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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Report

Tenth Workshop on Voluntary National Reviews in the Arab Region Beirut, 4 March 2024

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, organized the tenth Workshop on Voluntary National Reviews in the Arab Region, at ESCWA premises in Beirut on 4 March 2024, ahead of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development held from 5 to 7 March 2024.

The thematic sessions of the workshop focused on financing sustainable development and the dynamic tools developed by ESCWA in that field and presented some country experiences. The workshop included interventions on the preparations of countries submitting their voluntary national reviews in 2024, and informed participants of preparations for the High-level Political Forum and the Summit of the Future scheduled for 2024.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), organized the tenth Workshop on Voluntary National Reviews at ESCWA premises in Beirut on 4 March 2024,¹ ahead of the [Arab Forum for Sustainable Development](#) held from 5 to 7 March 2024.
2. The workshop focused on financing sustainable development as a global and regional priority and a key instrument for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The sessions included presentations on the financing context in the Arab region and the national, regional and global efforts to overcome challenges related to financing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The sessions also highlighted a set of interactive tools and resources developed by ESCWA to support the endeavours of Arab countries.
3. One of the workshop sessions focused on the preparations of Arab countries submitting their voluntary national reviews (VNRs) in 2024, and informed participants of preparations for the [High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#) and the [Summit of the Future](#) scheduled for 2024.

I. Outcomes of the workshop

4. The following is a summary of the key messages emanating from the workshop:
 - (a) In view of the complex challenges facing countries in the region, it has become essential to identify priorities related to development and government spending. The development finance tools developed by ESCWA can support States in taking appropriate actions to mobilize resources for the financing of sustainable development from various sources, public or private, local or international, conventional or innovative;
 - (b) The importance of voluntary local reviews is increasing in the Arab countries and worldwide, due to their prominent role in supporting the localization of SDGs. In this context, there is a need for guiding methodologies and intensive efforts to produce data at the local level;
 - (c) The VNRs of conflict-affected Arab States focus on the impact of conflict on the SDGs, convey messages in this respect to the international community, and are accompanied by analytical reports for internal use;
 - (d) The VNR process provides an opportunity to review adopted policies, including for example incentives offered by Arab States to attract foreign direct investments, which can sometimes be excessive and not lead to an increase in investment flows;
 - (e) It is important for Arab States to estimate the SDG implementation costs according to their national targets by using methodologies adopted at the international level or by the relevant United Nations working group, in line with national circumstances and contexts;
 - (f) There is a need to prepare case studies from the region and beyond, centred on financing for development, that can be used by Arab States to formulate integrated national financing strategies;
 - (g) Integrated national financing frameworks (INFFs) and information provided by ESCWA interactive tools should be used to prepare VNR reports;

¹ Regional workshops on voluntary national reviews have been organized periodically since 2019 to provide a platform for dialogue, knowledge sharing and peer learning at the request of ESCWA member States. For more information, please visit the link to the [regional workshops](#) organized to date.

(h) There was a suggestion to prepare an Arab regional development plan with financing protocols, similar to that of Africa;

(i) The international community should be called to decouple reconstruction and refugee support from development assistance;

(j) The Summit of the Future and the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development should be leveraged as they provide opportunities to advance Arab financing priorities and steer the reform of the international financial architecture by taking into account the circumstances and specificities of the region, and in accordance with the adopted Arab Financing for Development Framework.

5. The presentation and discussion of national experiences revealed a range of **good practices**, including the following:

(a) Adopting innovative institutional frameworks to continuously and systematically engage stakeholders in formulating operational procedures, projects, contracts and investments in support of achieving the SDGs (as in the case of "SDGs in focus laboratories" established in Oman);

(b) Establishing digital platforms and databases with indicators to monitor SDG implementation at the local level (as in the case of Morocco);

(c) Developing integrated national frameworks to finance Arab visions and sustainable development efforts, particularly for projects with social and environmental returns (as in the case of the [Sustainable Finance Framework](#) in Oman);

(d) Including a section on financing for development in the SDG roadmap, which is based on the VNR (as in the case of the [2022 VNR for Jordan](#));

(e) Incorporating appropriate financing solutions for each goal in the different chapters of the VNR report (as in the case of the [2023 VNR for Saudi Arabia](#), which focused on mobilizing the private sector to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs).

