the implementation of General Assembly resolutions pertaining to youth.

4. The Meeting adopted a number of recommendations to renew the commitment of Arab Governments to achieve the following: (a) integrate youth issues into development planning; (b) accelerate the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond; and (c) develop

¹ See the report of the workshop (E/ESCWA/SDD/2009/2), which is available at: www.escwa.un.org.

capacity-building programmes, and create national and regional mechanisms aimed at improving the quality of life of this group of the population.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Participants adopted a set of recommendations to promote social equity and integrate youth into the development process. These recommendations were addressed to the Governments of ESCWA member countries and to the ESCWA secretariat.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

6. The following recommendations were made to ESCWA member countries:

(a) Use contemporary scientific methodology to address youth as a socio-demographic group facing specific challenges. This implies adopting a stand-alone methodology, separated from the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and indicators;

(b) Adopt a national strategic vision for youth based on citizenship, rights and duties, and on the fact that the human being is the centre and goal of development;

(c) Establish a national body for coordination among ministries and various actors dealing with youth issues, including non-governmental youth organizations, and identify the functions of those actors, enhance their powers and establish cooperation frameworks among them;

(d) Use standard indicators with specific targets and timeframes in order to devise a national agenda for youth development and provide better opportunities to assess progress made in the implementation of national youth policies;

(e) Participate, within available resources and possibilities, in supporting and funding the regional project on Strengthening National Capacities to Formulate Youth Policies: Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth;

(f) Establish youth parliaments and enhance their legislative powers and capacities in order to encourage youth participation in public life and political decision-making.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ESCWA SECRETARIAT

7. The following recommendations were made to the ESCWA secretariat:

(a) Continue to work in collaboration with national experts to promote the methodology of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, and to monitor and assess its implementation at the regional level, with emphasis on the need to integrate priority areas set out in the Programme into national development policies, programmes and projects;

(b) Provide participants at the Meeting with copies of United Nations reports on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth, and with literature on policies targeting youth; and to inform them of the outcomes of the inquiry conducted by ESCWA on the responses of member countries to the World Programme;

(c) Strengthen efforts to provide technical support to countries that are about to enter the “demographic window” phase by identifying requirements and mechanisms that enable Arab countries to take advantage of the demographic window and transform it from a demographic burden into a demographic dividend;

(d) Prepare, in collaboration with national counterparts, a formal letter to be addressed to Governments of member countries aimed at the following: urging the parties concerned with developing

national youth policies to adopt ESCWA's approach in targeting youth; providing all actors with the necessary knowledge and conditions to prepare these policies; and contributing to developing institutional capacities and helping to develop adequate mechanisms;

(e) Advocate for and develop the project on Strengthening National Capacities to Formulate Youth Policies: Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth, and examine the possibility to customize it and implement it at the national level in collaboration with Governments;

(f) Train and empower the national officials participating in youth-related decision-making, and produce a manual that includes clear indicators to assess the outcomes of the implementation of national youth policies.

II. TOPICS FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

8. In addition to the opening speeches delivered by the organizers, the Meeting included three main sessions. At the first session, presentations were made on the demographic, economic, social and cultural characteristics of Arab youth; factors affecting these characteristics and ensuing necessary policies in the priority areas set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth in order to achieve social equity; and contemporary approaches that tackle youth as socio-demographic cohorts whose performance is related to the life cycle and development process.

9. At the second session, national counterparts submitted reports on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth in nine Arab countries. Their aim was to identify procedural as well as institutional problems and constraints that have contributed to a slow response to the Programme and prevented the integration of youth issues into the development process. In addition, the session included a presentation by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Community Development in the United Arab Emirates on preparing young leaders. Finally, there was a presentation about activities undertaken by regional organizations and United Nations entities in mobilizing efforts and building national capacities in order to enable decision makers to integrate youth into economic, social and political policymaking.

10. The third session discussed ESCWA's regional project, entitled Strengthening National Capacities to Formulate Youth Policies: Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth. Participants discussed the recommendations that they subsequently addressed to the Governments of member countries and to the ESCWA secretariat, guided by available studies and national reports.

A. DEMOGRAPHIC, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH IN ARAB COUNTRIES

1. *Integrating youth issues into the development process from an ESCWA perspective*

11. Ms. Batool Shakoori, Chief of the Population and Social Development Section at ESCWA, made a presentation on the integration of youth issues into the development process from an ESCWA perspective. She highlighted several youth-related demographic indicators in the Arab region and elaborated on the concept of "youth bulge". She stressed the need for integrated policies that would not only develop the individual capacities of youth but also promote their participation in the development process by meeting their needs and offering them equal opportunities. The presentation included a critical review of major youth issues in the Arab region, including poverty, unemployment, lack of access to education, the impacts of globalization, poor civic participation and limited reproductive health services. In addition, it addressed the main prevailing approaches, which are based on the important role of youth in development and focus on the human life cycle, evolution in the concept of development, globalization and the demographic window of opportunity.

