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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

**Report
of the third meeting of the Executive Committee
Rabat, 6-7 May 2017**

Summary

The Executive Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its third meeting in Rabat, on 6 and 7 May 2017. The meeting was attended by representatives of ESCWA member States.

The meeting agenda covered several items, including progress by the secretariat in implementing recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its second meeting, the Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and resolutions adopted by ESCWA at its twenty-ninth session, and an evaluation of the Executive Committee's work. The Committee examined several regional and global issues, including the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) held in Quito from 17 to 20 October 2016, and of the twenty-second Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Marrakech, Morocco, in November 2016; financing for development; the digital future of the Arab region; and the outcomes of the 2017 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development.

The meeting also considered the reports of ESCWA subsidiary bodies for sessions held between the twenty-ninth ESCWA session and the third meeting of the Executive Committee, namely the report of the seventeenth session of the Committee on Transport and Logistics, and the report of the first session of the Committee on Technology for Development.

The present report gives an overview of the key issues raised and the recommendations adopted at the meeting.

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Introduction

1. The Technical Committee was established pursuant to the decision of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) at its twenty-fourth session, held in Beirut from 8 to 11 May 2006. At its twenty-eighth session, held in Tunis from 15 to 18 September 2014, ESCWA adopted resolution 320 (XXVIII) on redesignating the Technical Committee as the “Executive Committee” and amending its terms of reference to empower it to facilitate direct communication between the secretariat and member States on development, economic and social issues, and to submit resolutions directly to the Economic and Social Council. The Executive Committee held its third meeting in Rabat on 6 and 7 May 2017.
2. The Executive Committee addressed the items on its agenda, including progress by the secretariat in implementing recommendations made by the Committee at its second meeting, the Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and resolutions adopted by ESCWA at its twenty-ninth session, and an evaluation of the Executive Committee’s work. The Committee examined several regional and global issues, including the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) held in Quito from 17 to 20 October 2016, and of the twenty-second Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Marrakech, Morocco, in November 2016; financing for development; the digital future of the Arab region; and the outcomes of the 2017 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development. The Committee also reviewed the proposed programme of work for the biennium 2018-2019, and the reports of ESCWA subsidiary bodies for sessions held between the twenty-ninth ESCWA session and the third meeting of the Executive Committee, namely the report of the seventeenth session of the Committee on Transport and Logistics, and the report of the first session of the Committee on Technology for Development.
3. The present report gives an overview of the key issues raised and the recommendations adopted at the meeting.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AT ITS THIRD MEETING

4. At the end of its third meeting, the Executive Committee reached a number of recommendations and suggestions on its agenda items.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS MADE TO ESCWA MEMBER STATES

5. The Executive Committee made the following recommendations to ESCWA member States:
 - (a) To take note of progress made in implementing the recommendations of its second meeting and the Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development issued at the twenty-ninth ESCWA session, and to urge member States that had yet to submit progress reports thereon to do so at the next Executive Committee meeting;
 - (b) To approve the proposed programme of work for the biennium 2018-2019 and its activities, noting the need for flexibility in redrafting the outcomes in line with emerging challenges and issues facing the Arab regions, such as youth issues, entrepreneurship and social economy; reinstate the Doha Development Round, and focus on small and medium enterprises; and to provide comments to the secretariat by 19 May 2017 for consideration in line with the Executive Committee’s mandate and available resources;
 - (c) To reaffirm the strong interlinkages between implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and providing funding, supporting technology and building capacity and trade, especially regarding developed countries’ official development assistance commitments to developing countries, and technology transfer and trade, in accordance with agreed commitments and declarations in that regard;

(d) To adopt the session reports of the seventeenth session of the Committee on Transport and Logistics, and the first session of the Committee on Technology for Development;

(e) To commend the secretariat's efforts aimed at supporting the Palestinian people and its institutions in achieving economic and social development, including the 2030 Agenda; in raising awareness of the Palestinian people's rights and the impact of the Israeli occupation and practices on the Palestinian people in general; and in establishing a Palestinian affairs unit to promote activities aimed at supporting the Palestinian people, its institutions and development efforts;

(f) To thank Morocco for successfully hosting the 2017 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, and take note of its outcomes; and to stress the importance of coordination with the League of Arab States in the Forum's preparatory process, in line with mandates.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS MADE TO THE ESCWA SECRETARIAT

6. The Executive Committee made the following recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat:

(a) To continue assisting member States in implementing the Doha Declaration at the national level;

(b) To prepare introductory material and provide technical support to assist member States in implementing the New Urban Agenda in the economic, social and environmental fields, especially countries affected by and recovering from conflict;

(c) To welcome activities implemented by ESCWA to build the capacity of Arab negotiators in the climate change field, and urge their continuation to ensure effective Arab participation, with special focus on providing training on preparing proposals for funding from international climate change funds;

(d) To prepare a comprehensive vision on establishing an Arab climate change centre within the secretariat, similarly to other regional commissions, covering the desired goals of the centre, funding sources and potential activities, to be presented at the next meeting of the Executive Committee;