II. Summary of the sessions

A. Session 1: Overcoming the challenge of financing sustainable development in the Arab region

6. The first session set the scene for discussions by providing a brief analysis of the financing context in the Arab region and the national, regional and global efforts to overcome relevant challenges. The session was facilitated by Ms. Jana El-Baba, Sustainable Development Officer at the 2030 Agenda and SDG Coordination Cluster at ESCWA.

7. Mr. Hisham Taha, Economic Advisor and Head of Financing for Development at the Shared Economic Prosperity Cluster at ESCWA, made a presentation on financing for development in which he pointed out that the VNR reports were mostly descriptive, lacked an analysis of financing policies, tools and sources, and did not reflect the requirements for financing the SDGs at the national level. Given the increasing importance of financing, Mr. Taha noted that some States were reviewing the VNR mechanism and considering other processes for monitoring and evaluation, including those contained in the INFFs and the International Monetary Fund mechanisms. He also pointed out the serious challenge of financing the SDGs given that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimated the global financing gap at \$4.5 trillion annually, while the United Nations Working Group, of which ESCWA was a member, estimated the regional gap at \$600 billion annually. He noted that reforming the global financing system was one of the most important requirements to accelerate and incentivize the SDG process. For example, during the COVID-19

crisis, many funding sources proposed by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda proved inadequate and their added value was low. In addition, Mr. Taha highlighted the official development assistance (ODA) gap as only five States had fulfilled their ODA commitments, noting that what counted as ODA varied considerably among donor countries. He then stated that the flow of foreign investment to the Arab region was volatile and difficult to estimate, noting a considerable gap between outflows (\$50 billion) and inflows (\$60 billion). He concluded by stressing the importance of conveying a renewed Arab position in preparation for the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, to be organized in Barcelona, Spain, in 2025, which would represent an opportunity to adjust the course of action and rearrange priorities.

8. Ms. Lara Geadah, Senior Research Assistant at the 2030 Agenda and SDG Coordination Cluster at ESCWA, gave an overview of SDG financing policies and mechanisms, based on the results of the forthcoming [Arab Sustainable Development Report 2024](#). The report showed that domestic financial resources allocated to finance the SDGs in the Arab region remained low due to the absence of effective tax reforms, weak anti-corruption efforts, excessive military spending, and shrinking fiscal space due to crises. Ms. Geadah cited some examples of mechanisms and tools for financing specific SDGs, including: the Incheon Declaration, which included two benchmarks for measuring the amount of funding allocated to education (SDG 4), the adoption of a comprehensive framework for a gender-responsive national budget (SDG 5), financing mechanisms for clean energy initiatives such as green bonds (SDG 7), and climate action financing mechanisms such as debt-for-climate swaps (SDG 13). She concluded by noting that limited spending on research and development in the region was a major obstacle to achieving all SDGs, in addition to the weak decentralization of budgets and revenues, which hindered cities from enhancing their revenue streams.

9. Mr. Tanner Boisjolie, Associate Economic Affairs Officer at the 2030 Agenda and SDG Coordination Cluster at ESCWA, tackled the issue of reforms of the international financial architecture, which would be on the agenda of the 2024 Summit of the Future. He explained that the path leading to the Summit had begun in 2020 with member countries recognizing the multilateral challenges facing the global order, followed in 2021 by the "Our Common Agenda" document that recommended convening the Summit of the Future. He added that the reforms to be discussed at the Summit were of great importance given that the international financial architecture had been designed for purposes that were incompatible with today's challenges, resulting in a dramatic increase in debt and debt servicing, weakened access by countries to liquidity in crisis situations, and wider SDG financing gap. Mr. Boisjolie explained that the draft Pact for the Future issued by the Summit was aligned with the recommendations of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in several areas, including: rebalancing power and representation in international financial institutions, allocating at least half a billion dollars in financial incentives for the SDGs, reconsidering how to distribute financial liquidity in times of crisis according to actual need, restructuring debt and enhancing debt transparency. Finally, he recommended reviewing [the policy brief on reforms to the international financial architecture](#) and the [draft Pact for the Future](#), which was still under discussion.

