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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

**OF THE FOURTEENTH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM
BEIRUT, 11-12 NOVEMBER 2010**

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Introduction

1. As the Secretariat to the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) convened the fourteenth meeting of the RCM at United Nations House, Beirut, on 11 and 12 November 2010 under the chairmanship of United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Ms. Asha Rose Migiro.

2. The purpose of the meeting, which was attended by representatives of regional United Nations agencies, other regional organizations and the League of Arab States, was to promote thematic and policy coherence in the region around key economic and social priorities on the development agenda. The thematic focus of the meeting was youth and poverty reduction. This report is a summary of the key discussions and outcomes of the meeting.

I. PRESENTATIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND OUTCOMES

A. SESSION 1 – PROGRESS STATUS AND NEXT STEPS FOR THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS

3. The purpose of this session was to build synergy and complementarity between agencies working in thematic areas.

1. *Presentations*

(a) *Climate change: key challenges and way forward*

4. Mr. Abdul-Majeid Haddad, Programme Officer at the United Nations Environment Programme – Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP-ROWA), presented an overview of the history of the Climate Change Thematic Working Group (TWG) and its major focus areas. He underlined a number of challenges facing the TWG, including the lack of a broad framework for programming climate change activities in the Arab region, limited funding for coordination costs and the lack of a common information-sharing platform, which limits the exchange of information on the activities of the United Nations and other international agencies in the region. A stronger commitment to furthering the work of the TWG is required from those agencies.

5. Mr. El-Habr Habib, Director and Regional Representative, UNEP-ROWA, emphasized the core components of the 2011 UNEP plan, which include following up on the second Expert Group Meeting on the Development of a Vulnerability Assessment for the Arab Region to Assess Climate Change Impact on the Water Resources Sector (Beirut, 8-10 November 2010), establishing a platform for information exchange, mapping climate change activities in the region and producing an assessment report on the vulnerability of water resources to climate change.

(b) *Food security: key challenges and way forward*

6. Ms. Fatima Hachem, Food and Nutrition Officer, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), set out the achievements of the TWG for 2010 at the regional level. These included a survey of food security activities by regional and United Nations institutions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region; the publication of a number of documents on food security; monitoring consumer food prices in the countries of the region; and an evaluation of the Global Information and Early Warning System Workstation at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Regional Office for the Near East. She also highlighted the challenges faced by the TWG, with particular focus on the repercussions of the global financial crisis on food security.

(c) *United Nations Development Group cluster on the nexus between climate change and food security*

7. Mr. Zlatan Milisic, Deputy Regional Director, World Food Programme, noted that the complex nexus between climate change and food security affects availability of, access to and utilization of food, as well as stability within countries, and thus constitutes a major threat to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, the increasing visibility of the nexus also offers an opportunity for multi-sectoral joint programming and for reinforcing country programming through regional cooperation. In this regard, the United Nations system has a comparative advantage, which flows from its ability to support regional Governments in facing the multifaceted challenges posed by the climate change-food security nexus.

(d) *Millennium Development Goals: way forward*

8. Mr Tarik Alami, Director, Economic Development and Globalization Division, ESCWA, highlighted the achievements of the TWG, which included the completion of three major reports. He also emphasized the challenges faced by the drafting committee of the Arab Regional MDG Report, including conflict between national and international data, subregional classifications, and the lack of harmonized regional and subregional groupings within the United Nations system. Challenges facing the TWG include the absence of an action plan, limited resources, competing priorities, a lack of coordination with other TWGs, and other forces-majeure, such as wars, economic crises and natural catastrophes.

2. Discussion

9. Mr. Mohamed Khonji, Regional Director, International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Middle East Office, outlined the role played by the organization in environmental protection and climate change within the framework of global efforts in this regard. Drawing the attention of participants to a number of ambitious resolutions adopted by ICAO on the development of a robust global policy to reduce greenhouse emissions by international civil aviation, he noted that the organization is striving to develop framework principles for civil aviation, introducing measures to involve countries directly in such efforts, and preparing to move from a policymaking phase to an implementation phase.

10. Ms. Sima Bahous, Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs, League of Arab States, highlighted challenges related to data and indicators, and the importance of harmonizing national and international data and country classification, particularly at the subregional level. She recommended that future reports and documents include not only decisions, but also achievements; reliable data are central to this process. She highlighted the importance of advocacy in the Arab region and of involving the people of the region in the work of regional organizations.

11. Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, called for greater links between the efforts of regional and international organizations, and national programmes and projects. She noted the need for a holistic, rather than a fragmented, approach to the design and reform of programmes, structures and mechanisms. The ensuing discussion revealed a general consensus that greater linkage between the work of the three TWGs is needed. She recommended that the MDGs be integrated into social and economic policies and agendas in the Arab region, and that development efforts be extended beyond 2015. She also highlighted the need to benefit from existing national, regional and international mechanisms to promote development in the region.

12. Dr. Hussein Gezairy, Regional Director, World Health Organization, recommended that the key outcomes of the RCM be concrete and practical, that information be gathered on water scarcity and that participating organizations cooperate to convince member countries to take the measures necessary to mitigate climate change, reduce gas emissions and reduce poverty.

13. Ms. Rima Khalaf, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, recommended that advocacy activities be conducted at the country level; that the importance of cooperation and coordination at the regional level be built upon; and that a balanced approach be maintained between efforts at the country level on the one hand and those made by regional structures, primarily the League of Arab States and non-governmental organizations, on the other hand.

