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for Africa
(ECA)

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**REPORT****INTERREGIONAL SEMINAR ON THE ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT OF INTERNATIONAL
TRANSPORT LINKAGES AND ON TRANSPORT FACILITATION
CAIRO, 26-28 JUNE 2007**

*United Nations Account Project on capacity-building through cooperation in developing
land and land-sea interregional transport linkages (2002-2007)*

Summary

The Interregional Seminar aimed at strengthening national capacities in terms of assessing the economic feasibility of alternative interregional transport linkages, and at introducing transport facilitation practices in general, and simplifying border crossing procedures along priority interregional transport linkages in particular.

The Seminar discussed progress made in terms of developing the following: (a) regional transport networks; (b) geographic information system (GIS) maps of interregional transport linkages; (c) the most economically viable linkages among United Nations regional commissions; (d) the current status and developments of border crossing procedures and formalities, and other transport facilitation issues; (e) selected good practices of transport facilitation; (f) funding transport infrastructure and transport facilitation; and (g) the remaining project activities.

The Meeting arrived at a set of conclusions and recommendations on those issues, which are outlined in this report.

CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	1-25	3
A. Developing regional transport networks.....	3	3
B. GIS maps of interregional transport linkages	4-7	3
C. Economically viable linkages among regional commissions	8-9	3
D. Transport facilitation	10-18	4
E. Funding of transport infrastructure and facilitation projects	19	5
F. Good practices of transport facilitation	20	5
G. Other initiatives	21-23	5
H. Remaining project activities	24-25	5
II. ORGANIZATION OF THE SEMINAR	26-61	5
<i>Annex</i>		10

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Meeting considered a range of issues related to the development of transport within the framework of the United Nations Development Account project, entitled "Capacity-building through cooperation in developing land and land-sea interregional transport linkages". Specifically, the Seminar discussed progress made in terms of developing the following: (a) regional transport networks; (b) geographic information system (GIS) maps of interregional transport linkages; (c) the most economically viable linkages among regional commissions, namely, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and ESCWA; (d) the current status and developments of border crossing procedures and formalities, and other transport facilitation issues; (e) selected good practices of transport facilitation; (f) funding for transport infrastructure and transport facilitation; and (g) the remaining project activities. Those are set forth below.

2. The role of ESCWA in terms of coordinating the project and the Meeting was noted with appreciation.

A. DEVELOPING REGIONAL TRANSPORT NETWORKS

3. The Meeting recognized the importance of sharing experiences aimed at developing regional transport networks among United Nations regional commissions, namely, ECA, ECE, ESCAP and ESCWA. Within that context, there was a general consensus that ECA could benefit from the experience of ECE, ESCWA and ESCAP in terms of formalizing the highway and the railway agreements in Africa.

B. GIS MAPS OF INTERREGIONAL TRANSPORT LINKAGES

4. The Meeting noted with appreciation the five draft GIS maps showing the interregional land and land-sea transport linkages among countries coming under the purview of ESCWA, ECA, ECE and ESCAP. The Meeting was informed that the maps collated and incorporated the interregional transport routes and linkages identified under previous activities of the project. Discussions focused on linkages between Asia and Africa that were not included in the ESCWA road and railway agreements; and Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen emphasized the need to include such linkages, particularly the proposed Madayek Tiran Bridge and the Bab Al-Mandab Bridge or Tunnel.

5. The regional commissions and the concerned countries were requested to review the draft maps and provide their comments to ESCWA by 16 July 2007. ECE informed participants that, with the exception of those Euro-Asian linkages identified under the project, additional information provided by ECE are identified in the European Agreement on Main International Traffic Arteries (AGR) and the European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC), which are not in GIS format. The delegates from ESCWA and ECA member countries are set to review the routes indicated and their descriptions as noted on the back of each map, and to inform their respective commissions of any comments and clarifications before the deadline of 16 July 2007. ECE and ESCAP will forward the maps to Turkey, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, respectively, for the same purpose; and ECA and ESCWA will also forward the maps to the countries that were not represented at the Meeting.

6. ESCWA provided compact discs of the draft GIS maps for delegations to study the relevant routes and provide their regional commissions with relevant comments within 15 days of receiving the disc.

7. ESCWA, ECA, ECE and ESCAP plan to work together to refine and complete the maps and prepare a second draft for review by delegates from participating countries. Additionally, ESCWA will consider the option of showing road and rail transport separately, thereby facilitating the use of such maps. ECA recommended that the consultant working on the maps needed to visit its GIS team in order to finalize Africa's linkages.