(e) To continue supporting Arab countries in ensuring that their national plans include methods to harness and invest technology for development, so as to promote sustainable development and encourage a shift towards the digital economy, smart societies and youth innovation for inclusive growth, with special focus on young people; and to present a progress report thereon at the fourth Executive Committee meeting;

(f) To ensure that ESCWA programmes and activities in the region cover youth issues and empowerment;

(g) To hold a workshop on best international and regional practice regarding digital transformation strategies and policies, and how the Arab region can benefit therefrom;

(h) To update the secretariat's quantitative study on the impact of the transport and logistics sector on sustainable development in Arab countries;

(i) To continue supporting Arab countries in multidimensional poverty reduction, and present a progress report thereon at the fourth Executive Committee meeting;

(j) To support member States emerging from and affected by conflict in conflict-prevention efforts, and assist them in facing development challenges and conflict-related burdens during their rebuilding process, by promptly implementing agreed projects and programmes undertaken by the secretariat, such as the project on rebuilding, institutional development, capacity-building and reconciliation; institutional and socioeconomic development in post-conflict Libya; and the National Agenda for the Future of Syria, and to build those countries' capacity in the field of modelling;

(k) To continue fully evaluating the impact of conflict, crises and occupation on affected member States, including measuring short-term effects and the impact on future generations, so as to strengthen the capacity of those countries, their institutions and populations to face challenges; and strive, in the long term, to enhance their institutional capacity to evaluate threats, analyse the effects of crises and conflict, and identify institutional shortfalls;

(l) To confirm the implementation of ESCWA resolution 321 (XXVIII) on redesignating the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia as the “Economic and Social Commission for Arab States”; and to present member States with a working paper on progress in this area so as to expedite the resolution’s implementation, in full coordination with the leadership of the Executive Committee and the Arab Group in New York;

(m) To take note of the secretariat’s report on financing for development, and to present a report on key international and regional developments in this area at the next Committee meeting.

II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

A. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AT ITS SECOND MEETING (Agenda item 3 (a))

7. Under this sub-item, the representative of the secretariat, with reference to document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.2/3(Part I), gave a presentation on progress made by the secretariat in implementing the recommendations issued by the Executive Committee at its second meeting, held in Amman from 14 to 16 December 2016. The presentation also covered the twenty-ninth ESCWA session on implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Arab countries, which included three roundtable discussions on the challenges of implementing the 2030 Agenda in Arab countries, the impact of conflict and occupation, and the means and tools for assisting countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda over the next 15 years.

8. The presentation reviewed several studies and reports prepared by ESCWA pursuant to the above-mentioned recommendations, including an initial evaluation of data availability to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), many working papers on technology and implementing the 2030 Agenda, a study on the innovation policy framework for inclusive sustainable development in Arab countries, and a detailed report on implementing a workplan on financing for development and technical support. ESCWA also prepared a comparative study on early warning systems to prevent conflict, a study on the long-term impact of conflict on human development, and three reports on the Palestinian people that tackled ethnic segregation, calculated the cumulative cost of occupation, and a communications strategy to support the Palestinian people. The presentation also covered ESCWA meeting and conferences, including workshops in Iraq, Libya, Palestine and Yemen on dialogue and building partnerships in the fields of climate change, disaster-prevention and migration.

9. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Yemen said that challenges faced by conflict-affected countries differed from those experienced by others, requiring interventions of a different nature. A more detailed process was required, entailing identifying national needs, training national teams participating in Committee meetings to follow-up and report, and allocating more resources to support those countries. He requested the secretariat to prepare a study on over 1 million displaced Yemenis, whom the Government had no information on.

10. The representative of Morocco thanked ESCWA for its efforts, especially in successfully preparing the country for participation in the twenty-second Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP22) held in Marrakesh in November 2016, and for its contribution to that Conference. He commended the study on innovation policies, and asked how countries could benefit from it.

11. The representative of Tunisia praised the secretariat's efforts, requesting further information on the digital economy and current processes on open government and technology transfer, stressing the need to keep pace with technological developments and pay attention to the digital gender divide, thus ensuring women's inclusion in ESCWA activities and the economy of the future.

12. The representatives of Oman and Saudi Arabia expressed their wish to strengthen communication with focal points in member States and other bodies, especially with regard to sharing studies upon their publication. They also requested the operationalization of the technical cooperation network.

13. The representatives of Egypt and Qatar expressed their enthusiasm to participate in ESCWA meetings and to implement recommendations. The representative of Egypt added that technology played a central role in ensuring a sustainable development leap, and that Arab countries faced challenges in building technological capacity and legislative structures.

14. The representative of the secretariat said that concerted efforts were being made at ESCWA to operationalize technical cooperation activities and to strengthen and expedite communication. It had organized visits to some member States to that end, and held workshops to determine priorities and develop related workplans. ESCWA was developing support programmes for conflict-affected countries involving all parties, similar to the National Agenda for the Future of Syria, while benefiting from the varied expertise available in the United Nations House covering all development sectors.

