



Expert group meeting on innovation and technology for achieving the 2030 Development Agenda

UN House, Beirut, 5-7 December 2017

Information Note

1. Background

"We are all here because we have a common belief: that innovation and connectivity have a huge role to play in implementation of the SDGs" – Peter Thompson, President of the UN General Assembly, High-Level Event on Innovation, 17 May 2017.

Innovation is acknowledged as one of the major drivers of productivity, inclusive economic growth, sustainable development, social well-being, and job creation. The implications of innovation are notable in improving human welfare, industrial efficiency, and environmental protection. Innovation and technology have become key to finding solutions to the most pressing and persistent social, economic and environmental needs and challenges communities face today, particularly in the Arab region.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ stresses that challenges and commitments are interrelated and calls for integrated solutions and a new approach for implementation. As such, business as usual is no longer an option and a new innovative and integrated development approach is required. The challenges experienced in the implementation of the SDGs have been discussed by ESCWA and its member states during the various instalments of the Arab Sustainable Development Forum, the last of which was in May 2017. Some of the challenges in the region include capitalising on economic growth, job creation in-line with decent work standards, protection of the labour force, and Water-Energy-Food (WEF) issues.

The onset of the SDGs necessitates rethinking the developmental approach towards an innovative integrated approach. The traditional linear approach of innovation has been applied to find novel solutions and products starting with research and development, product design, prototyping, then commercializing and marketing. To better serve the SDGs, the linear approach of innovation needs diversification, better linkages between research and actual needs, and improved technology transfer modalities. There are other types of innovation approaches that are perceived as useful in fostering SDG fulfilment, including process, service, mission-oriented, open, grass-root, pro-poor, social, multi-disciplinary, and technology-driven innovation.²

The link between technology and innovation cannot be over-emphasized; on the one hand, emerging and/or disruptive technologies have been the result of innovation, and on the other hand, these

¹ United Nations (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1). Available from http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E.

² See for example: UNCTAD (2017). New innovation approaches to support the implementation of the sustainable development goals. http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/dtlstict2017d4_en.pdf

technologies are stimulating innovation and creativity needed to address the current challenges. Some of these technologies are artificial intelligence, drones, robotics, Internet of Things, 3D printing, wearable technology, renewable technology and bio-technology. There are tremendous applications based on these disruptive technologies, and innovation is crucial in utilising them to address region-specific, cross-sectoral issues.

The situation in the Arab region varies among countries in terms of developmental level, the responsibilities and roles of stakeholders, the adoption of innovation, and the availability of emerging and/or disruptive technologies. Looking towards 2030 and the challenges faced by the Arab region, it is necessary to identify and employ various innovation approaches and technologies that will — through continuous evaluation and adaptation — bring about improved economic, social, and environmental development.

The 2030 Agenda also acknowledges the importance of involving various stakeholders in the achievement of the SDGs and the responsibility of all actors in contributing towards their fulfilment. It calls upon governments, the private sector (including small businesses, entrepreneurs and start-ups), civil society and the communities to actively engage in this global movement and become instruments of change to ensure economic, social, and environmental development.

2. Objectives

The main objective of this meeting is to discuss innovation and technology in the context of an integrated approach for Arab countries that can be employed to aid in the achievement of the SDGs, especially goals 9 and 17. Special attention will be paid to the role of innovation and technology in economic growth, enhancing productivity, the creation of decent jobs, and addressing community societal challenges. Thus, the meeting is also linked to SDG 1, 3, 5, 8 and 10.

Selected international activities related to technology and innovation for SDGs and case studies from the international, regional and national arenas may be presented and discussed to stimulate the sharing of knowledge, lessons learned, and encourage the building of partnerships among various stakeholders to further foster the role of innovation and technology in the achievement of the 2030 Development Agenda.

The discussion, in some sessions, will be based on several draft reports developed by ESCWA including "*Horizon 2030: Innovation and Technology Perspectives for the Arab Region*" and others related to the role of innovation and technology in: fostering entrepreneurship, enhancing small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and developing community-based solutions in the Arab region.