C. ECONOMICALLY VIABLE LINKAGES AMONG REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

8. The Meeting agreed on the improvement projects for the various countries in the ESCWA region that have proven viable, and recommended to implement improvements in line with the scheduled dates as

specified in the economic feasibility study of the proposed interregional transport linkages between ESCWA and ECE, ECA and ESCAP.

9. Participants recognized that social impacts of the proposed improvement projects needed to be given a priority, rather than prioritizing such projects purely on the basis of economic feasibility.

D. TRANSPORT FACILITATION

10. Despite the progress made in transport facilitation, participants agreed that a lot of work remained, including further and more intensified cooperation and coordination among agencies involved in border and transborder operations at the national level.

11. Participants requested the regional commissions to continue their efforts aimed at helping member countries to address transport facilitation issues by providing technical assistance and to back national efforts by promoting inter-country cooperation and coordinated actions; elaborating studies; undertaking new capacity-building activities; and organizing national and subregional facilitation workshops and training seminars, including promoting and formulating legal instruments and training trainers. Moreover, emphasis needs to be placed on easing customs clearance procedures at border crossing points, given that they are considered the main obstacles to transport and trade facilitation.

12. Noting the importance of accession to and implementation of international agreements and conventions on transport facilitation, including those developed by ECE, participants encouraged those countries that have not yet acceded to the principal facilitation conventions to consider adopting and implementing them.

13. Several delegations requested the regional commissions to continue to hold seminars and workshops, which promote understanding of international conventions, and to provide a platform to discuss other issues relating to trade and transport facilitation. Additionally, the participants noted the importance of engaging with customs authorities and other related entities, and of ensuring their participation at future seminars to be organized by the regional commissions.

14. The time/cost/distance model developed and implemented by ESCAP was considered to be a useful tool to be applied on selected corridors in the ECA and ESCWA regions. The preparatory work to apply the model could commence within the framework of the current project, extending possibly under a new project proposal.

15. The participants noted the important role of national transport and trade facilitation committees (NTTFCs) in addressing facilitation issues at national and regional levels, and the tangible results produced in that sphere in some countries owing to the national efforts and the support offered by the regional commissions. There was a general consensus of the need to take all necessary measures aimed at further strengthening such committees.

16. The participants encouraged conducting joint meetings among NTTFC committees with the aims of exchanging experiences and solving problems and obstacles of the border crossing points.

17. Moreover, the participants encouraged the respective countries to translate the transport facilitation recommendations into action plans, as outlined in the ESCWA study on transport and trade facilitation, with particular emphasis on the draft action plan prepared for Egypt.

18. Owing to the fact that transport and trade facilitation problems are continuous in nature, participants recommended to follow up such ongoing activities as the organization of workshops and the provision of advisory services on facilitation issues, including international transport conventions and a new project that could continue this work.

E. FUNDING OF TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITATION PROJECTS

19. The participants noted with appreciation the information provided by the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and its readiness to consider funding transport infrastructure and facilitation projects that are regional in nature. In particular, the regional commissions were encouraged to submit relevant project proposals to IDB for due consideration for funding in coordination with concerned Governments.

F. GOOD PRACTICES OF TRANSPORT FACILITATION

20. The participants noted with appreciation the information provided by the International Road Transport Union (IRU) regarding the Black Sea Highway Caravan and encouraged the regional commissions to collaborate with IRU in organizing similar events in other regions.

G. OTHER INITIATIVES

21. The participants recognized the existence of other initiatives on transport and trade facilitation within the United Nations system at global, regional and subregional levels, including, for example, the Almaty Programme of Action.

22. The representative of the Institute of National Planning (INP) in Egypt briefed the Meeting on the work led by INP within the framework of the Nile Basin Initiative of 1999, which involves significant facilitation issues along the Nile Basin corridors. He explained that much of the material and models presented in the Meeting could be highly beneficial to that endeavour by INP.

23. The participants noted the initiative by INP with appreciation and agreed to provide technical assistance to that activity through applicable modalities in the United Nations system with the close cooperation of INP, ESCWA, ECA and ESCAP.

H. REMAINING PROJECT ACTIVITIES

24. The participants noted with appreciation the information provided by the regional commissions on the remaining activities to be implemented within the framework of the project before the end of 2007.

25. Several member countries suggested additional activities as indicated above. While current efforts needed to focus first on the successful completion of the project, there was a general consensus that additional activities could be conducted within the frameworks of subsequent projects, with funding from several sources, including the Development Account and IDB.