15. The representative of the secretariat added that ESCWA responds to large statistical needs in all member States with a small team, and puts its efforts into meetings all technical support requests, especially from conflict-affected countries, including requests from Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. The secretariat was currently preparing a training model on measuring the impact of conflict in areas where data collection was difficult. Progress had been made in the technology field, with eight countries joining the technology transfer programme. The ESCWA Technology Centre was currently focusing on issues related to implementing the 2030 Agenda.

**B. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DOHA DECLARATION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION
ON THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ARAB STATES
AND RECOMMENDATIONS ISSUED AT THE TWENTY-NINTH ESCWA SESSION
(Agenda item 3 (b))**

16. The representative of the secretariat gave a presentation, with reference to document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/3(Part II), on progress made in procedures and activities undertaken by the secretariat and member States to implement the Doha Declaration and recommendations adopted by ESCWA at its twenty-ninth session. The presentation covered the project to implement, follow up and review the 2030 Agenda, including preparing booklets, guidelines and training material on implementing the 2030 Agenda; organizing workshops to adapt and incorporate the SDGs into national plans; preparing reports and guidance material on reducing gender disparities and on the energy, water and food SDGs, technical material on the methodology for measuring SDGs indicators, studies on violence against women, their political participation in the Arab region, a report on statistical data, a study of the innovation policy framework for inclusive sustainable development in Arab countries, and training material on e-learning.

17. The representative of the secretariat gave an overview of all the meetings and workshops organized pursuant to the Doha Declaration and recommendations, including expert group meetings on methodologies for achieving the SDGs in the water and energy sectors at the global, regional and national levels, an expert group meeting on ensuring interaction between science and policies to promote green technologies, and advisory services to member States upon request on incorporating the SDGs in national development plans and strategies.

18. The presentation also covered activities undertaken by the secretariat under the item on Palestine, notably a consultative process to prepare a report on the cumulative cost of occupation, a workshop on the SDGs for Palestine, and a note by the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan.

19. The representative of Yemen reaffirmed the importance of focusing on conflict-affected countries, especially regarding statistical analysis. The secretariat welcomed the request.

C. EVALUATION OF THE WORK OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
(Agenda item 3 (c))

20. Under this sub-item, the representative of the secretariat made a presentation to evaluate key Executive Committee achievements and developments in its work methods since the adoption of ESCWA resolution 320 (XVIII) on redesignating the Technical Committee as the “Executive Committee” and amending its terms of reference, to allow the Committee to make decisions in the period between ESCWA sessions.

21. In the ensuing discussion, the Chair stressed the importance of responding to evaluation requests and of completing questionnaires from the secretariat, given that those were the best methods to improve committees’ work and develop the secretariat’s services in line with member States’ needs.

22. The representative of Qatar enquired about redesignating ESCWA to represent Arab countries, and whether there was conflict between ESCWA membership and that of other commissions or organizations, such as the Economic Commission for Africa. The representative of the secretariat explained the formal process for presenting a resolution to the Economic and Social Council, stating that delays in presenting the resolution aimed to ensure its approval by the Council, and that the resolution could be presented at the next session. The Chair urged representatives to make efforts with their countries and United Nations delegations to support the resolution and ensure its approval, stressing that he was prepared to participate as the representative of Qatar and Chair of the Committee. The representative of Mauritania expressed desire to move forward with the resolution, confirming that there was no conflict between membership of ESCWA and that of the Economic Commission for Africa; on the contrary, member States would obtain added value from the process.

D. OUTCOMES OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HOUSING
AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HABITAT III)
(Agenda item 4 (a))

23. Under this sub-item, the Executive Committee considered document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/4(Part I) on the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). It reviewed activities undertaken by ESCWA in preparing member States for participating in Habitat III, held in Quito from 17 to 20 October 2016. It also presented the preparatory work for the Conference and its outcomes, notable the New Urban Agenda, and its impact on the Arab region. Moreover, the document covered ESCWA contributions to regional preparations for Habitat III, and its expected role in implementing the New Urban Agenda from a social development perspective.

24. The representative of Yemen asked about the status of an ESCWA study on implementing the 2030 Agenda, which covered the cultural and political dimensions, in addition to the economic, social and environmental dimensions. The representative of Egypt spoke about the widespread informal economy and reconstruction in the Arab region, and requested ESCWA to tackle those two challenges in its studies.

25. In response, the representative of the secretariat said that the cultural dimension proposed by ESCWA had not been addressed at Habitat III, but it could be considered in detail by ESCWA. He confirmed that ESCWA was prepared to work with Egypt on priorities mentioned by its representative, especially the issue of interlinkages between rural and urban areas.

E. OUTCOME OF THE TWENTY-SECOND CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNITED NATIONS
FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE
(Agenda item 4 (b))

26. With reference to document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/4(Part II), the representative of the secretariat reviewed the activities undertaken by ESCWA in preparation for member States to participate in the twenty-second Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Marrakech, Morocco, from 7 to 18 November 2016. He also presented the workshops and other capacity-building activities organized by ESCWA in the field of climate change in the region, including preparatory work for conferences under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and support to Arab countries.