14. Ms. Seiko Sugita, Programme Specialist, Social and Human Sciences, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), identified data quality and the discrepancy between national and international data sources as major challenges, emphasizing that the real problem lies in the lack of an effective communication mechanism for such data.

15. Mr. Al-Saati Mohammad Jamal, Director, Operations Policy and Services, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), outlined a number of initiatives taken by the IDB in the field of food security and climate change, notably joint activities on cleaner and renewable energies with member countries and partners.

16. Ms. Khawla Mattar, Director, United Nations Information Centre (UNIC), Cairo, underlined the need to involve the media in advocacy and dialogue with national actors.

3. *Outcome and actions*

17. With a view to synergizing linkage between the three thematic working groups, and broadening and deepening the effectiveness of those groups, participants agreed that an annual joint meeting of the Thematic Working Groups should be convened between RCM meetings.

B. SESSION 2 – PROGRESS ON OUTSTANDING KEY ACTIVITIES FROM THE THIRTEENTH MEETING OF THE RCM

18. The purpose of this session was to report on progress in the establishment of the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG) and provide a civil society organization (CSO) perspective on youth.

1. *Presentations*

(a) *Briefing on the CSAG initiative and a CSO perspective on youth*

19. Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad, Chair, CSAG, detailed progress in establishing the Group, which is a think-tank on chronic and emerging developmental issues at the regional level and seeks to identify national CSO networks for partnership with member countries in relation to the ESCWA normative programme of work.

20. He highlighted anticipated challenges, including the centralization of the State in most Arab countries; restricted access to potential sources of funding, which limits the independence and effectiveness of such groupings; and restricted freedom of assembly and association. Youth organizations are generally the most restricted, since young people are frequently perceived as a threat to power dynamics. He also stressed the importance of addressing youth-related issues within general models of economic growth and social protection, rather than as an isolated category.

(b) *Enhancing regional statistical coordination between ESCWA and the League of Arab States: the way forward on the joint plan of action*

21. Mr. Juraj Riecan, Director, Statistics Division, ESCWA, highlighted statistical capacity-building as a top priority as countries aim to bring the expertise of regional organizations to their national systems. He underlined the importance of global initiatives in harmonization and the setting of standards. Noting that coordination is essential to achieve consistency and efficiency in the statistical system, he emphasized that it

is the responsibility of regional organizations to feed regional statistics and that of national Governments to coordinate national statistics.

22. He concluded by highlighting the joint plan of action between ESCWA and the League of Arab States for 2011-2015, which includes statistical capacity-building; collection, processing and dissemination of statistical data; and input to global standard setting initiatives.

23. Ms. Hoda Abo Leil, Statistics Department, League of Arab States, explained that the purpose of the Permanent Statistical Committee of the League of Arab States is to enhance cooperation and coordination in statistical activity. To date, collaboration between ESCWA and the League of Arab States in the area of statistics has been intermittent, which neither reflects the statistical potential of the two organizations, nor satisfies member countries. She suggested that potential areas for cooperation include capacity-building, the planning and implementation of training modules, and the introduction of the latest classifications to national statistical offices.

2. Discussion

24. Ms. Fatiha Serour, Regional Director, Europe and Middle East Office, United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), emphasized the need for continuous coordination in statistics and data collection. She argued that no programme will be able to solve youth problems unless all related data collection processes are implemented within a youth-sensitive mechanism. She contended that in many countries in the Arab region, young people are excluded from the development process as equal partners, since they are viewed by decision-makers as posing a challenge to their authority. This, in turn, leads to increased youth unemployment and poverty. Excluding civil society, in particular young women, from regional agendas thus results in higher levels of emigration in search of better opportunities.

25. Mr. Al-Saati Mohammad Jamal, Director Operations Policy and Services Department, IsDB, underlined the importance of involving civil society in activities undertaken by regional organizations in the area of statistics. He also emphasized the usefulness of microfinance and capacity-building in developing expertise.

26. Ms. Dena Assaf, Regional Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women, highlighted the importance of developing reliable, transparent and gender-sensitive statistics to inform policymaking. It was noted that gaps in statistics in the region are not necessarily the result of economic or technical factors, but frequently of political considerations.

27. Mr. Ziad Ifram, Chief, Arab Programme, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), underlined the key role of UNIDO in the field of industrial statistics, which are essential in informing policymaking. He also stressed the need for assessment mechanisms to evaluate the impact of statistical activity undertaken by ESCWA and other regional organizations with a view to ensuring their efficiency.

28. Ms. Hasmik Egian, Chief of Programme Planning, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) MENA Regional Office, argued that existing gaps in youth statistics are caused by political, rather than economic or technical reasons and that, contrary to general impression, some youth data is available in the region.

3. Outcome and actions

29. Participants agreed to: (a) continue with the CSAG and report back on progress to the RCM; and (b) strengthen statistical coordination, and to establish a taskforce on statistical coordination to address the priorities of the RCM in identifying data gaps and harmonizing collection approaches.

C. SESSION 3 – INFLUENCING THE REGIONAL AND GLOBAL POLICY AGENDA

30. The purpose of this session was to identify opportunities for devising a regional strategic vision to influence key regional forums and United Nations policymaking bodies.

