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Progress made in the advancement of women in the Arab region

Technical cooperation activities and advisory services

Summary

The Committee on Women of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its seventh session in Muscat, on 20 and 21 January 2016. The Committee adopted the Muscat Declaration: Towards the Achievement of Gender Justice in the Arab Region, which set out a broad understanding of the concept of gender justice. At the end of the meeting, the Committee adopted a set of recommendations addressed to the ESCWA secretariat and to member States on necessary measures to be taken over the biennium 2016-2017 in the field of gender equality.

The present document reviews technical assistance and advisory services undertaken by the ESCWA Centre for Women since the seventh session of the Committee on Women on various issues requested by member States, such as gender equality, legislation formulation, and the development of strategies and plans to support women's rights and gender equality in the Arab region.

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Introduction

1. The present document provides an overview of the technical cooperation and advisory services provided by the ESCWA Centre for Women to member States over the biennium 2016-2017, pursuant to the recommendations issued by the Committee on Women at its seventh session. Building on progress accomplished in member States, the Centre for Women works closely with national women's machineries, national stakeholders, relevant United Nations entities, regional organizations, and all divisions within ESCWA to address ongoing challenges that continue to undermine women's rights. Recent political developments in various Arab countries also highlight the fragility of women's situation, prompting the need to protect acquired rights while enhancing women's involvement in post-conflict and transitional processes.
2. ESCWA member States participating in the seventh session of the Committee on Women adopted the Muscat Declaration: Towards the Achievement of Gender Justice in the Arab Region, in which they affirmed their commitment to jointly work towards achieving gender justice as a foundation for achieving sustainable development and security in the Arab region. They also reaffirmed their commitment to implementing women's rights as stipulated by international treaties. They acknowledged the need to adopt a comprehensive approach to gender justice that ensured accountability by establishing effective national mechanisms, and achieving equality by eliminating all forms of discrimination between men and women. Member States also recognized their responsibility to monitor and implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG5 on gender equality and its related targets as a key regional and national priority.
3. To address the needs of member States and support them in fulfilling their commitments, ESCWA has intensified its efforts to translate its normative work and the findings of its evidence-based research into capacity-building packages to enhance the knowledge and skills of member States, and ultimately transmit this knowledge to national counterparts. ESCWA had also worked closely with member States to support them in adapting the SDGs to the national context, and analysing the relevance of national strategies to SDG5.
4. To maintain a focused and interrelated working approach, the Centre for Women has identified the following priority areas for its technical advisory services, in line with its work programme: gender justice; violence against women; and women, peace and security. In addition to those three areas of work, ESCWA has adopted a twin-track approach to its technical advisory services on the SDGs. Firstly, it has linked its work on those three thematic areas to SDG 5, as relevant. Secondly, it has provided dedicated technical support on SDG5.
5. ESCWA work on gender justice encompasses the principles of accountability and gender equality. To operationalize the broad concept of gender justice, ESCWA technical advisory work focuses on strengthening accountability mechanisms at the legislative and institutional levels, and on addressing all forms of discrimination at the social, economic, civil and political levels.
6. ESCWA realizes that addressing violence against women is at the heart of SDG5 and its targets. Numerous other international and regional instruments also tackle violence against women, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Despite this recognition that highlights the need for data collection and action at the legislative and institutional levels, additional national and regional efforts are needed to address the phenomenon. Accordingly, ESCWA efforts are geared towards guiding member States in the formulation of national strategies and legislation to address this salient issue. ESCWA has also provided tailor-made support to raise awareness and build the capacity of member States on the economic cost of violence against women as a tool for policy reform.
7. Realizing the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and the importance of strengthening the role of women in times of peace and conflict, ESCWA pays special attention to the issue of women, peace and security. It focuses on strengthening the capacity of various institutions in member States to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and its subsequent resolutions that comprise the women, peace and

security agenda. In response to member States' requests to enhance understanding and improve responses to this agenda, ESCWA initiatives focus on supporting member States in identifying key issues and priorities at the national and regional levels, providing technical assistance for the development of national action plans, and supporting platforms for participatory and inclusive dialogue at the regional and national levels. This has built on a wealth of research and knowledge that ESCWA has accumulated over the past few years.

8. In addition to specialized technical assistance in the three thematic areas, ESCWA has integrated a gender perspective in most of its advisory missions. For example, capacity building workshops on information, communication and technology were held in the Sudan for the Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders, high-level security officials, parliamentary delegates, journalists and labour unions, to highlight women's role in information, communication and technology and its relationship to socioeconomic development.

9. Drawing on established partnerships and previous achievements, the Centre for Women has continued to enhance regional synergy and collaboration between member States to respond to the requirements of relevant international instruments and global agreements through regional and subregional frameworks, such as joint strategies, platforms, appeals, and action plans. ESCWA has partnered with several United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to deliver its advisory services.