27. The representative of Qatar enquired about how to benefit from the Green Climate Fund, about countries that had submitted unsuccessful funding applications, and about information on criteria for accepting projects. The representative of Egypt stressed the need to focus on implementing the Paris Agreement, despite the importance of continued support for negotiations. He requested the secretariat to provide technical inputs to support countries in operationalizing the Agreement. He reaffirmed the common nature of climate change and water and energy management challenges in the Arab region, requiring regional solutions. He proposed that the secretariat study the establishment of a climate change centre at ESCWA, aimed at developing models and tools and at facilitating the exchange of successful experiences, similar to the Climate Change Policy Centre in Africa.

28. The representative of Tunisia praised ESCWA support to member States in preparing for the Conference. The representative of Morocco spoke about receiving funding from the Green Climate Fund by building the capacity of national teams and bodies to study project proposals and ensure their compliance with the Fund's terms of reference. Morocco had launched a climate change information centre in 2017, and the country was prepared to share that experience with ESCWA member States.

29. The representative of the secretariat expressed appreciation for the member States' confidence. In response to queries, he said that ESCWA was doing its best to support all countries wishing to submit a request for financing from the Green Climate Fund, such as Morocco that had received funds because its strategy had been consistent with other strategies; Iraq and Jordan would also receive funding shortly. He invited countries to benefit from the experiences of Egypt and Morocco by participating in capacity-building workshops.

30. In response to a question on the difference between the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, and the role of Arab countries in each, the representative of the secretariat said that negotiations were ongoing and included developing several mechanisms, such as endorsing a rule book in 2018. The representative of Egypt said that the relationship between the Paris Agreement and the Framework Convention had been left ambiguous to avoid wider fundamental changes that some countries attempted to secure. He also stressed the importance of upholding and strengthening the Framework Convention.

31. The representative of the secretariat said that the Swedish Development Agency (SIDA) and ESCWA were considering implementing a new phase of the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR). The main challenge was securing funding, but the secretariat was working on mobilizing resources and developing a vision for an Arab climate change centre.

F. FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT: PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE ESCWA WORKPLAN
(Agenda item 4 (c))

32. Under this sub-item, representatives discussed document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/4(Part III) on implementing the ESCWA workplan on financing for development and technical support, in line with a

recommendation made by the Executive Committee at its second meeting (Amman, 14-16 December 2015). The document reviewed the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and ESCWA efforts to support member States in benefiting from it. Financing was a key pillar for implementing the 2030 Agenda. At the third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa, 13-16 July 2015), a set of measures were agreed to reform global financial practices and earmark investments to face those challenges.

33. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Yemen asked how the cost of conflict in Yemen and Saudi Arabia had been calculated. The representative of the secretariat said that the cost had been estimated based on available data and some assumptions, similarly to modelling activities used in the National Agenda for the Future of Syria, on the basis of various (good and bad) scenarios. He stressed that the figures were estimates and could be refined, because statistical data sources in conflict-affected countries were limited and mostly unreliable.

34. The Chair emphasized the importance of the present sub-item and requested that it also be considered at the fourth meeting of the Executive Committee, clarifying that Arab countries belonged to a major negotiating group, namely the Group of 77 and China, and that it was vital to follow developments on the Monterrey Consensus, the Doha Declaration on Financing for Development, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

G. DIGITAL FUTURE OF THE ARAB REGION (Agenda item 4 (d))

35. Under this sub-item, the representative of the secretariat presented document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/4(Part IV) on the digital economy and its role in digital transformation. It set out the features of the digital economy in developed countries and their related plans, the status of the information and communication technology (ICT) sector in the Arab region, and the potential of Arab countries to shift towards a digital economy. The document also provided proposals on formulating development policies to harness ICT for development and promote a shift towards the digital economy and smart societies to achieve inclusive growth. It also gave an overview of the ISDEHAR programme prepared by ESCWA to support Arab efforts in shifting towards an information society and digital economy.

36. The representative of Tunisia noted that the Digital Tunisia 2020 plan was launched in early 2017, comprising four pillars: infrastructure, e-governance, e-services in education, health and government, and offshoring. The representative of Qatar enquired about the benefit of developing the sector for employing young people. The representative of Yemen queried the term 'digital economy', asking whether the correct term was 'information economy' or 'knowledge economy'. He requested ESCWA to provide member States with successful experiences in the knowledge economy field and some information references, and to hold training workshops; since the development rate of that economy was faster than any other, it was necessary to study it in detail.

37. The representative of Saudi Arabia said that Saudi Vision 2030 and the national transformation project contained a national digitization initiative and a transformation strategy towards the knowledge society. He requested the secretariat to adopt a programme aimed at transforming Arab society into a knowledge society, so that it was not merely a technology consumer. He commended Arab strategies on nanotechnology and ICT, adopted in collaboration with the League of Arab States. He also stressed the importance of Arab cooperation in that field.