10. Mr. Mohamed Abdel Maqsood Hassan, Legal Researcher in the Department of Sustainable Development and International Cooperation at the League of Arab States, presented the efforts of the League of Arab States in supporting SDG financing, which included institutional structures such as the activities of the Sustainable Development Committee, initiatives and partnerships with regional and international organizations, in addition to various publications such as the report on [Promoting Sustainable Finance and Climate Finance in the Arab Region](#), the report on [Financing Sustainable Development in Egypt](#) and a study on sustainable finance in the Arab region.² He touched on the themes covered by that study, such as green and sustainable financing practices in some Arab countries, the impact of crises, and the role of organizations, including Arab funds, in providing financing, noting that the study also highlighted regional financing challenges and a roadmap proposal.

11. Ms. Aseel Hassan, Director General of the Public Debt Management Unit at the Ministry of Finance in Oman, delivered an online statement on the Sustainable Finance Framework in Oman, which was part of the

² For a summary of the study, please see the presentation delivered ([in Arabic](#)) during the workshop.

implementation of [Oman Vision 2040](#). She reviewed the Framework components, which included the use and management of proceeds, and project evaluation. The Framework was developed in phases, starting with its formulation by the Ministry of Finance, the identification of eligible projects that formed the asset register, and the engagement of experts to evaluate the Framework. Ms. Hassan gave examples of community-based and green projects in the fields of renewable energy, climate change adaptation, infrastructure, and economic and social advancement. Finally, she stressed the expected benefits of the Framework, including encouraging government and private entities to report on their efforts to achieve net-zero emissions, building capacity among ministries in environmental, social and governance issues, establishing good environmental and community practices, and attracting foreign investment to Oman.

12. The ensuing discussion focused on the following:

(a) The difficulty faced by conflict-affected countries in accessing financing, which was often directed towards humanitarian issues and did not necessarily feed into development. Therefore, a triple nexus approach linking relief, development and peace could be useful to enhance the return on financing;

(b) The need to take the national context into account and to focus on national priorities to determine which SDGs should be funded so as to ensure the optimal use of available funding. Discussions also tackled the possibility of leveraging SDG localization efforts and the resulting reports on national priority-setting, as well as the integrated financing frameworks prepared by ESCWA;

(c) The gap between planning and financing, which was a primary obstacle to financing sustainable development, along with various challenges in the Arab region such as increased indebtedness, interest rates, and high debt service;

(d) The importance of adopting a new regional position and identifying future Arab priorities in the process leading up to the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, which would represent an opportunity to reform the international and regional financing system and structures.

B. Session 2: Tools to better finance national SDG priorities

13. The session reviewed the toolkits developed by ESCWA to assist Arab countries in financing priority SDGs at the national level. Some best practices for reporting funding in VNR reports were also discussed. The session was moderated by Ms. Hania Sabbidin Dimassi, Associate Programme Management Officer at the 2030 Agenda and SDG Coordination Cluster at ESCWA.

14. Mr. Nathaniel Martin, Associate Economic Affairs Officer, and Ms. Dana Hamdan, Research Assistant at the Shared Economic Prosperity Cluster at ESCWA, made a joint presentation on the [Social Expenditure Monitor](#) developed by ESCWA to help Arab countries devise more efficient and effective budgets to achieve the SDGs. Ms. Hamdan pointed out that the Social Expenditure Monitor was a tool that monitored public spending in seven areas, namely: education, health, housing, the labour market, social protection, culture and environmental protection, and broke spending into current and capital expenditure. It also linked spending to specific SDG targets and to the social group that directly benefited from it (e.g. children, women or older persons). Mr. Martin gave a presentation on the data currently available through the Social Expenditure Monitor, which covered nine Arab countries, using Jordan and Tunisia as examples. He then demonstrated how the tool could be used to assess the efficiency of social spending and improve results while maintaining existing spending levels. He invited participants to consult the “[Social Expenditure Monitor for Arab States](#)” report issued by ESCWA and its partners for more information.