12. Ms. Shakoori elaborated on ESCWA's approach towards targeting youth and integrating them into development. This approach is based on the interrelationship between demographic changes, the human life cycle and the development process. It helps to absorb youth dynamics in a positive way and reduces social exclusion among them. It is also based on targeted policymaking whereby specific economic, social and

political priorities are identified for youth aged 15-24 as a targeted sociodemographic category facing special challenges.

13. Ms. Shakoori pointed out that ESCWA member countries have committed themselves to support and implement international resolutions on the need for policies to address various youth issues. She underlined the fact that these countries so far lack the tools and mechanisms for implementation, as has been the case in countries in East and Southeast Asia which have made progress in this area. In that regard, Ms. Shakoori introduced the general principles of youth integration into development. She called for separating youth policies and the MDGs and indicators, and for developing a coherent set of indicators to measure and assess progress made towards achieving youth-related goals.

2. Towards a contemporary vision of the role of youth in comprehensive development and human security

14. Mr. Hussein Salem al-Sarhan, Director of the Social Development Department at the Family Development Foundation in Abu Dhabi, presented a paper, entitled “Towards a contemporary vision of the role of youth in comprehensive development and human security”. He noted that the role of youth is increasingly important nowadays given that the world is facing challenges and difficulties resulting from globalization and related plans, and that technological advances in communication and information have become a threat to systems of social values, customs and ideals in the framework of what could be described as cultural invasion, notwithstanding the positive contributions of such advances to science, knowledge and progress.

15. Mr. al-Sarhan pointed out that the misuse of knowledge and communication tools has become a catalyst for many risky behaviours, which affect family cohesion as well as the capacity to raise children and protect them from violence and delinquency. Therefore, social structure and its core units are the most threatened by such behaviours. The paper addressed three main themes, namely, development, youth and human security. Each theme ramified a set of topics related to the relationship between youth and development requirements, and to the role of youth in preserving the gains of social stability and development.

3. Arab youth demographics: current situation and future trends

16. Mr. Ayman Zohry, an expert in the Egyptian Society for Migration Studies, presented a paper, entitled “The demography of Arab youth: current situation and future trends”. He addressed the unprecedented youth bulge phenomenon in the Arab region whereby youth aged 15-24 represent about 20 per cent of the population. The paper included an analysis of current, medium and long-term demographic trends disaggregated by broad age groups and gender. It also included an analysis of youth to total population and to working age population ratios by gender, and of youth population in selected countries with high and low fertility rates. The conclusions of the paper established a link between youth demographics and risks as well as opportunities associated with this age group.

17. Based on the interlinkages between the process of development and the cyclical process of human life, the paper underlined the importance of addressing the youth bulge by taking a number of factors into account, namely, transition from childhood to maturity and its resulting physiological, psychological and intellectual transformations; efforts made by those concerned with development to meet the basic needs of youth; and the intersection between transition from childhood to maturity and transition to globalization at the global level.

4. Arab youth: current situation and social implications

18. Mr. Abdel Basset Abdel Moti, Population Policy Consultant at the League of Arab States, presented a paper, entitled “Arab youth: current situation and social implications”. The paper presented and analysed the current situation of Arab youth in the light of existing policies addressing them over the past three decades, and in view of international and regional transformations resulting from globalization and subsequent economic liberalization policies. The paper addressed major challenges, risks and problems facing Arab

youth empowerment; ensuing economic, social and cultural implications; requirements of the regional vision to empower Arab youth and increase their options in economic, social and political participation.

19. The paper stressed the need to adopt a comprehensive and historic approach to empower youth. It also highlighted the need to promote youth human rights and to consider youth participation as a right and also as an essential factor for both youth empowerment and sustainable human development at regional and national levels. Moreover, it underlined that policies, programmes and projects aimed at empowering youth must provide for equal opportunities in order to address the gender gap among youth. The paper noted that youth empowerment has a future dimension, given that youth constitute an engine of change in the Arab development and reform process. In that sense, it stressed upon the need to empower youth in order to increase the participation of the working age group in the labour market, reduce dependency ratios and increase saving rates. The paper also emphasized the importance of benefiting from the human capital represented by Arab youth and not wasting the historic opportunity offered by the demographic window.