II. ORGANIZATION OF THE SEMINAR

26. The Interregional Seminar on the Economic Assessment of International Transport Linkages and on Transport Facilitation (Cairo, 26-28 June 2007) was organized by ESCWA, with the cooperation of ECA, ECE, ESCAP, and was held under the auspices of the Minister of Transport in Egypt, H.E. Mohammad Mansour. The Meeting was organized within the framework of the United Nations Development Account project, entitled "Capacity-building through cooperation in developing land and land-sea interregional transport linkages".

27. The Meeting was attended primarily by the project focal points that were officially nominated by their respective countries in the ECA, ECE, ESCAP and ESCWA regions; other national officials concerned with the development of transport infrastructure and facilitation at interregional border crossings from public and private sectors; selected consultants from the respective regions; and representatives from IRU and IDB. The list of participants is contained in the annex of this report.

28. The Meeting was opened jointly by the Vice Chairman of the Transport Planning Authority, Mr. Hassan Selim, on behalf of the Minister of Transport in Egypt, H.E. Mr. Mohammad Mansour; the Project Coordinator and Transport Team Leader at the Globalization and Regional Integration Division in ESCWA,

Mr. Nabil Safwat; the Chief of Transport Infrastructure Section, Transport Division in ECE, Mr. Michalis Adamantiadis; the Chief of Transport Facilitation Section, Transport and Tourism Division in ESCAP, Ms. Geetha Karandawala; and the Economic Affairs Officer, New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and Regional Integration Division in ECA, Ms. Marie Therese Guiebo.

29. Mr. Nabil Safwat from ESCWA briefed the participants on behalf of all the regional commissions on the status of the project and the objectives of the Meeting. In turn, the participants noted with appreciation the role played by ESCWA in coordinating the project.

30. Each of the regional commissions briefed the participants on the development of transport networks, the progress made to date and the plans for the future. The Meeting noted the importance of sharing experiences among ECE, ESCWA, ESCAP and ECA, and encouraged the opportunity to learn from each other.

31. In his presentation on the development of the African highway network and other initiatives, Mr. Robert Lisinge from ECA stressed the importance of regional transport networks to Africa's socio-economic development, focusing on the Trans-African Highway Network, which was established in the early 1970s to provide direct routes between capitals in Africa, thereby contributing to the political, economic and social integration of the continent and linking areas of production and consumption.

32. Additionally, the presentation outlined the constraints to the development of regional infrastructure in Africa, including the limited funds of African countries, complexity of donor funding, and limited technical capacity of African countries and economic communities.

33. The presentation underscored ongoing efforts aimed at addressing problems related to infrastructure development in Africa and proposed that the way forward was to harness the potential of public-private partnerships (PPPs). That requires capacity-building of public sector officials in order to plan, negotiate and manage PPPs; and of countries to adopt appropriate investment frameworks aimed at attracting potential investors.

34. Mr. Michalis Adamantiadis from ECE presented the progress made on the Trans-European Motorway (TEM) and Trans-European Railway (TER) projects master plan, under which a total of 21 countries in central, eastern and southeast Europe identified their road and rail backbone networks and evaluated and prioritized 451 transport infrastructure projects at a total cost of 102 billion euros. That work is being followed up by member countries of TEM and TER; and the monitoring mechanisms, which have been established under TEM and TER projects, and master plan are set to be received in 2008.

35. The participants recognized the relevance of that work for the coordinated development of international transport infrastructures and stressed that the methodology used by the TEM and TER master plan can serve as example to other regions.

36. Mr. Dong-Woo Ha, Chief of Transport Infrastructure Section, Transport and Tourism Division in ESCAP, presented the progress made on implementing the Asian Highway (AH) Network and other initiatives. He illustrated how AH and Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) had been formulated through a series of corridor studies and further formalized through negotiation of intergovernmental agreements. Additionally, he briefed the Meeting on the new initiatives by ESCAP aimed at developing intermodal networks of dry ports in order to realize the vision of an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system, as contained in the Busan Declaration on Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, which was adopted by the Ministerial Conference on Transport (Busan, Republic of Korea, 11 November 2006).

37. Mr. Bassam Anani from ESCWA briefed the Meeting on the status of implementation of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq, the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq and the Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Transport in the Arab Mashreq. He indicated that a total of 10 ESCWA member countries had ratified the Agreement on International Roads and that genuine implementation of the prepared action plan of the Agreement had taken place in many countries, with official inauguration ceremonies in Jordan, Egypt and the Syrian Arab Republic.

38. Equally, seven ESCWA member countries had ratified the Agreement on International Railways, with genuine steps undertaken aimed at establishing the feasibility of constructing the missing links in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. The action plan for the implementation of the Agreement has been approved by the Committee on Transport in ESCWA. Moreover, the action plan for implementing the Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Transport, which was ratified by five member countries, has been prepared and will be submitted to the ninth session of the Committee on Transport for approval.