15. Ms. Maya Hammoud, Research Assistant at the Shared Economic Prosperity Cluster at ESCWA, gave a presentation on the [INFFs](#), describing them as planning and implementation frameworks that helped countries assess financing gaps to achieve the nationally determined SDGs, and close those gaps by leveraging the full range of financing sources – whether public or private, local or international. Ms. Hammoud stressed that

INFFs did not aim to replace existing policies and institutional arrangements but to build on them. The United Nations Inter-Agency Task Team had developed global guidance on the steps required to operationalize INFFs based on four pillars: (a) diagnosing the financing landscape, assessing gaps and identifying risks; (b) developing a risk-informed financing strategy that would take into account equity and social and environmental concerns, and would address the potential spillover effects and trade-offs; (c) collecting the necessary information for policymakers to monitor progress and make decisions, and for stakeholders to hold funders accountable; (d) developing a mechanism to enhance governance and coordination so as to ensure State ownership, intra-governmental cooperation and the engagement of all stakeholders. At the end of her presentation, Ms. Hammoud pointed out that designing and implementing INFFs was a dynamic process that varied according to each country's specificities and context.

16. Mr. Georges Stephan, Financing Expert and Economic Assistant at the Shared Economic Prosperity Cluster at ESCWA, presented the [National SDG-costing Simulator](#), noting the importance of accurately assessing costs and not comparing countries to each other. In the absence of consensus on a single methodology, ESCWA followed a number of methodologies, including national assessments, methodologies developed by the United Nations specialized and SDG custodian agencies, the computation methods of international financial institutions, in addition to ESCWA estimates. Mr. Stephan stressed that costing was a dynamic process affected by many variables; during the Covid-19 outbreak, for instance, sweeping changes occurred at all levels, including country priorities.

17. Ms. Rasha Hijazi, Financing Expert and Economic Assistant at the Shared Economic Prosperity Cluster at ESCWA, delivered a presentation on the SDG Financing Simulator of ESCWA, which included the following three tools: first, the SDG Financing Outlook Simulator, aimed at providing projections of financing sources based on gross domestic product projections until 2030, taking into account the impact of global shocks on financing channels and pathways; second, the SDG Financing Gap Estimator, aimed at estimating the additional financial resources required to close national financing gaps and achieve the SDGs; and third, the SDG Financing Solver, aimed at estimating the level of economic growth needed to generate the required increase in financing, close national financing gaps, and identify untapped potential in private and public, international and domestic financing.

18. Mr. Georges Stephan also presented the Integrated Budget Intelligence Toolkit (i-BIT), which included six AI-based tools to link current and projected government spending to progress or decline in national development indicators. Such a tool would help governments improve spending efficiency and optimize budgets to minimize the potential damage resulting from austerity measures and achieve the best possible development returns when taking expansionary measures. Drawing on the case of Jordan, Mr. Stephan provided an illustrative example in which the tool showed a correlation between the marked decline in SDG 8 and the stagnation of economic spending over the past fifteen years. Furthermore, the tool showed that increased spending on SDGs 4, 8 and 9 might affect national development indicators, and that the existing scenario offered an opportunity to improve the efficiency of government spending by 17 per cent.

19. Ms. Jana El-Baba stressed the importance of integrating SDG financing issues into the VNR reports, thereby enhancing the core VNR functions. She then presented examples of good VNR practices including analyses of SDG expenditure plans, detailed assessments of financing needs, information on ways to mobilize the required financial resources, and messages to the international community regarding ODA. She concluded by stressing that finance reporting in the VNR report was not limited to SDG 17 reporting and could be mentioned in parts of the report relating to the overall context, policies and enabling environment, and means of implementation, for example.

20. In that context, Ms. Sabbidin Dimassi noted that ESCWA was working to identify good VNR practices for Arab countries. She pointed out that the research phase had been completed, and work was underway to transfer the information collected by Arab countries' focal points to an electronic database, adding that the related Internet link would be published soon. She hoped that additional good practices would continue to feed into the database on a regular basis.

21. The ensuing discussion focused on the following:

(a) The importance of taking into account financing risks, in particular volatility in oil prices, which greatly affected oil-dependent countries, as well as political and environmental variables and risks;

(b) The use of social spending for the development of peripheral areas to eradicate poverty rather than pass it on through generations. This could be achieved, for example, by making subsidies conditional on the schooling of children;

(c) The selection of performance indicators for social spending and of countries as a benchmark to compare spending efficiency;

(d) The added value of INFFs, which lied in multi-stakeholder engagement;

(e) The challenge of determining the optimal sequence of funding actions according to the existing national context;

(f) The major challenge posed by governance, especially for least developed countries and countries in fragile situations, where it was difficult to attract and monitor contributions from the private sector and international development partners, and align them with development efforts.