5. Social exclusion and its implications on the employment of Arab youth

20. Mr. Samir Radwan, member of the Board of Directors of the General Authority for Investment in Egypt, presented a paper, entitled “Arab youth employment: economic, social and institutional exclusion and its impact on youth unemployment”. The paper addressed causes impeding the effective participation of youth in the economic and social life in Arab countries, with emphasis on employment as a major factor affecting economic and social integration. The paper was based on the observation that unemployment rates in the Middle East and North Africa have been higher than in other regions of the world, and that prevailing unemployment was primarily youth unemployment. The paper presented the main features and causes of exclusion on the basis of gender, income level or employment in the informal sector, given that such exclusions cause the marginalization of youth outside the formal economy.

21. The paper included an analysis of factors affecting the supply of and demand for labour. In terms of supply, the youth bulge phenomenon within the population pyramid reflects the increase in the number of entrants into the labour force. Furthermore, the transition from school to labour market is difficult and leads to an increase in the number of unemployed youth. In terms of demand, the situation varies among Arab economies, with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) facing no problems in this regard. On the contrary, the growing demand for labour makes it necessary to bring in large numbers of foreign workers. On the other hand, densely populated economies face a chronic problem, and need to achieve high economic growth rates that could, in turn, lead to demand levels likely to facilitate the absorption of new entrants into the labour market. The lack of harmonization between the outputs of education and training, on the one hand, and of labour market needs, on the other hand, is a prevailing problem that all Arab countries face, despite their differences. The paper presents proposals on policies required to tackle the problem of youth exclusion, including development policies driven by employment-intensive growth, and to improve the quality of the Arab workforce in order to meet the needs of the labour market and become more competitive. All these objectives have become particularly pressing in the light of the prevailing global financial and economic crisis.

6. International Arab youth migration

22. Mr. Mohammad Shahidul Haque, International Organization for Migration (IOM) Regional Representative for the Middle East, made a presentation, entitled “Dynamics of mobility of Arab youth for work abroad: challenges and potentials”. The presentation reviewed the features of migration in the Arab region, which differentiate it from migration elsewhere, given that it is both a destination and source of migration at the same time. He pointed out that the Arab region is the third recipient of migrant labour in the world, after North America and Europe, and that it is also an area of origin for many reasons, primarily economic difficulties, environmental degradation, rapid population growth in some countries in the region, and wars and conflicts.

23. The presentation addressed linkages between migration, youth bulge and employment. It pointed out the characteristics of Arab youth, their propensity to migrate, and their favorite migration destinations, while focusing on selective migration by gender, age and education level. The presentation also elaborated on the

impacts and challenges associated with migration, notably the brain drain, migrant remittances, migrant worker rights and the changing demographic profile of labour-receiving countries. It underlined the need for a regional dialogue on migration, integrated migration management policies as well as migrant worker and returnee protection programmes, especially in the light of the current global financial and economic crisis.

7. Arab youth culture: current situation and future vision

24. Mr. Imad Melliti, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Tunis, presented a paper, entitled “The culture of Arab youth: current situation and future vision”, in which he addressed the dilemmas associated with Arab youth culture and phenomena associated with youth cultural patterns. He raised a number of questions on major social transformations in the Arab region and their relationship with this age group.

25. The paper focused on the basic knowledge needed to examine youth culture, particularly patterns of cultural overlap and the spread of globalized cultural patterns, and also to study the values and standards shaping youth culture. Moreover, it addressed the diverse and heterogeneous components of youth culture as a function of social settings, economic levels and sub-cultures. The paper sought to monitor the various aspects of youth culture, its relationship with such major social institutions as family and school, and its impact on the internal dynamics of such institutions. It emphasized on core values underpinning youth culture and their impact on identifying options in major areas, including political participation, civil work and reproductive health.

8. Youth bulge in the Arab region: situation and political implications

26. Mr. Atef Odibat, President of the Higher Council for Youth in Jordan, presented a paper, entitled “The youth bulge in the Arab region: situation analysis and political implications”. The presentation analysed the phenomenon of youth bulge in the Arab region and its political implications. It introduced several theoretical responses aimed at alleviating the implications of this phenomenon and at transforming it from a demographic burden on society to a demographic dividend. Such a dividend could be used to integrate youth into their own communities in two ways, namely: (a) by meeting their needs and respecting their rights; and (b) by assigning responsibilities to them, thereby encouraging their involvement in their communities and participation in decision-making that could affect them and shape the future of their communities.

27. The paper analysed the youth bulge phenomenon through a methodology that relies on the following: (a) available data and information that are restructured and used to serve the objectives of the research; (b) available studies, reports and literature pertaining to this phenomenon; and (c) analyses of several country case studies, with a view to identifying the dimensions of the youth bulge phenomenon and analysing its content and implications.