1. *Presentations*

(a) *High-Level Committee on Programmes (via video link to Washington DC)*

31. Mr. Elliot Harris, Vice-Chair, High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP)/Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), outlined the role of the HLCP as the principal mechanism within the United Nations for system-wide coordination in policy and programmes. In addition to providing a forum for inter-agency dialogue in the development and launching of new programme initiatives, HLCP advises the United Nations System CEB on strategic planning, policy and programme development, and implementation. It also provides advice on areas that require priority attention in response to the challenges facing both the United Nations system and the global community. The HLCP presentation focused on the central role of United Nations agencies in setting post-2015 strategy; the need for policy coherence to ensure equitable outcomes of globalization; and the need for United Nations agencies to synergize their work for the benefit of developing countries. The RCM has a role to report to the HLCP on the thematic and policy priorities of the region in order to ensure that the regional agenda is fully reflected at the global level.

(b) *Arab Economic and Social Development Summit*

32. Ms. Sima Bahous, Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs, League of Arab States, confirmed that the League of Arab States will convene the second Arab Economic and Social Development Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on 19 January 2011, to further the efforts of Arab leaders for development in the region, and follow up on the plan of action issued at the first summit (Kuwait, 19-20 January 2009). Ms. Bahous highlighted the need for close coordination with all United Nations organizations with a view to preparing for the summit, proposing appropriate solutions and coordinating for technical assistance on the implementation of the summit outcomes. Key items on the agenda of the summit are the recommendations of the *Third Arab Report on the Millennium Development Goals*; the situation of women in Arab countries; the environment and climate change; empowering Arab youth; and enhancing the roles of civil society and the Arab private sector.

2. *Discussion*

33. In response to a question raised by Mr. Walid Saleh, Regional Coordinator, United Nations University (UNU), on existing background documents or policy guidelines on the green economy, Mr. Harris explained that UNEP is currently finalizing a draft report on this topic which will serve as a resource guide to good practice; the Environment Management Group is preparing a related report; and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is drafting a document which aims to raise awareness of the green economy.

34. Mr. Tzannatos Zafiris, Economic Adviser, International Labour Organization (ILO), underlined the importance of using the MDGs as a means to effect policy change in the region. To this end, a larger policy nexus needs to be established and the goals to be achieved once the MDGs have been attained need to be identified.

35. Ms. Migiro observed that targets set up under the MDGs have always existed in the form of national policies which also call for reducing hunger and poverty, improving child and maternal health, and increasing the sustainability of natural resources. However, what needs to be devised now are policies to ensure a sustainable implementation of such goals and policies, backed up by strong political will and sufficient resources. She anticipated that the MDG process would be extended beyond 2015, which will necessitate the integration of the MDGs into a sustainable development framework. She also commended the

progress made in a number of Arab countries in recent years in reducing unemployment and increasing education enrolment rates.

36. Ms. Bahous commended the youth employment initiatives taken by the Arab Labour Organization, primarily in Kuwait. She reiterated that the MDGs must be used as a tool to effect policy change and measure progress achieved.

37. Ms. Khalaf agreed that the MDGs do not constitute an end in themselves, but rather a set of minimum rights that citizens must enjoy if they are to lead fulfilling lives. She stressed the need to tackle such major issues as instability and marginalization, and to work in full coherence with other agencies.

3. *Outcome and actions*

38. The participants agreed that the RCM secretariat would continue discussions with the office of the Deputy Secretary-General to explore ways forward on enhancing linkages between the RCM and HLCP. As a contribution of the RCM discussions to the deliberations of the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit (Sharm el-Sheikh, 19 January 2011), a memorandum will be submitted to the League of Arab States by end of next week on the outcome of the RCM meeting and its deliberations on youth and poverty reduction.

4. *Side event*

Launch of the Combating Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy and Politics Report

39. In parallel with the RCM meeting, ESCWA organized the launch of the global report *Combating Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy and Politics*, produced by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). Speakers at the press conference included Ms. Sarah Cook, Director of UNRISD, Mr. Tarek Alami, Acting Director, Economic Development and Globalization Division, ESCWA, and Ms. Maha Yahya, Regional Advisor at the Social Development Division, ESCWA.

40. The report explores the causes, dynamics and persistence of poverty, identifying the least and most effective aspects of international policy thinking and practice. It analyses the multiple and complex processes involved in sustainable poverty reduction, and sets out a range of policies and institutional measures which countries could adopt with a view to achieving such a reduction. An overview of the report has been translated into Arabic and is available on the ESCWA and UNRISD websites.

D. SESSION 4 – UPDATE ON KEY REGIONAL YOUTH PROGRAMMES

41. The purpose of this session was to take an overview of the challenges facing youth in the region, noting progress on key activities and identifying potential gaps and opportunities.

42. Ms. Nicola Shepherd, Co-Chair, United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, opened the session by outlining the United Nations approach to the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding. She explained that it focuses on three key areas:

- (a) Enhancing commitment to and investment in youth by creating awareness;
- (b) Increasing youth participation and partnerships by mobilizing and engaging young people;
- (c) Increasing intercultural understanding among young people by connecting and building bridges with them.

1. *Presentations*

(a) *Emerging issues affecting and defining youth in the Arab world*

43. Mr. Rami Khoury, Lecturer at the American University of Beirut (AUB), gave an overview of the activities jointly undertaken by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB and the MENA regional office of UNICEF since 2008, with particular focus on the first regional report on Arab youth. He highlighted four key themes related to Arab youth today: they are the first generation to break social constraints; they are increasingly using media to express their aspiration to quality education and decent employment, and to create new bright avenues for their future; they often manifest several identities that are not necessarily contradictory; and they are the barometer of the current grievances and future promise of Arab society.