C. Session 3: Preparations for the 2024 voluntary national reviews

22. The session provided Arab States preparing their VNRs in 2024 with the opportunity to showcase their progress, the new approaches and tools adopted, challenges they faced, and next steps. The session also addressed preparations for the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the Summit of the Future to be held in 2024. The session was moderated by Ms. Nada El-Agizy, Director of Sustainable Development and International Cooperation Department at the League of Arab States.

23. Mr. Taher Belhassan, General Director of the Planning Institute and Head of the Sustainable Development Committee at the Ministry of Planning in Libya, presented the steps taken in his country to prepare the 2024 VNR (which was second after the [2020 VNR](#)). Those steps included restructuring the Sustainable Development Committee and raising the engagement level of stakeholders, including oversight bodies such as the Libyan Audit Bureau and the Administrative Control Authority. The seventeen technical teams were also reactivated and a small team responsible for drafting the report was formed. The Libyan Forum for Sustainable Development would also support a multi-stakeholder consultative process. The VNR was expected to contribute to the development of the newly approved “Libya Vision 2040” and would highlight a number of infrastructure projects and social programmes implemented as a result of the relative stability that Libya had witnessed in recent years. Mr. Belhassan noted the important role of the VNR in highlighting local progress made in various municipalities, especially those affected by wars and natural disasters, whose role had recently been strengthened through the establishment of reconstruction funds. Mr. Belhassan referred to the census survey launched at the end of 2023, which would contribute significantly to bridging the data gap. He also noted the Ministry's efforts to mobilize funding in partnership with the private sector, and efforts to address the challenge of migration.

24. Mr. Mohamed Abderrahmane Deddi, Deputy General Director at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Promotion of Productive Sectors in Mauritania, stated that the 2024 VNR would be the second one for Mauritania following the [2019 VNR](#). He pointed out that the current 2030 Agenda implementation context in Mauritania was characterized by an economy recovering from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. He also noted that the extractive sector in Mauritania, including the plan to begin exporting gas in 2025, was expected to drive economic growth. However, some 75 per cent of the rural population suffered from multidimensional poverty, and gender equality remained a major challenge. Given the current trajectory, only 20 per cent of SDG targets were expected to be implemented by 2030, with a delay in key Goals, including SDG 2. The 2024

VNR would build on local reviews of Nouakchott city and Hodh Ech Chargui province, with a particular focus on SDGs 1, 2, 4, 13, 16 and 17. For the VNR preparation, experts were engaged with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to work in coordination with focal points in ministries and under the supervision of the Technical Steering Committee in a participatory and multi-stakeholder process.

25. Ms. Intisar Al-Wahaibi, General Manager of Development Planning at the Ministry of Economy in Oman, pointed out that the preparation of the second VNR for 2024 began with the launch of Oman Vision 2040 considered as a gateway to achieving the SDGs. To accelerate the SDG implementation, six national programmes were developed in the areas of economic diversification, employment, carbon neutrality, investment and export promotion, national sustainability and the digital economy. She praised the efforts made to enhance the enabling environment, especially at the level of institutional development, legislation and laws and financing mechanisms. One of the most innovative institutional mechanisms was the establishment of a laboratory for each SDG to engage stakeholders. Those laboratories, which might last for weeks or even months, sought to come up with implementation actions, projects, contracts and investments. The Youth Centre was also established to stimulate the generation of ideas reflecting youth aspirations, which would be included in the VNR report. Work was underway to develop the third edition of the data dashboard, which would include 63 per cent of the SDG indicators, noting that data provision at the governorate level remained a challenge that would be addressed in the future. Models were also developed to engage stakeholders and identify their ambitions and demands. Community awareness was raised through podcasts and university hackathons.