38. In response, the representative of the secretariat said that imposing taxes on the electronics sector, especially on foreign companies, was being discussed by member States, and that ESCWA was studying the issue in detail. Regarding the role of young people in that sector, he said that the technology, programming and communications sectors undoubtedly provided an output for young people's capacity, requiring that they channel their capacity into those sectors and benefit from it. ESCWA was prepared to further analyse the issue

in its studies, especially with regard to young people and women. He added that ESCWA was reviewing success stories, which it would share with member States upon completion, including the case of Estonia that had benefited greatly from the digital economy as a country in transition. He stressed the importance of Arab work based on coordination rather than competition, to achieve optimal benefits for member States from the sector.

H. OUTCOMES OF THE 2017 ARAB FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (Agenda item 4 (e))

39. Under this sub-item, the representative of the secretariat gave a presentation on the outcomes of the 2017 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, held in Rabat from 3 to 5 May 2017. The Forum's theme was 'Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing Arab region', in line with the theme of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, to be held in New York from 10 to 19 July 2017.

40. The Arab Forum on Sustainable Development had provided a platform for interaction and dialogue between Arab countries and all development partners; and an opportunity to exchange experiences, expertise and lessons on achievements at the national and regional levels, and to guide work over the coming years towards implementing the SDGs, especially in view of the current circumstances in the region. As was customary in previous sessions of the Arab Forum, the outcomes of the 2017 Forum would constitute the Arab region's main contribution to the 2017 High-level Political Forum.

41. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Tunisia noted the absence of the private sector and weak syndicate and union representation at the Forum. He said that implementing the SDGs must not overlook related issues of concern to Arab countries considered at the Forum, such as financing for development and operationalizing the right to development. The representative of Yemen said that members of the Executive Committee should participate in the Forum when they were held in parallel, as was the case in 2017. He proposed adding a permanent item to the Forum's agenda alongside the main theme, namely considering successful experiences regarding the Forum's topics so as to disseminate benefits to member States. The Chair proposed that the secretariat follow up on the outcomes of the Arab Forum, and report back to member States at the next meeting of the Executive Committee.

I. SESSION REPORTS OF ESCWA SUBSIDIARY BODIES (Agenda item 5 (a))

42. Under this sub-item, the Executive Committee considered the reports of two ESCWA subsidiary bodies for meetings held between the twenty-ninth ESCWA session and the third meeting of the Executive Committee. The following two reports set out recommendations, topics for discussion, and information on the organization of work, the participants and the documents presented:

(a) Report of the seventeenth session of the Committee on Transport and Logistics (E/ESCWA/EDID/2017/IG.1/7/Report);

(b) Report of the first session of the Committee on Technology for Development (E/ESCWA/TDD/2017/IG.1/9/Report).

43. In the discussion on the report of the Committee on Transport and Logistics, the Chair said that the most recent International Transport and Logistics Conference, held in Ashgabat, stressed the important link between the transport sector and development. He enquired about the secretariat's opinion in that regard. The representative of the secretariat said that studies showed the existence of a definite correlation between the two, causal or statistical, and that there was a fundamental relationship between development and advancing transport systems and infrastructure. The secretariat would prepare a detailed study on the issue, focusing on the capacity of transport investments in driving development. The representative of Yemen said that there was

a clear positive relationship that could be quantitatively measured by building a model on the relationship between growth and transport. However, it was also necessary to study linkages to other sectors, and how the transport of goods and people increased production capacity and value. He requested the secretariat to prepare a standard model on the positive relationship between transport and development, by developing trade and facilitating the transfer of labour, capital and goods. The representative of Tunisia commended the request, highlighting the importance of focusing on the environmental dimension and the relationship between transport and sustainable development, given that transport was a polluting sector.

44. In the discussion on the report of the Committee on Technology for Development, the representative of Mauritania requested the secretariat to provide guidance to member States on increasing the benefits of ICT and limiting some of its negative effects. The representatives of Egypt and Qatar stressed the need to enhance cooperation and coordination between United Nations organizations and the League of Arab States in exchanging knowledge and experiences. The representative of Tunisia said that there was potential to support member States in the field of Internet governance and to strengthen their participation in the Commission on Science and Technology for Development of the Economic and Social Council. He stressed the difference between importing modern tools and devices from the West and importing content. He emphasized the importance of developing Arabic content, and encouraging an innovation culture among young people. The representative of Qatar agreed with the representative of Tunisia, confirming the need to build the capacity of young people and motivate them to innovate.

45. The representative of the secretariat said that ESCWA was closely following the issue of technology for development through various channels, including the Centre for Science and Technology for Development, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Technology for Sustainable Development Goals, the ICT Forum for All (ICT4All), the World Summit on the Information Society. A database had been established for a technology facilitation mechanism, in which 1,400 Arab initiatives had been registered. He added that, since 2007, ESCWA had been following Internet governance efforts, and annually held the Arab Internet Governance Forum, in collaboration with the League of Arab States. He said that Arabic digital content was increasing, with the Arabic language ranked fourth globally, thus surpassing French digital content. Technology was a sector that relied on young people, and therefore invested and motivated them above all.

J. PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE BIENNIUM 2018-2019 (Agenda item 6)

46. The representative of the secretariat presented document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/6 containing the proposed ESCWA programme of work for the biennium 2018-2019. She gave an overview of the programme of work, and the objectives, expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement for its seven subprogrammes, and the proposed activities under the regular budget and those funded by the United Nations Development Fund and extrabudgetary sources. When preparing the programme of work, the secretariat took into account regional and global priorities. She explained the process for presenting the programme of work to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. The Chair expressed his country's (Qatar) preparedness to support the programme.

47. The representative of Yemen thanked ESCWA for its efforts in preparing the programme of work, and stressed the importance of preserving the remaining institutional capacity in conflict-affected countries, especially in view of the waves of refugees and displaced persons in the region. He requested support for institutional and human capacity in conflict-affected countries, reflected in specific activities in the programme of work. The representative of Mauritania evaluated the programme of work, enquiring about the nature of the technical cooperation programme, and the role of follow up and evaluation processes in the programme of work. He also asked about the budget, and urged concerted efforts to mobilize resources. The representative of Qatar enquired about the intention to allocate a budget to youth issues. The representative of Oman stressed the need to identify specific goals on young people, given that 65 per cent of the Arab region's population fell under that category, and to invest in sectors that built their capacity, especially technology transfer and small and medium enterprises. The representative of Egypt expressed his country's support for ESCWA in

implementing the proposed programme of work, stating that the issue of young people was cross-cutting but required special attention in the technology sector.

48. The representative of Tunisia proposed adding activities aimed at assisting member States in understanding the various dimensions of social economy or solidarity that Tunisia had begun studying. He also requested ESCWA to support countries in trade negotiations and activate the Doha Round on trade facilitation. He also commented on the number of reports submitted by member States on implementing the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), enquiring as to whether that number was realistic. The representative of Saudi Arabia reviewed and commented on the subprogrammes, notably on the need to incorporate more implementation programmes in subprogramme 1, to focus on activities that strengthened cohesion and integration between Arab societies in subprogramme 2, and to add projects on infrastructure and trade, transport and logistics agreements in subprogramme 3. The representative of Tunisia said that ESCWA adopted a results-based planning and management approach. He reemphasized the issues of young people and the exchange of experiences, and enquired about the accuracy of proposed indicators of achievement.

49. The representative of the secretariat said that the main aim of ESCWA was to benefit from expertise in the Arab region, given that its principal objective was to build human capital before rebuilding countries. Everyone was therefore in agreement on the issue of young people and women, which cut across all ESCWA programmes, meaning that they did not have specific goals dedicated to them. In response to budgetary questions, he said that the budget was presented by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, totalling around \$70 million. He added that the proposed programme of work was funded by the regular budget, and did not include the technical cooperation programme or Development Account programmes, which were not presented at ESCWA intergovernmental meetings. The budget for the technical cooperation programme was around \$7 million, and the Development Account totalled around \$5 million. He stressed the importance of supporting member States in the General Assembly to preserve budgetary gains achieved through the ESCWA strategy on implementing the 2030 Agenda.

50. The representative of the secretariat also discussed the great importance given to youth issues in the programme of work. Two outputs revolved around young people, namely a study on young people and sustainable development in the Arab region, and the demographic features of the region focusing on young people; and the implementation of a Development Account project on youth development policies, including regional and national capacity-building workshops and technical cooperation activities. He stressed that countries were the main financiers of scientific research, and that it was necessary to encourage the private sector in Arab countries to enter that field. ESCWA would work on proposing the issue, adding that the current Secretary-General was greatly focused on youth issues.

51. The representative of the secretariat said that economic policies were not aimed only at expediting economic growth, but also at reducing unemployment and poverty; as such, social goals were implicit in all economic goals. Infrastructure issues and transport networks topped the list of priorities in transport projects. He also discussed the challenges faced by the ESCWA team in gathering accurate and up-to-date data from member States. Such work was conducted in coordination with regional organizations to improve statistical capacity in Arab countries, especially in monitoring and following up on SDG implementation.

**K. ESCWA TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME:
PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING PLANNED ACTIVITIES
(Agenda item 7)**

52. Under this item, the representative of the secretariat gave a presentation on the ESCWA technical cooperation programme: progress in implementing planned activities, with reference to document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/7. It covered progress in implementing technical cooperation activities undertaken by ESCWA since the last meeting of the technical cooperation network for knowledge exchange, held in Doha on 12 December 2016. The meeting, aimed at operationalizing the technical cooperation network, considered

the network's terms of reference and the role of its members, in view of the new approach adopted by the technical cooperation programme based on planning for the medium and long terms, and on improving accountability, strengthening cooperation and regional integration, and South-South cooperation in supporting the 2030 Agenda.

53. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Saudi Arabia requested strengthening the technical cooperation programme, especially the role of regional consultants, and allocating a specific budget for reporting back to member States. He also highlighted the need to strike a balance in providing services to member States. The representative of Kuwait underscored progress in the technical cooperation network's work, especially the speed and effectiveness of communication. The representative of Mauritania said that it was necessary to intensify the exchange of experiences to enable member States to benefit from them. The representative of Morocco thanked ESCWA for its response to requests for technical support from Morocco, and for signing a memorandum of understanding on technical cooperation. The representative of the Sudan also thanked ESCWA, and requested more flexibility and cooperation.