9. Gender gap among youth: challenges and policies

28. Ms. Sawsan Karimi, Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Bahrain, presented a paper, entitled “Gender gap among youth: challenges and policy implications – Bahrain model”. This presentation addressed the status of gender gap among youth in Bahrain, in addition to varying integration concepts, policies and programmes. Ms. Karimi raised questions about gender integration programmes and dilemmas associated with their implementation in Bahrain.

29. The paper examined the varying concept of integration among major social actors in Bahrain through a brief historical review of attempts aimed at mainstreaming gender from the beginning of the twentieth century until the new millennium through the British Mandate, the National Movement, women’s movements in Bahrain, the political reform era, establishment of the Supreme Council for Women, and the various positions of and disputes among religious and sectarian movements vis-à-vis gender issues in general and women issues in particular. Students at the University of Bahrain were taken as a sample of youth in Bahrain in order to examine and analyse the effects of the varying concept of integration. The paper concluded with recommendations on traditionally, culturally and scientifically efficient means to address gender gap among youth in Bahrain.

10. *Outcome of discussions held at the first session*

30. The key issues raised in the presentations made by ESCWA and the Family Development Foundation can be summarized as follows:

(a) To consider youth as a socio-demographic group that faces specific challenges and, therefore, needs to be targeted by specific policies and strategies, rather than by holistic and sectoral policies;

(b) To adopt the United Nations definition of youth whereby youth is represented by the age group 15-24 for the purpose of comparisons among countries;

(c) The importance of being guided by the World Programme of Action for Youth in developing youth policies and strategies;

(d) To consider youth university education as an essential tool for their empowerment, and to recognize the need to provide them with employment opportunities in order to save them from poverty, marginalization and delinquency;

(e) The necessity of realizing that globalization leads to both opportunities and challenges in the area of youth empowerment. While globalization facilitates knowledge of current events happening in the world through information and communications technology, it creates new challenges owing to the transition to a new way of life. In addition to the negative consequences of globalization on the youth situation in the labour market, the resulting new global culture may not be consistent with prevailing local cultures;

(f) The importance of involving youth in discussing matters of concern to them and in formulating youth policies, strategies and programmes;

(g) To emphasize the role of youth in human security, in all its economic, environmental, health-related and other dimensions.

31. The debate on youth demographics and their social situation addressed the following issues:

(a) It is likely that monitoring, analysing and understanding the current status of youth could reveal the expected changes in the status of society in two or three decades;

(b) It is essential to emphasize the importance of the demographic dimension in development planning. The study of the current demographic situation and future trends of youth is the cornerstone of the analysis of economic, social and political dimensions and implications of youth bulge;

(c) It is essential to take advantage of the looming demographic window of opportunity, which offers opportunities for economic and social returns, and of lessons drawn from the experience of East Asian countries known as the "Asian tigers".

32. Major issues raised by the debate on youth migration can be summarized as follows:

(a) High unemployment rates among youth in the Arab region, noting that these rates are the highest in the world;

(b) Repercussions of the global financial crisis on youth employment and migration in the Arab region, and the need to address and overcome them;

(c) Lack of harmonization between the outputs of the educational system and labour market requirements in many Arab countries, which leads to youth unemployment and migration in search of decent work opportunities;

(d) Emergence of the Arab region at the world level as one of the major sources and destinations of international migration flows, major source of remittances and one of the major receiving zones of these remittances;

(e) Imbalance in the age-sex composition of the population in the GCC countries, owing to the fact that most immigrant workers are young males;

(f) Lack of accurate and reliable data on migration in Arab countries, which can be used to understand the nature and currents of migration;

(g) Poor dialogue and consultation processes among Governments on international migration;

(h) There is a need to develop migration legislation, combat document fraud and reveal violations of the human rights of migrants.

33. The debate on the culture of Arab youth and the political implications of youth bulge and gender gap addressed the following:

(a) The diverse and heterogeneous components of youth culture and problems arising from it;

(b) The growing influence of peer groups, and opening to the outside world through Internet as a primary source of normative and value references at the expense of the influence of family and educational institutions;

(c) The need to adopt a gender-based approach to youth empowerment and integration into development planning, considering that younger women are more vulnerable to social exclusion in terms of education, employment and participation in public life;

(d) The multiplicity of approaches adopted to address concepts of gender, inclusion and empowerment in the Arab region.

B. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS MADE IN RESPONDING TO THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH (WPAY)

1. *National reports*

34. On the second day of the Meeting, participants presented a number of national reports on the response of Arab countries to the World Programme of Action for Youth, especially with regard to developing national youth programmes and policies. These countries and territories comprised Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates. Reports were prepared in line with the template adopted at the Workshop on Reinforcing National Capacities in Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY): National Reports and Systematic Documentation of Accomplishments (Beirut, 17-18 December 2008).