26. Mr. Refaat Hejazi, National Coordinator for Sustainable Development at the Planning and International Cooperation Commission in the Syrian Arab Republic, spoke about the special nature of his country's second VNR, which focused more on the external determinants of sustainable development and included messages to the international community relating, among others, to the challenge of financing sustainable development in the absence of sovereignty over oil resources. A second, more detailed internal report on progress was available, including an analysis of development policies and their shortcomings. Mr. Hejazi noted that the most prominent development in the second VNR process was the composition of the Sustainable Development Committee, which was governmental in the first VNR and became national and multi-stakeholder in the second. He stated that workshops were held in all governorates to raise awareness on sustainable development and identify local development priorities, which resulted in simplified local reports. Electronic surveys for data collection were also developed to replace paper-based surveys, and data were now available for about 48 per cent of indicators. Some indicators still posed a major challenge due to the complexity of their calculations. Mr. Hejazi deplored the deterioration of a number of SDGs in his country, particularly those related to poverty and hunger, which became unattainable. He commended the efforts of the Syrian Arab Republic to focus on a number of accelerators, such as the National Programme for Rural Development, which included some 48 projects, in addition to promoting the transition to renewable energy through interest-free loans and supporting families to avoid school dropouts.

27. Mr. Mohamad Al-Hawri, Deputy Minister, Economic Studies and Forecasting at the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation in Yemen, presented the most prominent actions of the VNR preparation framework developed by the Ministry and approved by the Council of Ministers. A high-level supervisory committee chaired by the Ministry of Planning and composed of 14 ministers was formed in addition to a technical committee responsible for preparing the report according to a time-bound implementation plan. Small groups were consequently formed, each responsible for drafting a specific part of the report following a common methodology. International stakeholders, including ESCWA and UNDP, supported the organization of a number of technical consultations. An international expert was also appointed to develop scenarios and forecasts for some key indicators. The VNR preparation faced serious challenges due to the lack of official data and to discrepancies in some data issued by the United Nations entities. Only reliable data were used. The analysis would cover the impact of war on each SDG.

28. Mr. Joop Theunissen, Deputy Chief of the Intergovernmental Policy and Review Branch at the Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, made some observations on the 2023 VNRs, which showed that

most governments had adapted their SDG institutional frameworks, while many had established new high-level coordination mechanisms. More countries included statistical annexes and examples of solutions implemented by stakeholders at the local level. He pointed out that the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the Economic and Social Council sessions would be convened in the current year, thus offering an opportunity to advocate for a new generation of reviews that would be more relevant to national planning and budgetary processes and would contribute more to enhanced accountability. Mr. Theunissen touched on the ongoing preparations for the 2024 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the Summit of the Future, stressing that the Summit did not seek to offer an alternative to the 2030 Agenda.

29. The ensuing discussion focused on the following:

(a) How to integrate the results of local voluntary reviews into national reviews, especially when the reviewed Goals and the adopted methodology differed;

(b) The appointment of a focal point for data coordination in the technical teams working on the review of each Goal or a specific set of Goals;

(c) The difficulty of producing countrywide data when some governorates were outside the authority of the central government, and the importance of leveraging the data of United Nations agencies, which often had nationwide coverage;

(d) The importance of continuing to strengthen the national statistical system's capacity to provide data through the production of new indicators based on ad hoc surveys or through the use of administrative statistics, sectoral indicators or even proxy indicators;

(e) The importance of establishing local data platforms similar to national platforms.

III. Organization of work

A. Date and venue of the workshop

30. The tenth Workshop on Voluntary National Reviews in the Arab Region was held at ESCWA headquarters in Beirut and online, on 4 March 2024.

B. Opening

31. Ms. Maisaa Youssef, Leader of the Cluster on the 2030 Agenda and SDG Coordination at ESCWA, began her opening remarks by welcoming the participants and thanking the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the League of Arab States for their continued cooperation. She also expressed solidarity with the State of Palestine and its people, and saluted Yemen for its commitment to preparing its first VNR despite the challenges. Ms. Youssef stressed the importance of financing sustainable development regionally and internationally amid the widening financing gap, the increasing level of indebtedness, and the shrinking fiscal space in the Arab countries. She pointed to gaps in the international financial architecture that prevented the required resources from being channelled to developing countries with the volume and speed necessary to achieve the SDGs, adding that the 2024 Summit of the Future was expected to address some of those gaps. She mentioned two main challenges related to planning, namely the lack of coordination between ministries and the difficulty of identifying the most effective and efficient spending orientations based on national priorities, calling on participants to take advantage of the interactive toolkits developed by ESCWA to improve the development planning process and VNRs.