3. Topics

The following list of topics will be discussed during the meeting:

- 1) The integrated approach to problem solving, especially in the context of the 2030 Development Agenda;
- 2) Innovation approaches and models that will foster social and economic development and aid in the achievement of the SDGs in the Arab region;
- 3) Strategy and technology foresight for the adoption and localization of emerging and disruptive technologies and the leveraging of innovation to achieve the SDGs by 2030;

- 4) Innovation and technology for fostering economic development in the Arab region through entrepreneurship and SMEs;
- 5) Innovation and technology for improved social well-being at different levels of society, such as poverty reduction, equality and social inclusion, and better health;
- 6) Initiatives, projects and success stories of international and regional organizations, and countries on innovation and technology for achieving the SDGs.

4. Outcomes

The expected outcomes of the meeting are:

- (1) A common understanding about the integrated approaches for addressing the global and regional challenges in the context of the 2030 Development Agenda;
- (2) Greater awareness of the role of innovation and technology in addressing social and economic challenges in the Arab region;
- (3) Identified policy options that would aid in harnessing technology and innovation for the implementation of the SDGs.
- (4) Policy recommendations for enhancing the role of innovation and technology in addressing social and economic challenges of the Arab region for the achievement of 2030 Development Agenda;
- (5) Linkages, networking, and sharing of best practices between national stakeholders, regional and international organizations.

5. Previous and related work by ESCWA

- ESCWA (2017). *Innovation policy for inclusive sustainable development in the Arab region*. [Online]. ESCWA. Available from: <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/innovation-policy-inclusive-sustainable-development-arab-region>.
- ESCWA (2017). *Innovation landscape in the Arab region*. [Draft copy of study will be provided by email]
- ESCWA (2016). Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2015. Available from: <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/arab-sustainable-development-report-2015>.
- Presentations and outcomes of the Expert Group Meeting on "Mechanisms to Advance Innovation for Inclusive Sustainable Development in the Arab Region", 1-2 November 2016, Beirut. Available from: <https://www.unescwa.org/events/mechanisms-innovation-sustainable-development-arab-region>.
- Marine, S. (2015). *Role of Innovation and Technology in Building a Knowledge-Based Economy in the Arab region* [Online]. ESCWA. Available from: https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/role_of_innovation_and_technology_in_building_kbe_in_arab_region_-_final_version.pdf.
- Presentations and outcomes of the Expert Group Meeting on "Innovation and technology for advancing the knowledge-based economy in the Arab region", 3-4 June 2015, Amman. Available from: <https://www.unescwa.org/events/expert-group-meeting-innovation-and-technology-advancing-knowledge-based-economy-arab-region>.

6. Participation and registration

Participants will include government officials from technology (or ICT), public administration, planning and development ministries/authorities, experts from civil society, entrepreneurs, and international organizations and individuals. Participation is by invitation only.

Participants should register for the workshop by filling out the registration form and returning it by email to escwa-tdd@un.org, idlebi@un.org, and denner@un.org before or on 15 October 2017.

7. Organization, format, venue and dates

The EGM organized by the Technology for Development Division (TDD) at ESCWA, will take place from 5 to 7 December 2017 at UN House, Beirut (Lebanon).

It could include several specialised and general presentations on approaches to innovation for the achievement of SDGs, international and regional case studies from selected countries, and panel discussions. All the proposed presentations will be reviewed by the Organizers, to select those that will be included in the Agenda of the EGM.

8. Working language

Arabic and English are the working languages of the workshop. **Simultaneous interpretation between both languages will be provided.**

9. Travel and accommodation

All participants are to inquire about their visa requirements from Lebanon and secure one ahead of their anticipated travel date.

ESCWA will cover the travel and daily subsistence allowance (DSA) of one participant from invited organizations in selected countries, especially those coming from least developed countries.

10. Additional information

Further information and documentation will be made available at the following URL:
<https://www.unescwa.org/events/sdg-innovation-technology-arab-region>

Address inquiries and requests for additional information to:

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