44. Mr. Khoury underlined a number of challenges faced by young people in Arab society, including identity and values, migration, citizenship, sexuality, media and expression. He called for a revision of the Arab mindset on the role of youth in society, shedding light on adolescent girls, who often constitute an invisible category and are frequently excluded from the public arena.

(b) *United Nations Development Group Regional Youth Strategy: priorities, progress and challenges*

45. Ms. Shahida Azfar, Regional Director, UNICEF, called for the prioritization of sectoral support for youth in the fields of health, education, protection, employment, participation and emergencies. She highlighted the need for an early, age-appropriate, evidence-based investment in young people, who constitute a demographic dividend capable of yielding social, economic and political development gains. She noted that youth exclusion in general, and of adolescent girls in particular, is due to a number of factors, including the lack of protective, legislative and policy environments, State reservations to CEDAW and traditional harmful practices. She highlighted the importance of the UNDG regional strategic action plan on young people as a guiding framework for countries to develop their own youth policies.

(c) *League of Arab States programmes on youth*

46. Mr. Khaled Louhichi, Expert on Population and Youth, League of Arab States, noted that despite the progress achieved by Arab countries in a number of areas, a number of worrying challenges compromise such progress. These include soaring unemployment rates; deficiencies in the education system; delayed marriage, which brings with it delayed independency; the hegemony of the patriarchal mindset in the youth population; the demise of ideologies; the conflict between tradition and modernity; and the repercussions of war, conflict and occupation. He set out the League of Arab States regional vision on enabling Arab youth, which promotes cross-sectoral and participatory youth policies. He concluded by stressing the importance of establishing bodies vested with the authority to manage youth involvement as equal partners to coordinate national policies.

2. *Discussion*

47. Ms. Fatiha Serour, Regional Director, Europe and Middle East Office, UNOPS, rejected the premise that youth demonstrate patriarchal behaviour. She stressed that the role of international and regional organizations is to facilitate the involvement of young people as equal partners and argued that there is a need for adults, national officials and Governments to change their mindset on youth.

48. Mr. Walid Saleh, Regional Coordinator, UNU, argued that youth problems, such as unemployment, which has reached alarming levels across the region, are not exclusive to young people, but are the problems of society as a whole. He pondered the extent to which young people are aware of current issues facing the Arab region, such as water scarcity and other crises.

49. Mr. Rami Khoury, Lecturer, AUB, asserted that young people are aware of such matters. He contended that there is no need for new institutions, as civil society, the private sector, Governments and the United Nations already operate widely in this field; what is required is closer cooperation in listening to and addressing youth grievances.

50. Mr. Eric Mottu, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Resident Representative in Lebanon, pointed out the need for Governments to reform the business climate in Arab countries by improving labour markets and limiting monopolies in order to unleash youth entrepreneurship.

51. Ms. Sima Bahous, Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs at the League of Arab States, noted that young Arabs do not have a sole, common identity; on the contrary, they associate themselves with a wide variety of social, political and religious identities. This in turn requires civil society, the private sector, Governments and international agencies to listen actively to the voices of the young and devise interventions that respond accurately to their needs, in order to avoid the exclusion and marginalization which are viewed by many as the greatest problem related to youth.

3. *Outcome and actions*

52. The participants made the following recommendations:

(a) A working arrangement between youth and the RCM process should be developed with the participation of the League of Arab States;

(b) Young people should be involved in setting up a youth-sensitive conceptual framework;

(c) Youth-friendly legislation should be enacted, supporting existing youth organizations.

E. SESSION 5 – PERSPECTIVES ON THE REGIONAL CHALLENGE OF YOUTH

53. The purpose of this session was to provide a perspective on the development challenge of youth as seen by young people, member countries and the private sector, and to review gaps in existing United Nations youth development activities.

54. Ms. Fatiha Serour, Regional Director, Europe and Middle East Office, UNOPS, opened the session by identifying continuing military conflict in the region as a major challenge to youth development, noting that it was essential that United Nations activities for the promotion of youth take this into consideration.

1. *Presentations*

(a) *Youth development in the Arab States: a youth perspective*

55. The meeting adopted an innovative approach by inviting young Arabs to express the aspirations and concerns of Arab youth.

56. Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, a youth representative, noted that Governments continue to adopt outdated policies to address emerging youth issues, and argued that youth programmes need to be revolutionized and successful experience replicated elsewhere in the region. He argued that youth policies need to be integrated within political and social frameworks, and that the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding should be an opportunity to take concrete measures, rather than merely issue declarations and organize events.

57. Mr. Omar Shami, a youth representative, stressed that the mismatch between the aspirations of young people and the opportunities available to them was a major cause of family disintegration and migration in the Arab region. He welcomed the activities undertaken by international organizations and the opportunities

that those provide for young people to voice their concerns and participate in events that bring some of their ambitions to fruition.

(b) *Youth development in the Arab States: a public perspective*

58. Mr. Amin Bakhtiar, former Minister for Human Rights, Iraq, noted that obstacles to youth development include non-compliance with the principles of good governance, democracy and human rights; restriction of public and private freedoms; and unequal opportunities resulting from nepotism, and administrative and financial corruption.