10. Acknowledging the role of civil society organizations and their complementary role in achieving gender equality, ESCWA technical advisory services are not limited to national women's machineries, but include non-governmental organizations such as the Lebanese Council for Women, the Geneva Institute for Human Rights, and Besme International Group for Humanitarian Assistance. This approach has expanded ESCWA outreach to a greater pool of activists and non-governmental organizations, and facilitated the establishment of a common position between non-governmental organizations and national Governments on women, peace and security. This is reflected in ESCWA interventions in Libya and Tunisia to enable civil society organizations to better engage with the Government in the area of women, peace and security. Furthermore, ESCWA worked closely with Yemeni female activists to amplify their contribution to the peacebuilding process in Yemen.

11. ESCWA uses diversified methods in providing technical assistance, including holding regional workshops on topics of regional interest such as the SDGs, and organizing national workshops to support priority national initiatives. Technical advice is also provided on a one-to-one basis to build the capacity of officials or activists. ESCWA support ranges from developing capacity-building packages to producing audiovisual materials, such as videos on women, peace and security, aimed at disseminating information to a wide range of stakeholders in member States.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ESCWA SECRETARIAT

12. At its seventh session, the Committee made the following recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat:

(a) Continue implementing the recommendations issued by the Committee at its sixth session and develop a programme of work for the biennium 2016-2017; and exercise flexibility in reformulating some outcomes to ensure quick responses to emerging issues in the region;

(b) Work with national women's machineries on developing national plans to implement the 2030 Agenda and to unify national and regional approaches aimed at implementing those plans; ensure that gender equality goals are consistent with all international commitments, especially the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; provide the necessary technical support; and prepare studies on this issue;

(c) Cooperate with national machineries to amend discriminatory laws, policies and systems in all areas and at all levels, and coordinate with those machineries in monitoring and following-up on reports;

(d) Continue strengthening the capabilities of national machineries to mainstream gender in national policies, plans and programmes and in the justice chain; and prepare reports and provide technical assistance and guidance in this area;

(e) Pursue efforts to mainstream gender in all the administrative activities and structures of the secretariat and to strengthen its role in that regard within the United Nations system; work with national women's machineries on implementing the project to mainstream gender in public institutions; develop an Arab framework to measure progress towards achieving gender equality in public institutions; and work on mainstreaming gender in government institutions;

(f) Continue working with national women's machineries, parliaments and all other stakeholders to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000); and prepare studies, provide training and build capacities to assist member States in developing the necessary national plans and programmes for its implementation;

(g) Continue evaluating the effects of conflict on gender; study the status of women in conflict situations; measure the economic impact of gender-based violence on all social groups; and prepare a model on methods to measure this impact to be adopted as a national reference;

(h) Continue studying mechanisms and methods for achieving social justice in general, and gender justice in particular; and work with member States to propagate knowledge on gender issues at the national and regional levels;

(i) Promote women's participation in the economy in the Arab region, focusing on female migrant workers; and propose policies and strategies to achieve gender equality in the labour market;

(j) Promote partnerships between United Nations agencies and other regional organizations, especially the League of Arab States, the Arab Women's Organization, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and civil society institutions, and strengthen coordination between them.

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ESCWA SECRETARIAT

13. The following activities were implemented pursuant to the recommendations issued by the Committee on Women at its seventh session.

Activities	Beneficiaries	Outcomes
Training workshop for the development of the Palestine national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (Amman, February 2016)	Government officials of the State of Palestine	A joint workshop with UN Women Palestine, which brought together various constituents to design the final draft of the Palestinian national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325. The document was finalized at the workshop and is ready for adoption.
Capacity-development workshop to introduce the women, peace and security agenda in drafting national action plans (United Arab Emirates, May 2016)	United Arab Emirates General Women's Union and other Government officials	The workshop increased the understanding of participating officials on resolution 1325 and of its stipulations regarding relevant national policies and programmes. Participants agreed on priority areas to be included in the United Arab Emirates national action plan on resolution 1325, and on the national institutions to be included in the drafting process.