39. Mr. Nabil Safwat from ESCWA presented the draft GIS maps of the interregional land and land-sea transport linkages identified within the project. The participants noted with appreciation the five GIS maps showing the interregional linkages among countries coming under the purview of ESCWA, ECA, ECE and ESCAP. The Meeting was informed that the maps collated and incorporated the interregional linkages identified under the project. Within that context, the Syrian Arab Republic, Saudi Arabia and Yemen requested to include the missing linkages connecting Asia and Africa, the bridge at Madayek Tiran between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and the bridge or tunnel at Bab Al-Mandab between Djibouti and Yemen.

40. Mr. Bassam Anani from ESCWA presented a study, entitled “Economic evaluation of ESCWA interregional linkages with ECE, ESCAP and ECA regions”, which detailed the methodology used to determine the economic evaluation of the various sections along the land linkages agreed upon in both Amman (30 May-1 June 2005) and Rabat (8-10 December 2005). The presentation, which analysed a total of 77 road links, discussed the data collection method, traffic modelling, the estimation of both the costs and benefits, and the financial analysis used, with assumptions associated with each.

41. In the area of economic analysis, the benefits include vehicle operational cost (VOC) savings, value of travel time savings and savings resulting from the reduction of accident losses. The result of the economic analysis was that all the countries studied could benefit economically from the improvement projects. A sensitivity analysis was conducted, which confirmed the economic viability of the projects for all countries. Finally, the requirements for immediate, medium- and long-term improvements were presented.

42. The discussions focused on the fact that the scope of the study was limited to road improvements, rather than encompassing rail and sea linkages. It was not clear how the economic evaluation was extended from project level to country level. Finally, it was stressed that some of the assumptions were not particularly realistic, especially with regard to the traffic projections.

43. Mr. Mohamed Jemal from ECA assessed international transport linkages between ECA, ECE and ESCWA. The presentation focused on the main transport corridors linking Africa to ECE and ESCWA that are assessed on a subregional basis in relation to the Regional Spatial Development Initiatives Programme (RSDIP). Three subregions, namely, Northern, Eastern and Southern Africa were considered in terms of their basic features, economic characteristics and their inter-linkages with ECE and/or ESCWA.

44. Mr. Michalis Adamantiadis from ECE presented the results of the prioritization within the framework of the Euro-Asian Transport Linkages (EATL) project, which identified, evaluated and prioritized 230 projects at a total cost of \$43 billion. Those results were considered among the important outcomes of the Development Account project, and the methodology used can also serve as an example to other regions.

45. The participants noted that the EATL prioritization framework could represent a first attempt towards a coordinated investment strategy in the development of Euro-Asian routes; that implementation was a long-term exercise that required political will and commitment of all concerned countries, in addition to close coordination and monitoring; and that the continuation of the EATL project to a second phase (2008-2011) was essential.

46. Mr. Mohamed al-Ghandour from the Ministry of Transport in Egypt made a presentation on behalf of Mr. Hassan Selim on the road and railway routes connecting Egypt with its neighbouring countries. He highlighted the existing and proposed railway connecting corridors with the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Saudi Arabia and the Sudan; and presented the road projects under study aimed at connecting Egypt with its neighbours.

47. Mr. Abdel Razzak Hassan, the representative of Iraq, briefed the Meeting on the current status of road and railway networks, as well as sea ports, in Iraq; and highlighted the planned projects to link Iraq with its neighbouring countries, namely, Jordan, Kuwait, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey.

48. Mr. Ait Abdellah Boubeker, the representative of Algeria, gave a detailed presentation on the situation of the railway network in Algeria and the development of short- and long-term actions taken in that regard. He briefed the Meeting on the current development projects on east-west corridors in the Maghreb region, and the forthcoming projects due to be implemented by 2015 and 2025.

49. Mr. Mahmoud al-Haffar, the representative from the Syrian Arab Republic, highlighted those new projects in road and railway networks directly related to interregional linkages of the project. He presented the corresponding maps and photographs of those projects.

50. A joint representation by two ESCWA consultants, namely, Mr. Mohamed Sadeg and Mr. Fathi al-Tuni, and the Transport Team Leader at ESCWA, Mr. Nabil Safwat, highlighted the consolidated comparative study on transport and trade facilitation in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic. They briefed the participants on the objectives of the related studies in the four concerned ESCWA members, the methodology and main activities of those studies, and the nature of trade and transport, as well as the efforts that have been maintained to facilitate both. The presentation contained the main findings of the study and demonstrated the obstacles and the solutions of transport and trade facilitation. Additionally, it focused on the case study of Egypt that included a detailed description of a proposed comprehensive action plan for transport and trade facilitation in that country.