35. The reports extensively reviewed the situation of youth in those countries and territories according to the priority areas set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth, and policies and programmes designed for youth development and empowerment. Moreover, they addressed major constraints to developing an effective and practical response worthy of implementation according to the four settings identified in the questionnaire of the ESCWA regional inquiry, namely, the general, structural, institutional and circumstantial setting.

2. Presentations made by participating agencies

(a) *Preparing young leaders: methodological vision*

36. Ms. Sheikha Mohammed al-Jabiri, Senior Researcher at the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage at the Ministry of Culture and Community Development, presented the paper of the Ministry of Culture and Youth in the United Arab Emirates, entitled "Preparing young leaders: a methodological vision". Ms. al-Jabiri underlined that making future leaders required a lot of systematic work within a comprehensive plan for youth care, education, rehabilitation and training. It further required developing youth skills with the most modern available means in order to enable them to rely on their own capacities to build their nations. She quoted His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates, who had underlined that, without leaders who incorporated leadership qualities and virtues, reforms in the Arab world would be below the desired level and, as a result, models of failure would be reproduced in all fields. In the end, it was the role of leaders to create success rather than failure in politics as in economics, in education as in sports, in good times as in harsh times, in times of war as in times of peace. As leaders reaped the fruit of their high positions, they were also responsible for failures and defeats.

37. Ms. al-Jabiri underlined that shaping leading personalities begins at home, and that the features of such personalities are shaped at school, which helps young men and women to explore their capacities that will qualify them to become future leaders. Such capacities include intelligence, seriousness, spirit of initiative and courage. The role of society and all its formal institutions complements previous roles. Ms. al-Jabiri gave several examples of youth empowerment and rehabilitation, including in the United Arab Emirates, where the official interest in making future leaders has led to the adoption of important programmes and projects, such as the Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed fund to support small enterprises. This fund aims to develop the spirit of investment of young men and women, support their investment initiatives, train and rehabilitate them so that they become able to manage their own projects within the framework of an economic strategy based on diversification of income sources and utilization of human potential.

(b) *Youth and HIV in the Arab region*

38. Mr. HamidReza Setayesh, Regional Adviser at the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), made a presentation, entitled "Youth and HIV in the Middle East and North Africa". In this presentation, he reported facts and data on the spread of HIV and AIDS in different regions of the world, including countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Middle East and North Africa. He pointed out that youth are among the most vulnerable groups to HIV because of their harmful practices. The number of people aged 15-24 who are infected with HIV every day is an estimated 5000, which is equivalent to 40 per cent of all new infections. Young women represent one-third of women who are HIV-positive, due to some customs and traditions that discriminate between genders and therefore make women more vulnerable to infection. The presentation included an overview of AIDS, modes of HIV transmission, means to reduce the spread, especially among youth, including preparing awareness programmes; disseminating information in schools, health facilities and communities; and using public and targeted information.

39. The presentation addressed the global youth-related goal, which was set out in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted by the General Assembly on 27 June 2001, which provides for setting national, specific time-bound targets for reaching the global target in the field of prevention. The internationally agreed goal is to reduce the rate of HIV spread among youth, both men and women, between 15 and 24 years by 25 per cent in the most affected countries by 2005, and by 25 per cent globally by 2010. The Declaration also calls for ensuring that by 2005 no less than 90 per cent, and by 2010 at least 95 per cent of young men and women aged between 15 and 24 years obtain information and education in the field of HIV, including peer education and education targeting youth in particular. They must also receive services necessary to acquire life skills aimed at reducing their vulnerability to infection by HIV, with the full partnership of youth, parents, families, educators and health-care providers.

(c) *Approach of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to the issues of population and development*

40. Mr. Abdullah al-Zoubi, Regional Adviser on Population and Development at the United Nations Population Fund, spoke about the Fund's approach to population and development in the Arab region. He stressed the need to build the capacities of youth by offering them opportunities, protecting them against risks, and involving them in the planning and decision-making processes, particularly on issues of concern to them. He also spoke about the importance attached by the Fund to civil society organizations concerned with youth issues, and of their flexible and effective role in helping youth and in conveying their opinions, especially in terms of confronting the challenges faced by the Arab region, primarily globalization, AIDS, climate change and armed conflict.

41. Mr. al-Zoubi also addressed the role of the United Nations Population Fund in empowering youth and protecting their rights by building youth skills and improving their health through national, regional and international programmes and in cooperation with Governments, civil society and youth organizations. The Fund provides youth with information and services; links them to employment programmes and supports their rights, especially the rights of young women and marginalized groups; and encourages youth participation in business leadership and decision-making. The Fund also provides technical and financial support to conduct specialized research on youth and their needs.