Activities	Beneficiaries	Outcomes
Capacity-building workshop on the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for the members of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the SDGs (Beirut, August 2016)	Members of the ESCWA Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the SDGs: Government officials from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia	In partnership with UN Women and the League of Arab States, the workshop focused on the implementation arrangements of the Subcommittee; and provided member States with substantive knowledge on SDG5 and its interlinkages with other SDGs, and on defining the approach for formulating and implementing gender-related policies and plans under SDG5. The workshop resulted in the 2016-2017 plan of work for the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the SDGs.
Regional capacity-building workshop on baseline indicators to monitor women's status and the SDGs in the Arab region under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Amman, October 2016)	Members of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the SDGs: Government officials from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen	In partnership with UN Women and the League of Arab States, the Centre for Women held the second regional workshop for members of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the SDGs, hosting representatives of national women's machineries, statistical focal points and ministry of planning staff. The workshop tackled the baseline indicators for monitoring women's status and sustainable development in the Arab region. It identified the baseline indicators to monitor and follow up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The workshop was a preparation for the development of national and global indicators associated with the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets.
Capacity-building workshop on supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Palestine (Amman, November 2016)	Government officials of the State of Palestine	In collaboration with the ESCWA Sustainable Development Unit, the Centre for Women organized a workshop addressing the 2030 Agenda in Palestine. The workshop provided detailed information on the gender dimension of the SDGs, especially SDG5.
Technical assistance to support the Lebanese Ministry of Women's Affairs in developing a national action plan for the period 2016-2018. (Beirut, November 2016)	Lebanese Ministry of Women Affairs	ESCWA conducted a review of the draft action plan, and provided detailed input to the Ministry of Women's Affairs thereon and on a national strategy for gender equality. This included a substantive review and inputs to enhance the action plan and align it with international frameworks.
Technical assistance to facilitate national consultations on priorities relating to resolution 1325. (Beirut, November 2016)	National Commission for Lebanese Women	ESCWA provided input to the National Commission for Lebanese Women's conference on facilitating national consultations on priorities relating to resolution 1325. The input aimed to

Activities	Beneficiaries	Outcomes
		highlight methods for drafting a national action plan on resolution 1325, and to map the different pillars of the plan.
Capacity-building workshop on promoting CEDAW and the resolution 1325 in MENA countries (Tunis, November 2016)	Libyan and Tunisian civil society organizations	In partnership with the Geneva Institute for Human Rights, ESCWA conducted a capacity-development workshop, to enable civil society organizations in Libya and Tunisia engage with government counterparts on issues relating to women, peace and security. The workshop intended to produce a vision document for the development of national action plans on resolution 1325, which civil society organizations could use to engage with policymakers.
Technical assistance to the Syrian Supreme Council for Family Affairs to develop a national action plan on women, peace and security (Beirut, December 2016)	Syrian Supreme Council for Family Affairs	Reviewed and provided substantive comments on a proposal for a national action plan on women, peace and security.
Technical assistance to the Lebanese Ministry of Women's Affairs for a project on "Accelerating national response to the women, peace and security agenda" (Beirut, January 2017)	Lebanese Ministry of Women's Affairs	Developed a concept note to accelerate the country response on women, peace and security. The proposed concept note was discussed with the Ministry and other United Nations agencies (UNFPA, UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme) to develop means for its operationalization.
Capacity-building workshop on women's political participation: advancing women's equality and supporting women's inclusion in politics in Lebanon (Beirut, March 2017)	Lebanese Council for Women	The workshop built the capacities of participants on how to plan and campaign for the upcoming Lebanese elections, and explored ways for Lebanese women to enhance their political participation. The workshop strengthened women's capacity and engaged women from other Lebanese platforms, civil society organizations, political parties, women's machineries and women parliamentary candidates.
Capacity-building workshop on achieving SDG5 in the Syrian Arab Republic (Beirut, March 2017)	Syrian Supreme Council for Family Affairs	This workshop provided technical advice to the Syrian Supreme Council for Family Affairs on mainstreaming SDG5 in national and sectoral development plans. It concluded with a technical cooperation proposal towards strengthening social cohesion in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Activities	Beneficiaries	Outcomes
Capacity-building workshop on integrating the SDGs in the national strategies of Mauritania, with an overview on gender equality, women's empowerment, and resolution 1325 (Mauritania, March 2017)	Mauritanian Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family	ESCWA revised and provided inputs to the Ministry's action plan for institutionalizing gender and empowering women, which was approved by the Council of Ministers. The workshop enhanced and strengthened capacities to mainstream gender in the SDGs, especially SDG5, at the national level. The Centre for Women explored and examined the 2008 gender equality strategy and its 2015 updated version, incorporating a robust gender dimension and aligning it with the SDGs.
Capacity-building workshop for Yemeni Women on their participation in the peace process (Beirut, April 2017)	Yemeni government officials and civil society organizations	The Centre for Women, in collaboration with Besme, conducted this workshop to support the political analysis, advocacy and lobbying capacities of independent women peacebuilders, to amplify their contribution to the peacebuilding process in Yemen.
Capacity-building workshop on the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for the members of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the SDGs (Beirut, May 2017)	Members of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the SDGs: Government officials from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen	In partnership with UN Women and League of Arab States, the Centre for Women planned this workshop to track, develop and reinforce commitment on advancing the 2030 Agenda and monitoring women's status in the Arab region. The workshop explored baseline indicators for monitoring the status of women in the SDGs; built capacity on integrating the SDGs in national strategies by utilizing the findings of the study on mapping the SDGs as a tool; and discussed how to best integrate the SDGs in national strategies, citing recommendations and best practices in the region. The workshop focused on strengthening the Subcommittee's capacity to integrate gender under SDG5, and to map national machineries' strategy responsiveness to the SDGs. The workshop also considered the voluntary review of Egypt and Morocco.
Technical support to Oxfam Lebanon to develop training and promotional audiovisual material on women, peace, and security and the role of civil society (Beirut, May 2017)	Civil Society	Video developed as an awareness tool targeting civil society on the women, peace, and Security Agenda
Technical assistance to develop a national action plan to combat violence against women (in progress)	Lebanese Ministry of Women's Affairs	ESCWA, in partnership with UNFPA, has assisted the Lebanese Ministry of Women's Affairs in developing a national strategy to combat violence against women. ESCWA adopted a participatory approach to identify