54. At the end of the meeting, Executive Committee members expressed their appreciation for the significant efforts made by the former Executive Secretary, Ms. Rima Khalaf, during her leadership of ESCWA. They also congratulated the new Executive Secretary, Mr. Mohamad Ali Al Hakim, who would begin his mandate in the current month, stressing their support for his leadership of ESCWA.

L. DATE AND VENUE OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
(Agenda item 8)

55. Participants agreed that the fourth meeting of the Executive Committee would be held at the United Nations headquarters in Beirut in December 2017. The exact date would be determined by the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee.

M. OTHER MATTERS
(Agenda item 9)

56. No comments or proposals were made under this item.

III. ADOPTION OF RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
AT ITS THIRD MEETING
(Agenda item 10)

57. At the close of its third meeting, the Executive Committee adopted the recommendations submitted to it, and made comments thereon. The amended recommendations will be incorporated in a comprehensive report on the work and outcomes of the Committee.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

58. The Executive Committee held its third meeting in Rabat on 6 and 7 May 2017. Pursuant to its terms of reference, which stipulate that the Chair of the ESCWA session shall be designated to chair the Committee, the representative of Qatar, in his capacity as Chair of the twenty-ninth session of ESCWA, was appointed Chair of the Committee. The representatives of Tunisia and Bahrain were designated as first and second Vice-Chairpersons, respectively, and the representative of the Sudan as Rapporteur.

B. OPENING

59. The opening session of the third Executive Committee meeting began at 10 a.m. on 6 May 2017 in Rabat. Mr. Tariq al-Ansari, Director of the Department of International Technical Cooperation at the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs of Qatar and Chair of the third meeting of the Executive Committee, gave a speech on behalf of his country. He welcomed participants and thanked Morocco for hosting the meeting. He reviewed the topics for discussion, including governance, operationalizing the Doha Declaration, the outcomes of the 2017 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, and the ESCWA programme of work for the biennium 2018-2019. He urged representatives to adopt a unified approach, focusing on solutions, given that the outcomes of the current meeting would be drawn upon at upcoming high-level meetings hosted by several Arab countries in 2017 and 2018, and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development organized by the Economic and Social Council.

60. The representative of the host country, Mr. Mr. Lahsan Daoudy, Minister Delegate to the Head of Government in charge of General Affairs and Governance of Morocco, said that there were many Arab institutions, but ESCWA offered exclusive opportunities to its member States and worked tirelessly towards achieving sustainable development and strengthening Arab culture, despite a lack of resources. He stressed the importance of promoting a culture of creativity, cooperation and dialogue rather than one of consumption, competition and extremism, so as to ensure a decent standard of living for all. He reviewed key development priorities in Arab countries, such as investing in young people's capacity and reducing poverty. He welcomed regional events organized by ESCWA, and expressed hope that their outcomes would rise to the challenge. He also urged experience sharing and the adoption of effective recommendations.

61. He said that Morocco was committed to following up on recommendations, in line with the will of the Moroccan people and its capacity to overcome challenges. Arab countries faced common and borderless difficulties. It was necessary to stop lamenting the past and put all differences aside to find common solutions. He concluded by wishing participants a good stay in Morocco and a successful meeting.

62. The Acting ESCWA Executive Secretary, Ms. Khawla Mattar, welcomed participants and thanked Morocco for hosting the meeting. She said that the Arab region was currently witnessing some challenging circumstances and developments that gave hope. Today, the United Nations was led by a new Secretary-General, with fresh hopes and aspirations for improved performance. ESCWA was also expecting a new Executive Secretary, Mr. Mohamad Al Hakim. She thanked Ms. Rima Khalaf for her service to ESCWA and member States during her mandate. She also reviewed the challenges facing the region, including poverty reduction, unemployment, participation, conflict and war, extremism and terrorism, and occupation, highlighting the resultant refugee crises and the economic, social and physical destruction.

63. She urged representatives to develop plans and strategies, drawing upon the New Urban Agenda, the 2030 Agenda and accompanying global and regional efforts, stressing the need to adapt the SDGs to national priorities and specificities and to fund and follow up on their implementation, so as to ensure inclusive and sustainable development. She emphasised the importance of following up efforts to achieve Arab economic integration, establish a new development model based on inclusive and equitable economic and social policies, and strengthen institutions, government and communication in Arab societies.

64. She reviewed the main role of ESCWA that it had undertaken for 40 years: supporting member States in meeting their development needs and their peoples' demands, and formulating evidence-based scientific policies, through a flexible approach. The organization's main achievements were adopting a strategy and action plan to support member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and responding to a request by Mauritania to accede to ESCWA. She gave an overview of the meeting's agenda, including the outcomes of the 2017 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and the programme of work for the biennium 2018-2019.

C. PARTICIPANTS

65. The third meeting of the Executive Committee was attended by representatives of ESCWA member States. The list of participants is set out in annex I to the present report.

D. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

66. The Executive Committee adopted the agenda of its second meeting as set out in document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/L.1. The agenda was adopted as follows:

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
3. Follow-up issues:
 - (a) Implementation of recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its second meeting;
 - (b) Implementation of the Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab States, and the resolutions issued at the twenty-ninth ESCWA session;
 - (c) Evaluation of the work of the Executive Committee.
4. Regional and global issues:
 - (a) Outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III);
 - (b) Outcomes of the twenty-second Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change;
 - (c) Financing for development: progress report on the implementation of the ESCWA workplan;
 - (d) Digital future of the Arab region;
 - (e) Outcomes of the 2017 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development.
5. Session reports of ESCWA subsidiary bodies:
 - (a) Report of the Committee on Transport and Logistics on its seventeenth session;
 - (b) Report of the Committee on Technology for Development on its first session.
6. Proposed programme of work for the biennium 2018-2019.
7. ESCWA Technical Cooperation Programme: progress in implementing planned activities.
8. Date and venue of the fourth meeting of the Executive Committee.
9. Other matters.
10. Adoption of recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its third meeting.

67. The Committee also adopted the proposed organization of work as set forth in document E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/L.2.

E. DOCUMENTS

68. Annex II to the present report contains the list of documents considered by the Executive Committee at its third meeting.

Annex I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Bahrain

Mr. Bassam al Dosari
Consultant
Embassy of Bahrain, Morocco

Egypt

Mr. Mohamad Khalil
Consultant
Embassy of Egypt, Morocco
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Kuwait

Ms. Iman Ibrahim al-Haddad
Director of Department of International
Organisations
International Economic Cooperation Division
Ministry of Finance

Morocco

Mr. Lahsan Daoudy
Minister Delegate to the Head of Government
in charge of General Affairs and Governance

Mr. Abdel Karim al Omrani
Director
Ministry for General Affairs and Governance

Ms. Hanan Touzani
Director of Studies and General Affairs
Ministry for General Affairs and Governance

Ms. Sarah Cherki
President of the financial institutions authority
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International
Cooperation

Oman

Ms. Suad Bint Mohammed Bin Youssef Al-Fadhel
Director of Technical Cooperation Department
Higher Council of Planning

Qatar

Mr. Tariq bin Ali Faraj al-Ansari
Director of the Department of International
Technical Cooperation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Oussama Othman El-Fekki Mohammed Ahmad
Consultant for International Cooperation
Department of International Technical Cooperation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Mohamed Abdalla Attieh
Third Secretary
Department of International Technical Cooperation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Abdullah Ali al-Marwani
Assistant Under-Secretary for Planning
Ministry of Economy and Planning

Mr. Waleed AbdulRahman al Awad
Planning Researcher
Undersecretariat for Planning and Policy Affairs
Ministry of Economy and Planning

Mr. Majed Darwish Elharthy
Economic Researcher
Undersecretariat for Planning and Policy Affairs
Ministry of Economy and Planning

Mauritania

Mr. Mohammed Toqr
Director of Strategies and Studies
Ministry of Economy and Trade

Sudan

Mr. Taha Mohammed Ahmad Soumi al-Bashir
Assistant Director of the International
Organizations Division
Ministry of Foreign Trade

Mr. Montasser Ali Mohammed
Director, Department of Regional Organizations
Ministry of Foreign Trade

Tunisia

Mr. Sami Bougacha
General Director of Multilateral Cooperation
Public administration organizations and
international seminars
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

United Arab Emirates

Ms. Maha Saif al-Alawi
Diplomatic Attaché
Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, Morocco

Mr. Wael Osfar
Economic Researcher
Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, Morocco

Yemen

Mr. Muhammad Ahmad el-Hawri
Undersecretary, Ministry of Planning
International Economic Studies and
Forecasts Sector
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Title	Item	Symbol
Information note		E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/INF.1
Provisional agenda and annotations	2	E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/L.1
Organization of work	2	E/ESCWA/2015/EC.2/L.2
Follow-up issues	3	E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/3
Implementation of recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its second meeting	3 (a)	E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/3(Part I)
Implementation of the Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab States, and the resolutions issued at the twenty-ninth ESCWA session	3 (b)	E/ESCWA/2017/EC.2/3(Part II)
Regional and global issues	4	E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/4
Outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)	4 (a)	E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/4(Part I)
Outcomes of the twenty-second Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change	4 (b)	E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/4(Part II) (Arabic only)
Financing for development: progress report on the implementation of the ESCWA workplan	4 (c)	E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/4(Part III)
Digital future of the Arab region	4 (d)	E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/4(Part IV)
Session reports of ESCWA subsidiary bodies	5	E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/5
Report of the seventeenth session of the Committee on Transport and Logistics	5 (a)	E/ESCWA/EDGD/2016/IG.1/7/Report
Report of the first session of the Committee on Technology for Development	5 (b)	E/ESCWA/TDD/2017/IG.1/9/Report (Arabic only)
Proposed programme of work for the biennium 2018-2019	6	E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/6
ESCWA Technical Cooperation Programme: progress in implementing planned activities	7	E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/7 (Arabic only)