(d) *Role of the Pan Arab Project for Family Health*

42. Mr. Ahmed Abdel-Monem, Director of the Pan Arab Project for Family Health in the League of Arab States, made a presentation, entitled "The role of the Pan Arab Project for Family Health in providing data on youth attitudes and practices". He stated that the overall objectives of the project are to develop a database on health and population-related topics; provide necessary indicators to track progress in achieving the objectives of international conferences on population, social development, women, children and MDGs. He added that the concept of family health encompassed several objectives, namely: to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity related to pregnancy and childbirth; improve child health; empower women; encourage and strengthen the role and participation of men in reproductive health areas; eliminate such harmful practices as female genital mutilation, preferences for sons and violence against women; and meet the food needs of all family members. The project is implemented through the Arab Family Health Survey, training workshops, data analysis and dissemination, in addition to the publication of technical documents.

43. Mr. Abdel-Monem gave a detailed presentation on the tools used to conduct the Arab Family Health Survey, including the youth questionnaire that was undertaken in Algeria, Djibouti, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, and is set to be implemented in Iraq. This questionnaire covers many aspects of youth family life, in addition to their knowledge and health-related attitudes. The project is carried out in cooperation with all national stakeholders and research centres in order to identify necessary data and indicators, conduct field tests and training on the questionnaire.

3. *Summary of discussions held at the second session*

44. Participants at this session discussed the outcomes of the assessment of progress made in responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth, as reflected in the reports of participating Arab countries. They particularly commended Jordan, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates for their national reports, which followed the agreed upon outline for drafting national reports on the response to the World Programme of Action for Youth. Discussion outcomes can be summarized as follows:

(a) There is a need to examine the effects of wars in the region on youth mortality, disease and disability rates; on youth ability to pursue education; on their participation in economic activity and on their living conditions in general. Consequently, the priority of armed conflicts, which was identified by the World Programme of Action for Youth, has become an urgent priority in some Arab countries;

(b) There is a need to build a national database on youth, which must be accurate, reliable, timely, detailed and comparable across regions and over time;

(c) Youth integration in social development is not limited to their integration in employment and economic life. Rather it has other dimensions, such as guaranteed access to education, health services and participation in public life;

(d) Owing to unhealthy practices as well as drug and alcohol intake, many youth have become at risk and also vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Therefore, it is necessary to collect statistics on youth in order to identify their characteristics and the reasons for their delinquency;

(e) Youth unemployment rates are very high compared with general unemployment rates. In addition, youth looking for a job for the first time suffer from the “networks of relationships” phenomenon, also known as “connections” (wasta), which prevails in employment settings. Moreover, sectarian and other regionalist quota are implemented, which further limits employment opportunities for youth;

(f) Tunisia is the first Arab country to witness the opening of the demographic window, and should be prepared to reap the fruits of this historic opportunity;

(g) The prevalence of unhealthy lifestyles among youth, including unhealthy diets, smoking and lack of regular exercise, has led to a gradual rise in rates of youth obesity, diabetes, hypertension and other diseases. This requires educating youth about the importance of healthy lifestyles;

(h) The need for GCC countries to promote the participation of women in the labour market, both as a goal in itself and as a means to address the imbalance in the age and sex composition of the population. Such an imbalance stems from large numbers of male immigrant workers;

(i) There is a need to collect statistics on the phenomenon of “honour crimes” or “shame washing crimes” in order to assess their spread and put an end to them.

45. The debate over presentations made by regional organizations addressed the following:

(a) Advantages and disadvantages of the “individual leadership” and “collective leadership” patterns, and the important role of the centres for leadership in Arab countries, especially in GCC countries;

(b) Possible re-drafting of the “youth survey” within the Pan Arab Project for Family Health in line with the 15 priority areas set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth;

(c) There is a need for Arab countries to tackle AIDS in light of the increasing incidence of this disease, especially among youth.

C. MEASURES NEEDED TO FORMULATE AND IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH

1. *Project proposal on Strengthening National Capacities to Formulate Youth Policies*

46. Participants to this session discussed the drafting of ESCWA’s regional project for Strengthening National Capacities to Formulate Youth Policies: Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth. Discussions were held upon the recommendation of the Workshop on Reinforcing National Capacities in Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth: National Reports and Systematic Documentation of Accomplishments (Beirut, 17-18 December 2008). Participants also discussed a regional list of normative measurable indicators that could be adopted at the national level in order to measure and monitor progress made in implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth.