51. Mr. Niels Rasmussen from ESCWA gave a presentation on the rationale for and process of establishing NTTFCs in the ESCWA region. Facilitation is viewed as an important part of the Integral Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM). Approval and support for the establishment of NTTFCs were obtained from the twenty-first Ministerial Session of ESCWA in 2001 and the third session of the Committee on Transport in 2002. Subsequently, ESCWA prepared an NTTFC guide in Arabic, undertook several national facilitation studies and conducted a series of facilitation workshops in member countries. The campaign to establish NTTFCs was well received and, currently, eight ESCWA member countries have established such committees or steering committees, namely, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

52. Mr. Gordan Anyango from ECA presented a summary of the cargo-tracking system in East African corridors. He briefed the Meeting about the advantages of that system in the countries where it is applied and the problems still facing its full implementation.

53. Mr. Artur Bouten, expert from ECE Transport Division informed the participants of the significant advantages for trade, transport and Governments of acceding to the main legal instruments in the field of border crossing facilitation, as administered by ECE. In particular, he pointed out the important role of the TIR Convention of 1975, which provides the only existing global intermodal transit procedure for the development of national economies. Furthermore, he introduced other conventions, including the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods of 1982, the Customs Convention on the Temporary Importation of Commercial Road Vehicles of 1956, and the Customs Convention on Containers of 1972, which could all yield substantial benefits to countries that accede to them and implement effectively their provisions. Mr. Bouten offered the expertise of ECE to countries in terms of preparing, acceding and implementing the legal parts of those important conventions.

54. Ms. Geetha Karandawala from ESCAP gave a presentation on the non-physical obstacles to the smooth movement of goods in the ESCAP region and the strategies being implemented to address them, including the development and application of the ESCAP time and distance model, the promotion of important international conventions allying and strengthening trade and transport facilitation committees, and the development of multimodal transport and logistics and skills development and training. Additionally, the presentation highlighted some of the joint activities undertaken in transport facilitation under the ECE/ESCAP component of the project.

55. Experts from various participating countries, namely, Algeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tanzania informed the Meeting on their country facilitation status and developments. They recognized that non-physical obstacles, which are common phenomena in many countries, increase the transport costs, make their exports uncompetitive in international markets, increase the prices of imported goods and prevent their effective participation in international trade. Those obstacles include legislation that differs from one country to another; different and arbitrary taxes and charges; cumbersome, complex and time-consuming border procedures; unofficial payments and kickbacks; lack of adequate infrastructure; insufficient use of modern technology at borders; and inadequate know-how and training of personnel.

56. Moreover, participating experts presented the progress made in their countries, including the establishment/strengthening of transport and trade facilitation mechanisms, as well as other measures taken to improve international transport.

57. Mr. Ait Abdellah, the representative of Algeria, highlighted the measures of transport and trade facilitation taken for developing trade and transport.

58. Ms. Ihab Mawaldi, the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, focused on the stages of activities undertaken by NTTFC in that country and the role played by ESCWA in terms of offering technical support for it. Moreover, she listed the achievements of the Committee in strengthening trade and transport facilitation.

59. Mr. Haydar Ozkan, General Delegate of IRU, presented conclusions and video highlights of the Black Sea Ring Highway Caravan, which was organized in public-private partnership with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) from Belgrade to Istanbul around the Black Sea Basin. Within that context, IRU expressed its readiness to organize an Asian highway caravan between Tokyo and Istanbul, as well as an Arab Mashreq road caravan from Dubai to Istanbul under the patronage of relevant regional commissions, namely, ESCAP and ESCWA, respectively.

60. The participants noted with great interest the Black Sea Ring Highway Caravan and supported the IRU proposal for consideration and realisation by the relevant regional commissions. The Meeting was also informed of efforts aimed at promoting subregional corridors in Africa.

61. Mr. Sohail Mitha from IDB presented an overview of the Bank in terms of establishment, mission, membership, strategic objectives, priority areas and cooperation with other financial institutions, and talked about its role in financing infrastructure and development projects especially in the transport sector. Additionally, he shared the experience of IDB and lessons learned from financing a number of national and interregional road projects in West Africa; and emphasized the importance of developing an international transport regulatory framework for transit agreements, customs procedure, and cross-border trans-shipment regulations, and showed interest in providing support in that regard.

Annex*

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