Activities	Beneficiaries	Outcomes
		national priorities and the scope of the strategy. This resulted in a draft strategy that will go through the formal approval process.
Training workshop on supporting national mechanisms in implementing SDG5 (Jordan, August 2017)	Jordanian National Commission for Women	ESCWA supported the national women's machinery in building the capacity of the Jordanian gender equality team assigned by the Government to follow up on the implementation of SDG5 in collecting data and information on SDG5 and its indicators. The workshop contributed to coordinating the national response towards implementing SDG5.
Advisory service and training workshop to develop a national action plan on resolution 1325 (United Arab Emirates, August and October 2017)	United Arab Emirates General Women's Union	ESCWA supported the General Women's Union in developing a national strategy on women, peace and security in a participatory manner, and supported the validation of the draft strategy.
Capacity-building workshop on good governance and the SDGs (Istanbul, Turkey, January 2016)	Iraqi Ministry of Planning and members of the higher committee on the SDGs	The ESCWA Division on Governance and Conflict Issues, in partnership with UNDP-Iraq, assisted Iraqi officials in applying good governance principles, including gender mainstreaming, to adapt the SDGs to national specificities.
Technical Assistance on the implementation of the SDG and the 2030 Agenda (Beirut, September 2017)	Lebanese Ministry of Women's Affairs	ESCWA will support the Ministry in meeting its international commitments in the areas of women's empowerment and advancement, and in implementing the SDGs, particularly SDG5.
Training workshop on SDG target 5.5 on local governance (Beirut, September 2017)	Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and Palestine (statistical bureaus, and ministries of interior, and of women's affairs)	The ESCWA Centre for Women and the Statistics Division are enhancing participants' knowledge on SDG target 5.5 on women's participation in local governance.
Capacity-building workshop on Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (Sudan, 2017)	Sudanese Ministry of Welfare and Social Security	ESCWA will assist the General Directorate for Women and Family Affairs at the Ministry in reviewing their draft plan on women, peace and security to ensure its implementation, in addition to strengthening women's political participation throughout the process.
Technical assistance to conduct a SWOT analysis of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (Beirut, 2017)	Lebanese Ministry of Women's Affairs	ESCWA will provide technical support to the Ministry in conducting a SWOT analysis to identify the weaknesses, strengths, obstacles and opportunities facing its work in advancing and empowering women in Lebanon.

Activities	Beneficiaries	Outcomes
Capacity-building workshop for judiciary on international legal frameworks, especially in relation to the implementation of CEDAW (Beirut, 2017)	National Commission for Lebanese Women	ESCWA will build the capacity of judges by increasing their knowledge of international legal frameworks, with special focus on CEDAW.

III. TECHNICAL COOPERATION MATERIAL

14. In its efforts to capitalize on the work of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the SDGs, the ESCWA Centre for Women developed the Guide to Global Gender Targets, which provides an alignment between the SDGs and the Beijing Platform for Action to facilitate the reporting process.* This newly developed guide aims to simplify national reporting on the implementation of the SDGs, and avoid duplicating reporting efforts. By facilitating national reviews, this guide contributes to the regional reviews coordinated by United Nations agencies and the League of Arab States in the context of the SDGs and the Beijing Platform for Action for the period 2019-2020. The guide, produced in English and Arabic, is consistent with recommendations in the 2030 Agenda, which states that effective linkages can be made between its follow-up and review mechanisms and the review arrangements of all relevant United Nations conferences and processes.

15. Moreover, in partnership with UN Women and the League of Arab States, ESCWA produced a publication to review Arab national strategies on women and assess their compatibility with the SDGs, particularly SDG5 on gender equality. The analysis reveals gaps in current strategies, highlighted by country and under each target of SDG5 and other gender-related SDG targets. Member States were informed of the study's results to bridge gaps in their current strategies.

* Available from <https://www.unescwa.org/our-work/7781/resources>.