47. Ms. Khairieh Kadouh, Professor and Researcher at the Faculty of Education at the Lebanese University, spoke about the background and rationale of the project. She referred to the regional inquiry

conducted by ESCWA, with a view to identifying major problems and obstacles preventing the development of appropriate comprehensive national policies to integrate youth into the social development process. She underlined that the findings of the inquiry had revealed the existence of a high number of common challenges and difficulties that continued to hinder Government endeavours aimed at fulfilling their commitments to youth and to the international community.

48. The findings of the regional inquiry can be summed up as follows: (a) poor and/or non-existent knowledge of the modern scientific approach to address youth issues; (b) poor knowledge of the goals, targets and indicators identified by the World Programme of Action for Youth; (c) failure to adopt uniform terminology and concepts, and lack of statistical data on youth; (d) non-existent and/or inadequate coordination mechanisms within and among actors dealing with youth issues; (e) lack of clarity with regard to the functions, powers and resources accorded to those in charge of youth issues; (f) poor and/or non-existent youth participation in decision-making and policy formulation; (g) lack of interest in capacity-building for the purpose of youth policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and assessment; (h) lack of resource manuals on how to formulate, implement, monitor and evaluate any youth policy; (i) weak and/or insufficient research centres, media institutions, educational curricula and youth legislation; (j) inadequate financial resources allocated to research and to youth issues; (k) inadequate and/or non-existent dialogue and conflict settlement mechanisms, particularly given that youth are the primary victims in conflicts.

49. In the second part of the session, Ms. Batool Shakoory addressed the main components of the project, which are set to be implemented by ESCWA during the coming two years, in cooperation with the ministries and national institutions concerned with youth policies and programmes in Arab countries. The project aims to support decision makers in formulating youth policies and identifying necessary mechanisms to promote progress towards achieving the goals and targets set out in the Programme of Action for Youth. The project is expected to accomplish three major achievements, namely: (a) promote among policymakers the understanding of and support for the need to formulate national policies targeting youth; (b) enhance the capacity of policymakers to use the resource manual in the formulation, monitoring and implementation of national youth policies; and (c) adopt a list of national indicators to monitor progress in the implementation of priority areas set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth.

50. In order to achieve these goals, the Population and Social Development Section will seek to implement a number of activities that target policymakers in various ministries, in youth national councils and in other organizations in the field of youth policies and programmes in the Arab region. Such activities can be summarized as follows:

(a) Develop a regional resource manual on how to formulate and monitor the implementation of national youth policies;

(b) Hold a regional meeting to be attended by experts, focal points and national counterparts concerned with youth in order to discuss the manual;

(c) Publish the final version of the manual as part of an information kit that contains related reference publications;

(d) Promote the resource manual via electronic newsletters and during ESCWA meetings, and conduct missions to member countries with a view to ensuring the compatibility of the manual with national needs and particularities;

(e) Organize workshops for policymakers on how to use the manual in formulating integrated policies for youth;

(f) Provide advisory services to assist member countries in formulating integrated policies for youth or developing existing ones by using the manual;

(g) Implement an initial survey in some countries to assess their response to the manual;

(h) Reveal the outcomes of the survey and share lessons learned about how to use the manual at a regional meeting to be attended by experts as well as national focal points and counterparts concerned with youth;

(i) Carry out an inquiry on the readiness of countries to develop a list of national indicators;

(j) Implement national training workshops on sources and methodologies used to measure national indicators for monitoring progress in the implementation of the priority areas set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth;

(k) Produce awareness and advocacy material on national indicators for monitoring progress in the implementation of the priority areas as set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth;

(l) Organize a regional workshop to exchange national experiences and promote a regional list of indicators to monitor progress made in implementing the priority areas as set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth;

(m) Develop a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of goals and objectives as set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth, and promote a long-term initiative for developing a youth policies information system.

51. The third session was introduced by Mr. Abdul-Aziz Farah, a regional expert on population and development strategies. He gave a presentation on the project outputs, namely, a list of national indicators for monitoring progress in the priorities areas as set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth. Mr. Farah explained that the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth has constituted a strong push by the international community towards recognizing the value of youth as well as their role in social change and economic development, and towards highlighting the need to address obstacles hindering their integration into society. Consequently, this translated into the vital need to formulate and adopt concrete, measurable and time-bound indicators to assess progress made in youth development programmes.

52. Mr. Farah referred to obstacles faced by countries in the design and adoption of indicators, namely, the scarcity of accurate, reliable and comparable data; difficulty in identifying measurable indicators in some priority areas for youth development, such as globalization; collection of data on youth within data collection at the household level rather than through specialized surveys; and lack of specific data for youth sub-categories, including youth with disabilities or youth in conflict zones. Mr. Farah also underlined key indicators, which were proposed to measure youth development and were broken down according to priority areas as set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth.