59. He added that the Arab region has failed to manage diversity or to settle ethnic, sectarian, national and political disputes through peaceful and democratic means; nor has it been able to disseminate a culture of dialogue, tolerance and youth integration to counter terrorism and extremism. He recommended a trio of measures to establish a climate of peace and stability in the region: (a) preserve human and natural resources; (b) invest in people, their security and dignity; and (c) devise a regional vision on a region-specific policy.

2. *Discussion*

60. Ms. Khawla Mattar, Director, UNIC, Cairo, observed that in the Arab region, gaps exist between young people in different classes within the same society, not simply between countries.

61. Mr. Adib Nehmeh, Regional Adviser, Social Development Division, ESCWA, noted that Arab society is not conducive to youth development. He recommended the adoption of an innovative approach in lieu of standard national policies; that stereotypes be put aside; and that a conceptual and theoretical framework be established to tackle youth issues.

62. Mr. Mohammad Jamal Al-Saati, Director, Operations Policy and Services Department, IsDB, recommended that a monitoring and assessment mechanism be established to follow up all youth-related initiatives.

63. Mr. Tzannatos Zafiris, Economic Adviser, ILO, noted that solutions to challenges facing Arab youth need to emanate from the Arab region itself and that concrete regional solutions must be found, including the creation of real employment opportunities for young people.

64. Mr. Abu Ismail Khaled, Poverty and Economic Adviser, UNDP, suggested that young people be involved in the preparation of shadow Arab Human Development Reports.

65. Mr. Fatteh Azzam, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, noted that youth issues should be mainstreamed in all activities, rather than being categorized separately, as is often the case.

3. *Outcome and actions*

66. The participants made the following recommendations:

(a) Youth advocacy should be carried out at the country level, while retaining an equitable approach that balances activities at both the country and regional levels;

(b) Forums discussing youth issues should actively involve young people.

F. SESSION 6 – IDENTIFYING KEY GAPS AND CHALLENGES FOR REGIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

67. The purpose of this session was to identify challenges and gaps in youth development in the ESCWA region and provide policy options for member countries.

1. Presentations

(a) *Identifying gaps and challenges for regional youth development: facts and myths in education and the labour market*

68. Mr. Zafiris Tzannatos, Economic Adviser, ILO, presented an overview of the status of youth education and employment, and recommended that a number of measures be taken at the national and international levels. At the national level, such measures should ensure that economic development benefits all nationals, not only employers or international investors; and, within a framework of good governance and economic incentives, education should be matched with labour market needs. At the international level, donors and agencies should take national specificities and priorities into account in all decision-making.

(b) *The critical contribution of youth to sustained development in an era of rapid population transformation*

69. Mr. Ian Pool, Consultant on Population Affairs, ESCWA, highlighted the need to predicate development on exploiting the window of opportunity presented by large cohorts of youth and working-age populations. He suggested that this could be achieved through judicious use of the labour force, human capital and savings. He proposed a set of recommendations to Governments, which included analysing THE future demographic balance; paying particular attention to emerging demographic trends of youth; and studying the regulatory and policy targets set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. He concluded by making a number of recommendations to development agencies and international organizations, with the primary objective of exploring the means of mobilizing the financial resources necessary to underwrite youth programmes.

(c) *Youth in the MENA region: views from the IMF*

70. Mr. Eric Mottu, IMF Resident Representative in Lebanon, presented the IMF Youth Dialogue, which has acknowledged that youth employment is a critical issue in the region; identified the key linkage between educational systems and the business environment; and called for countries with developing and emerging markets to have a larger voice in the IMF. He called upon Governments to take measures in this regard, including tackling unemployment by focusing on growth, labour markets and education; improving competitiveness; and expanding partnerships.

(d) *Youth education and employment in the region: IDB vision, support and initiatives*

71. Mr. Mohammad Jamal Al-Saati, Director, Operations Policy and Services Department, IsDB, gave an overview of the current status and future plans of the IsDB in the light of the strategic challenges confronting the Muslim world. These include achieving healthy human development; securing strong and sustainable economic growth; strengthening peace and stability; and restoring the image of Islam in the Muslim world. Emphasizing that the bank is a strategic partner for development in the ESCWA region, he outlined a number of challenges facing young people, including the high demand for such disciplines as medicine, engineering, information and communications technology, and other areas of science and technology at the expense of vocational subjects.

(e) *The World Bank and youth in the region*

72. Ms. Haneen Sayed, Regional Youth and Human Development Coordinator, World Bank, highlighted a number of challenges for youth development in the Arab region, including rising rates of unemployment; the absence of reliable statistical data; the lack of appropriate investment in youth; weak knowledge-sharing between partners; inadequate capacity-building; insufficient levels of youth participation; and increasing migration across the region. She suggested a number of partnerships and regional initiatives with the involvement of a number of key regional actors, including the League of Arab States.

2. Discussion

73. Ms. Fatiha Serour, Regional Director, Europe and Middle East Office, UNOPS, noted that in view of their influence in the region, the IMF and the World Bank would be the most appropriate organizations to influence Governments to create jobs for young people. She added that she considered youth involvement in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) to be a major challenge for the World Bank.

74. Mr. Eric Mottu, IMF Resident Representative in Lebanon, agreed that the IMF and the World Bank have the potential to play a major role in convincing Governments to improve the social and economic infrastructure of the private sector, and provide social services. He considered policy dialogue to be the major area of influence of the IMF and called for collaboration between the public and private sectors to be diversified, and for youth groups to be included in IMF working groups to inform PRSP.