32. Ms. Nada El-Agizy, in turn, welcomed the participants and stressed the central role of financing to achieve the SDGs, especially in the light of persistent challenges and successive crises in the Arab region. In

that context, she pointed out that the Arab Committee for Sustainable Development of the League of Arab States had placed the issue of financing as a standing item on its agenda. Ms. El-Agizy highlighted some of the most prominent activities implemented by the League of Arab States in cooperation with Arab and international organizations. These included a report in 2021 on promoting sustainable finance and climate finance in the Arab region, and a study in 2023 on the foundations of sustainable finance and other efforts. She noted that the upcoming Arab Economic and Social Development Summit was scheduled to discuss ways to provide a regional mechanism for sustainable financing in the Arab region. Ms. El-Agizy concluded by stating that she was looking forward to the 2024 Summit of the Future, which was in line with the Arab Vision 2045, hoping that the Summit would result in real reforms in the management of the global economy according to the proposals of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

C. Participants

33. The workshop was attended by 70 participants in person and virtually, including representatives from 18 Arab countries, namely Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen. The workshop was also attended by participants from United Nations country teams and by the organizing entities, namely ESCWA, DESA and the League of Arab States (see list of participants in the annex). Women accounted for 53 per cent of participants.

D. Draft Agenda

34. The workshop included three main sessions, in addition to the opening session and closing remarks. The following is a summary of the agenda:

- (a) Opening statements;
- (b) Session 1: Overcoming the challenge of financing sustainable development in the Arab region;
- (c) Session 2: Tools to better finance national SDG priorities;
- (d) Session 3: Preparations for the 2024 voluntary national reviews;
- (e) Closing remarks.

E. Documentation

35. To access the list of documents, please visit the workshop's page on the ESCWA website at <https://www.unescwa.org/events/10th-workshop-voluntary-national-reviews>.

Annex*

List of participants

A. Arab countries

Algeria

Ms. Manel El-Ayoubi
Director of Environment and Sustainable
Development
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National
Community Abroad

Mr. Sami Boukelia
Deputy Director in charge of cooperation in the
field of sustainable development
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National
Community Abroad

Mr. Mohamed Titoum
Diplomatic Secretary
Embassy of the People's Democratic Republic of
Algeria in Lebanon

Bahrain (online)

Mr. Hussein Janahi
Ministry of Sustainable Development

Ms. Wesal Aljalalma
Ministry of Sustainable Development

Ms. Fotoun Alimadi
Ministry of Sustainable Development

Comoros

Mr. Djaafari Abdou
Officer of Statistical Data and Coordination Center
General Planning Authority

Mr. Youssef Ali Mmadi
Macroeconomic Programmes Officer
General Planning Authority

Djibouti

Mr. Dini Ali Daoud
Service Manager
Ministry of Finance

Ms. Fatouma Houmed-Gaba
Senior Executive at the Department of Economy
and Planning
Ministry of Finance

Egypt

Mrs. Mona Essam Fayed
Assistant Minister for Sustainable Development
Affairs
Ministry of Planning and Economic Development

Ms. Rasha Eldiasty
Advisor
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Mariam Al-Badawi (*online*)
Ministry of Planning and Economic Development

Ms. Mariam Mahmoud (*online*)
Ministry of Planning and Economic Development

Ms. Aya Nawwar (*online*)
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Ministry of Planning and Economic Development

Ms. Alia Khalid (*online*)
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Ms. Aseel Adel Fattah
Director of the Department of Sustainable
Development
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* Issued as submitted.

Jordan

Ms. Lamia Al-Zoubi
Director of Development Plans and Programs
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Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

Ms. Rasha Dabbouri
Head of the Sustainable Development Goals Unit
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

Libya (online)

Mr. Taher Belhassan
General Director of the Planning Institute, Head of
the Sustainable Development Committee
Ministry of Planning

Mauritania

Mr. Sidaty Sidaty
Assistant Director of the Accelerated Growth and
Shared Welfare Department
Ministry of Economy and Sustainable
Development

Mr. Mohamed Abderrahmane Deddi
Deputy General Director
Ministry of Economic Affairs and Promotion of
Productive Sectors

Morocco

Mr. Said Saghir Zarouali
Head of the Agricultural Programs and Rural
Development Department
High Commission for Planning

Oman (online)