2. Summary of discussions at the third session

53. During discussions on the project proposal by ESCWA on “Strengthening national capacities to formulate youth policies: Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth”, the following issues were raised:

(a) Given that the project proposal was ambitious, the proposed budget allocation needed to be increased in order to enable the implementation of all activities contained therein;

(b) There was a need to develop a list of national indicators aimed at monitoring progress in the implementation of priority areas as set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth;

(c) It was important to collect data on youth by conducting specialized surveys targeting this age group of the population, rather than through general censuses and household surveys;

(d) It could be possible to create a composite index on youth, such as the Human Development Index, which is periodically calculated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This composite index could be composed of several indicators, including education, employment, health and participation in

public life. Moreover, it needed to contain quantitative and qualitative indicators, and be comparable across regions and over time;

(e) There was a need to ensure the participation of youth in this project and give them the opportunity to identify their priorities and contribute to the formulation of programmes and plans designed for them;

(f) There was a need to activate the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in addressing youth issues;

(g) There was a need to encourage the participation of all Arab countries in this project, and to convene a workshop to discuss it in detail.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

54. The Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth in the Development Process was held in Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates, from 29 to 31 March 2009, under the patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, Supreme Chairperson of the Family Development Foundation and President of the General Women's Union, and in the presence of Her Excellency Minister of State, Ms. Maitha al Shamsi, and Her Excellency Minister of Social Affairs, Ms. Mariam al Roumi.

B. OPENING OF THE MEETING

55. Mr. Bader Omar al-Dafa, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, delivered the opening speech. He welcomed participants and thanked Her Highness, Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, for sponsoring the Meeting. He commended the initiative taken by the managers of the Family Development Foundation to provide financial, technical and logistical support to ESCWA, and to offer a large number of experts, researchers and decision makers the opportunity to participate in the Meeting. Mr. al-Dafa underlined that structure and age composition of the population in the Arab region are continuously reshaped through the process of demographic transition whereby more cohorts of working-age population appear, while other groups, primarily children, continue to shrink. He stated that these transformations and subsequent youth bulge have become a formidable challenge for Arab Governments, given that youth bulge is often associated with potential outbreaks of civil strife and local and sometimes regional unrest.

56. The Executive Secretary underlined that the inability of youth to contribute to the development of their communities can be explained not only by their lack of self-capacities to attend to the burdens of development, but also by the lack of Government opportunities provided to youth to participate in the economic, social and political development process, in addition to the lack of an integrated strategic vision aimed at creating adequate conditions to absorb this group in terms of both quantity and quality. He explained that the lack of such a vision has led to education policies that were not compatible with labour market requirements. Mr. al-Dafa called for vigilance and anticipation of the repercussions of the demographic transformations at national and regional levels. He commended the role of some Arab Governments that have taken positive steps towards enhancing youth integration in development through national programmes and through empowerment policies aimed at ensuring the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth.

57. Mr. Ali Bin Salem al-Kaabi, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Family Development Foundation in Abu Dhabi, delivered a speech on behalf of the Foundation. He conveyed to the participants the greetings of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, Supreme Chairperson of the Foundation, pointing out that she has spared no effort to help all young men and women, not only in the United Arab Emirates, but also at the regional and international levels. This is in line with the philosophy of Sheikha Fatima who has always adhered to just values and noble human goals. Mr. al-Kaabi noted that the United Arab Emirates has paid special attention to youth in the areas of science and knowledge through schools, universities and different areas of work. He added that he could reaffirm, with all humility and confidence,

that his country was now reaping the fruits of what they had sowed over the past years, and also that their vision with regard to providing care to youth had not changed; rather it had evolved to keep pace with changing times.

58. Mr. al-Kaabi invited participants to get acquainted with the experience of the United Arab Emirates in that regard. He called on them to benefit from the youth development model adopted in his country, which reflects a high degree of sophistication, civility and willingness to interact with the experiences of others. He concluded by commending the role of ESCWA as a regional organization that plays a distinct role in the service of humanity, regardless of gender, colour and race. ESCWA's approach was consistent with the strategy adopted by the United Arab Emirates, which has always called for dialogue among civilizations and supported the outcomes of the United Nations Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples. The United Arab Emirates believed that promoting the principles, ideals and energies of young women and men was pivotal to achieving social goals and objectives.

C. PARTICIPANTS

59. Participants at the Meeting included national counterparts appointed by member countries upon the request of ESCWA; experts from ESCWA and the Family Development Foundation in Abu Dhabi; senior advisors in the fields of social sciences, economics and demography; experts in national youth strategies and programmes; Government officials; researchers from national and regional centres for development; and experts from NGOs specialized in youth policies and issues. The list of participants is contained in the annex of this report.

Annex I

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