3. Outcome and actions

75. The participants made the following recommendations:

- (a) The issue of youth migration should be tackled and the concept of Arab citizenship clarified;
- (b) Partnerships should be established to actively involve young people in the fulfilment of socio-economic development objectives.

II. CLOSING REMARKS

76. On behalf of the Executive Secretary, Mr. Roberto Laurenti, Director, Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Division, ESCWA, thanked participants for their active contribution to the discussions and presented the key outcomes of the meeting, which are also set out in annex IV to the present report. He announced that, based on the agreement to convene RCM twice a year, it is anticipated that the next meeting will be held in Cairo in May 2011 and will be hosted by the League of Arab States.

77. Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, United Nations Deputy Secretary General, concluded by observing that the current situation in many Arab countries requires enhanced policy coordination in order to strengthen social and economic infrastructure. She called upon international organizations to work together to make a real difference, serve the needs of young people, and help to fill the gap between their aspirations and the opportunities available. She noted that it is critical that policy options be designed that will bring tangible results in analysis and advocacy. She concluded by thanking participants for their valuable contribution and expressed the hope that partnerships between the United Nations and other key actors in the region would continue to prosper.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

78. The fourteenth meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) was held at United Nations House, Beirut, on 11 and 12 November 2010. It convened six sessions for the discussion of agenda items.

B. OPENING OF THE SESSION

79. United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, Ms. Rima Khalaf, opened the meeting with a statement in which she welcomed participants and regional partners. She extended her thanks to the Prime Minister of Lebanon Mr. Saad Al Hariri for his continuing support to ESCWA and the commitment of the Government of Lebanon to regional integration and human development.

80. Highlighting the need to enhance cooperation between regional actors, she said that it was vital that the concerns of the region be placed effectively on the global policy agenda. Genuine coordination, even competition between the various United Nations organizations in the region, was essential in order to better serve member countries.

81. She noted that while the countries of the region had made significant progress on many indicators of development, including youth education, mortality rates and combating disease, other factors, including unemployment, the impact of foreign occupation and regional instability, remained major challenges for many Arab countries. Such complex challenges will of necessity have an impact on the way in which we work. To be truly effective, we cannot simply adopt ready-made, “one size fits all” policies, but must address the needs of the region by forging partnerships with the private sector and civil society, pooling resources and constantly seeking creative, innovative solutions.

82. The Executive Secretary also emphasized the importance of the theme of the meeting – youth and poverty reduction – arguing that it is the shared responsibility of all to work towards a more dignified future for young people. She called upon participants to conclude the meeting by agreeing a clear statement, reflecting a substantive, solution-oriented and practical discussion of the high-level priorities for the region.

83. She accepted that the RCM is still fine-tuning its role in the region; its members have not consistently been provided with a clear direction on the global policy agenda, nor have they always been assisted in contextualizing priorities. She therefore called upon participants to provide feedback on areas which they believe still require improvement and highlighted the importance of regional partnerships to bring about such improvement.

84. Underlining the important role played by the United Nations Development Group in guiding resident coordinators and United Nations country teams in the implementation of global and regional priorities at the national level, the Executive Secretary concluded her statement by identifying enhanced links between RCM and HLCP as a key priority.

85. Ms. Sima Bahous, Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs at the League of Arab States, highlighted the importance of the RCM for improving coordination between the League of Arab States and the United Nations, particularly in the fields of statistics, the advancement of women, the reduction of unemployment, youth issues, and in fostering comprehensive and equitable development to improve the lives of those in the region.

86. She hoped that the RCM would conclude with (a) a plan of action for statistical coordination, with a view to providing reliable and accurate data to inform the development of well-defined policies and programmes; (b) a road map to synergize cooperation across the region to help countries to deal effectively with the challenges posed by climate change, conflict, unemployment, poverty, health, education, and the empowerment of women; and (c) a clear understanding of the need to invest in human development, cooperate in capacity-building and disseminate a culture of development that involves all social stakeholders and offers innovative development solutions to social problems. To achieve this, the RCM must constitute a new platform, providing expertise in a broad range of areas, including the MDGs, the financing of development in Arab least developed countries, and the fight against climate change, gender disparity and poverty.

87. Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, noted that the RCM constitutes a central pillar in the work of the Organization. She defined the objective of the meeting as the promotion of coherence and synergy between regional stakeholders in order to enhance the global impact of the work of the United Nations and said that ESCWA would continue to play a key role in that process. The focus of the fourteenth RCM meeting on youth and poverty reduction is timely, as the world is stepping up efforts to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the MDGs by 2015, despite the setbacks faced as a result of

the global economic crisis, the food and energy crisis, and the impact of natural disasters, climate change, inequalities between countries and regional conflicts.

88. She concluded by defining the priorities for the region in terms of (a) ensuring jobs for young people at a time of rising regional unemployment, as employment-intensive recovery, social inclusion and integration are critical if an entire generation is not to be marginalized; (b) empowering women in all economic and political spheres as critical agents of development; and (c) developing and adopting a comprehensive approach to improving food security.

89. The Prime Minister of Lebanon, H.E. Saad al-Hariri, stressed the importance of stability in Lebanon, as it reflects on the whole region, adding that the presence of the United Nations in Lebanon is a clear indication of the importance which the Organization attaches to such stability.