Ms. Intisar Al-Wahaibi
General Manager of Development Planning
Ministry of Economy

Mr. Ali Ahmed Al-Najjar
Ambassador, Department of International
Organizations
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Suad Ambo Saidi
Planning and Follow-up Specialist
Ministry of Economy

Mr. Talal Al-Saadi
Director of Development Plans Preparation
Ministry of Economy

Mr. Mohamed Al-Shuaili
Director of the Planning and Development
Department
Ministry of Social Development

Ms. Aseel Hassan
Director General of the Public Debt Management
Unit
Ministry of Finance

Ms. Iman Ahmad
Ministry of Finance

Mr. Saleh Al-Obaidani
Economic Advisor
Ministry of Economy

State of Palestine

Mr. Mahmoud Ataya
General Director
Office of the Prime Minister

Qatar

Mr. Shaheen Ali Alkaabi
Director of the International Cooperation
Department
Department of International Cooperation

Ms. Wasmiah Abdullah Aldhidah
First Secretary
Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Jamal Abdullah Al-Yafei
Assistant Director of the Strategic Planning
Department
Planning and Statistics Authority

Ms. Salama Saeed Al-Basti
Second environmental development planning
researcher
Planning and Statistics Authority

Somalia

Ms. Umulkhair Fuad Ali
Senior Advisor
Office of the Prime Minister

Sudan

Mr. Jamal El-Nil Abdullah
Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social
Development

Syrian Arab Republic

Mr. Refaat Hejazi
National Coordinator for Sustainable Development
Planning and International Cooperation
Commission

Mr. Eyad Hassan Ali
Macroeconomics Manager
Planning and International Cooperation
Commission

Tunisia

Mr. Samir Lazaar
Director General
Ministry of Economy and Planning

United Arab Emirates (online)

Ms. Ruaa Alshehhi
Government Experience Exchange Programme
Ministry of Cabinet Affairs

Yemen

Mr. Mohamad Al-Hawri
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

Mr. Aiman Mohammed Qasem
Director General of Follow-up, Office of the
Minister
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

B. United Nations agencies and programmes

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) - Shared Economic Prosperity Cluster

Mr. Hisham Taha
Economic Advisor and Head of Financing for
Development

Mr. Nathaniel Martin
Associate Economic Affairs Officer

Ms. Dana Hamdan
Research Assistant

Ms. Maya Hammoud
Research Assistant

Ms. Rasha Hijazi
Financing Expert and Economic Assistant

Mr. Georges Stephan
Financing Expert and Economic Assistant

United Nations Environment Programme

Mr. Abdelmenam Mohamed
Programme Management Officer

Food and Agriculture Organization (online)

Mr. Abdoulaye Saley Moussa

United Nations Volunteers (online)

Mr. Juan Pablo Gordillo
Regional Integration Expert

World Health Organization (online)

Mr. Jamal Nasher
Coordinator of the SDGs, Gender, Equity and
Human Rights

Ms. Reema Aldakheel

Ms. Hyam Bashour

Ms. Grazia Perreca

Mrs. Nourhan Elrifaie

Ms. Yara Othman

United Nations Children's Fund (online)

Ms. Magda Bertolotti

United Nations Population Fund (online)

Mr. Willis Odek

C. Organizing team

League of Arab States

Ms. Nada El-Agizy
Director, Sustainable Development and
International Cooperation

Mr. Mohamed Abdel Maksoud Hassan
Legal Researcher
Sustainable Development and International
Cooperation

United Nations Department of Economic and
Social Affairs (online)

Mr. Joop Theunissen
Deputy Chief of the Intergovernmental Policy and
Review Branch
Office of Intergovernmental Support and
Coordination for Sustainable Development

ESCWA, 2030 Agenda and SDG Coordination
Cluster

Ms. Maisaa Youssef
Cluster Leader, 2030 Agenda and SDG
Coordination

Ms. Jana El-Baba
Sustainable Development Officer

Ms. Hania Sabbidin Dimassi
Associate Programme Management Officer

Mr. Tanner Boisjolie
Associate Economic Affairs Officer

Ms. Lara Geadah
Senior Research Assistant

Ms. Lara El-Khoury
Senior Research Assistant

Ms. Sobhieh Kabbarah
Administrative Assistant

Ms. Nadera El-Bizri
Administrative Assistant