90. He emphasized the need for collaboration in order to enhance social and economic development in the region and address the challenges posed to the achievement of MDGs. He welcomed the focus of the fourteenth RCM meeting on youth and poverty reduction, as he considered addressing youth concerns and preparing young people for the future to be of the utmost importance for the region. He concluded by stressing the commitment of Lebanon to international legitimacy, with particular reference to United Nations Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), noting that Lebanon continues to face Israeli occupation with national solidarity.

C. PARTICIPANTS

91. The meeting was attended by representatives of regional United Nations agencies, other regional organizations, regional banks, international financial institutions and the League of Arab States. A list of participants can be found in annex I to this report.

D. AGENDA

92. At its fourteenth meeting, the RCM discussed the items on the agenda which is reproduced in annex II.

E. DOCUMENTS

93. The list of documents submitted to the RCM at its fourteenth meeting is contained in annex III to this report.

Annex I*

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Annex II

AGENDA

Thursday 11 November 2010

Opening – B1 Main Hall Conference Room

Speakers

- | | | |
|-------|---|------------------------|
| 08.30 | Registration | Ms. Ahed Sboul (ESCWA) |
| 09.00 | Welcome by Executive Secretary, ESCWA | Ms. Rima Khalaf |
| 09.10 | Speech by Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs, League of Arab States | Ms. Sima Bahous |
| 09.20 | Speech by Chair of the meeting, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General | Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro |
| 09.35 | Welcome by the Prime Minister of Lebanon | |
| | Administrative/housekeeping issues | H.E. Mr Saad Al-Hariri |
| 09.50 | Coffee break – mezzanine floor (MZ) | |

Session 1 - Progress status & next steps for thematic working groups

- | | | |
|-------|---|-----------------------------|
| 10.05 | Introduction by Chair | Mr. Youssef Nusseir (ESCWA) |
| 10.05 | 1. Climate Change: key challenges and way forward | Mr. Habib El Habr (UNEP) |
| 10.25 | 2. Food Security: key challenges and way forward | |
| 10.45 | 3. UNDG cluster on the nexus between climate change and food security | Ms. Fatima Hachem (FAO) |
| 11.05 | 4. Millennium Development Goals: way forward | Mr. Zlatan Milisic (WFP) |
| | <i>Purpose: To build synergy and complementarity between agencies working in thematic areas</i> | Mr. Tarik Alami (ESCWA) |

12.30 Lunch

Session 2 - Report on outstanding key activities from the thirteenth meeting of the RCM

- | | | |
|-------|---|---|
| 13.30 | Introduction by Chair | Mr. Bahktiar Amin (Iraq) |
| 13.35 | 1. Briefing on the Civil Society Advisory Group initiative and a CSO perspective on poverty reduction and youth | Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad (CSAG) |
| | <i>Purpose: Report on progress in the establishment of the Civil Society Advisory Group and a CSO perspective on youth</i> | |
| 13.50 | 2. Enhancing regional statistical coordination between ESCWA and the League of Arab States: the way forward on the joint plan of action | Mr. Juraj Riecan (ESCWA) and Ms. Hoda Abo Eil (League of Arab States) |
| 14.10 | Discussion | |
| | <i>Purpose: Report on progress in coordinating statistical activities in the region and opportunities for enhancement</i> | |
| 15.00 | Coffee break | |
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Thursday 11 November 2010 (*continued*)

Session 3 - Influencing the regional and global policy agenda

- | | | |
|-------|---|---|
| 15.15 | Introduction by Chair | Mr. Tarik Alami (ESCWA) |
| 15.25 | Presentation - High-level Committee on Programmes (via video link to Washington D.C.) | Mr. Elliot Harris (HLCP) |
| 15.45 | Presentation - Arab Economic and Social Development Summit | Ms. Sima Bahous (League of Arab States) |
| 16.00 | Discussion | |
- Purpose: To identify opportunities for devising a regional strategic vision for key regional forums and United Nations policymaking bodies*
- | | | |
|-------|---|--|
| 16.45 | Wrap-up of day 1 and group photo with the Deputy Secretary-General | |
| 18.00 | Launch of United Nations Research Institute for Social Development report on global poverty; cocktail reception | |

Friday 12 November 2010

Session 4 - Update on key regional youth programmes by RCM member

- | | | |
|-------|--|----------------------------|
| 09.00 | Introduction By Chair – <i>Briefing on the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding</i> | Ms. Nicola Shepherd (DESA) |
| 09.10 | 1. Presentation: Emerging issues affecting and defining youth in the Arab world | Mr. Rami Khoury (AUB) |
| 09.35 | 2. Presentation by United Nations Development Group Regional Youth Strategy: Priorities, progress and challenges | Ms. Shahida Azfar (UNICEF) |
| 09.50 | 3. Presentation: League of Arab States programmes on youth | Mr. Khaled Louhichi (LAS) |
| 10.10 | Discussion | |
- Purpose: An overview of the challenges facing youth in the region, noting progress on key activities and identifying potential gaps and opportunities*

10.40 **Coffee break**

Session 5 - Perspectives on the regional challenge of youth

- | | | |
|-------|---|--|
| 10.50 | 1. Youth development in the Arab States: a youth perspective | Mr. Bakhtiar Amin (Iraq) |
| | 2. Youth development in the Arab States: a public perspective | Mr. Omar Shami (Lebanon) and Mr. Ahmad Al Hindawy (Jordan) |
| | Discussion | Facilitator: Ms. Fatiha Serour (UNOPS) |
- Purpose: To provide a perspective on the development challenge of youth as seen by young people, member countries and the private sector, and to review gaps in existing United Nations youth development activities*
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Friday 12 November 2010 (*continued*)

Session 6 – Identifying key gaps and challenges for regional youth development

11.50 **Purpose:** *To identify challenges and gaps in the region and provide policy options for member countries* Chair: Mr. Tarek Nabulsi (League of Arab States)

Followed by plenary discussion

High Level Panel

1. Mr. Zafiris Tzannatos (ILO)
2. Mr. Ian Pool (ESCWA)
3. Mr. Eric Mottu (IMF)
4. Mr. Mohammad Jamal Al-Saati (IDB)
5. Ms. Haneen Sayed (World Bank)

13.30 Coffee break

13.40 Wrap up: concluding statement

14.40 Lunch

Annex III

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Title	Details
SESSION 1	
Climate Change: Progress Report.	Presentation by Climate Change Working Group.
Climate Change: Way Forward 2011.	Presentation by Climate Change Working Group.
Food Security: Progress Report.	Presentation by Food Security Working Group.
Food Security: Way Forward 2011.	Presentation by the Food Security Working Group.
MDGs: Progress Report.	Presentation by the Thematic Working Group on Arab MDGs.
MDGs: Way Forward 2011.	Presentation by the Thematic Working Group on Arab MDGs.
Nexus on Climate Change and Food Security.	Presentation by UNDG Middle East and North Africa Region.
SESSION 2	
Briefing Report on the Civil Society Advisory Group Initiative.	Presentation by CSAG.
Briefing Report on the Civil Society Advisory Group Initiative.	Presentation by ESCWA.
Enhancing Regional Statistical Coordination: Way Forward.	Presentation by ESCWA.
Enhancing Regional Statistical Coordination.	Concept Note.
Enhancing Regional Statistical Coordination.	Presentation by the League of Arab States.
Intersecting Circles of Poverty Reduction and Youth Challenges in the Arab Region: Policies, Programmatic Interventions and Future Prospects.	Report by ESCWA for the Civil Society Advisory Group.
SESSION 3	
Arab Economic and Social Development Summit.	Presentation by the League of Arab States.
SESSION 4	
New Emerging Issues Affecting and Defining Youth in the Arab World.	Note by Dr. Rami Khoury, American University of Beirut.
Regional Youth Strategy.	Report by UNDG.
Regional Youth Strategy.	Presentation by UNDG.
League of Arab States Programme on Youth.	Presentation by the League of Arab States (Arabic).
League of Arab States Programme on Youth.	Presentation by the League of Arab States (English).
SESSION 5	
Talking Points.	Presentation by Mr. Bakhtiar Amin.

Title	Details
SESSION 6	
The Critical Contribution of Youth to Sustained Development in an Era of Rapid Population Transformation.	Presentation by Mr. Ian Pool, ESCWA consultant.
The Critical Contribution of Youth to Sustained Development in an Era of Rapid Population Transformation.	Paper by Mr. Ian Pool, ESCWA consultant.
Youth Education and Employment in the Region: the Islamic Development Bank's Vision, Support and Initiatives.	Presentation by the Islamic Development Bank.
Youth in the MENA Region: Views from the International Monetary Fund.	Presentation by the International Monetary Fund.
World Bank and Youth in MENA.	Presentation by the World Bank.
The Challenge of Youth Employability in the Middle East and North Africa.	World Bank report.
Identifying Gaps and Challenges for Regional Youth Development.	Presentation by the International Labour Organization.
Key Outcomes of the Fourteenth Meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism.	Document by ESCWA.
Report on the Fourteenth Meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism.	Report by ESCWA.

Annex IV

KEY OUTCOMES

- *Synergising interlinkage between the thematic working groups, and broadening and deepening the effectiveness of these groups*
 - Convene an annual joint meeting of the three thematic working groups between RCM meetings
- *Strengthening statistical coordination*
 - Establish a taskforce on statistical coordination; directors of statistics functions in national statistical offices, United Nations organizations and other international organizations to identify key aspects of the capacity-building challenge
 - The taskforce will address the priorities of the RCM in identifying data gaps and harmonizing collection approaches
- *Focus of the Civil Society Advisory Group*
 - Continue with the CSAG and report back on progress to the RCM
- *Feeding into HLCP/CEB deliberations – Forum/mechanism/approach*
 - Continue discussions with the Office of the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General to determine the way forward
- *Contribution of the RCM discussions to the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit (Sharm el-Sheikh, 19 January 2011)*
 - Issue a memorandum to the League of Arab States on the outcome of the fourteenth RCM meeting and its deliberations on youth and poverty reduction
- *Youth*
 - Develop a working arrangement between youth and the RCM process, with the participation of including the League of Arab States
- *Priorities for engagement with regional banks, the Bretton Woods institutions and key regional stakeholders for 2011-12*
 - IMF and World Bank will be invited to participate in working groups and the work of the RCM
 - Islamic Development Bank has agreed to enhance its participation with current actors in the region through the RCM process
 - Other actors, including the Gulf Cooperation Council, Organization of the Islamic Conference and Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, which have expressed interest in the work of the RCM will be encouraged to participate
 - The fifteenth meeting of the RCM will agree priority areas for engagement with regional banks and international financial institutions