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Report

First Coordination Meeting of the Steering Committee for the “Regional Initiative for Promoting Small-Scale Renewable Energy Applications in Rural Areas of the Arab Region” Beirut, Lebanon, 25 - 26 September 2018

Summary

The First Coordination Meeting of the Steering Committee for the “Regional Initiative for Promoting Small-Scale Renewable Energy Applications in Rural Areas of the Arab Region” was convened by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in Beirut, Lebanon on 25 - 26 September 2018.

The Coordination Meeting brought together key implementing partners and provided an update on the outcomes of the consultative meetings undertaken in the pilot countries - Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia. It also presented the outcomes of the project’s inception phase, discussed, consulted and coordinated the project components, indicators of achievements and future roles and responsibilities of the national and regional partners and established the project’s “Steering Committee”.

The Coordination Meeting also included consultative meetings with Jordan, Tunisia and AIDMO.

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INTRODUCTION

The “*Regional Initiative for Promoting Small-Scale Renewable Energy Applications in Rural Areas of the Arab Region*” aims to improve the livelihoods of rural Arab communities by promoting pro-poor investments in renewable energy (RE) applications focusing on environmentally adequate, affordable, and region specific small-scale renewable energy technologies. The project addresses the underlying constraints in the rural environment and operation of market mechanisms within the rural areas of the Arab countries. It intends to review, benchmark and build capacity to enable the dissemination and use of appropriate renewable energy technologies based on rural entrepreneurship in green sectors. The project is conceived to promote gender equality and social inclusion to support rural development, satisfy energy needs and showcase and document the effectiveness of the bottom up approach to achieve the desired results.

To ensure successful execution of the project activities and achievement of its expected accomplishment, an inception phase was envisaged and started from January 2018 till end of September 2018. This Inception phase constituted a preparatory step for Project development and was dedicated to clearly identify regional and national partner organizations in the implementation of this Project and those who will be part of the Steering Committee (SC) to be established. Further information on the meeting topics and materials are available in ESCWA website: <https://www.unescwa.org/events/first-meeting-regional-initiative-promoting-energy>

II. MAIN TOPICS OF DISCUSSIONS

Presentations and discussions are summarized in the following sections and are organized in accordance with the meeting agenda.

A. OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT SCOPE, OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES OF THE INCEPTION PHASE

1. The first session provided a summary of the project, its components and expected accomplishments, key partners, expected duration of 4 years (2018-2021), pilot countries and main beneficiaries. The session also provided an update on all the activities done under the inception phase of the project.
2. The project’s expected accomplishments include 1- increased knowledge on the socio-economic, political and environmental aspects of Arab rural communities and increased understanding of appropriate small scale RE technologies; 2- enhanced capacity for public, private and financial institutions to apply business models for small scale RE technologies in the productive sectors of rural areas; 3- improved opportunities for rural economic development through creating an enabling environment for the private sector and women entrepreneurs to invest in Income Generating Activities by increasing use of small scale technologies; 4- the sustainability of the Regional Initiative beyond its project timeframe.
3. An update was provided on the consultative country visits to the target countries (Jordan – Lebanon – Morocco and Tunisia). The Letter of Understanding (LoU) with the Lebanese Center for Energy Conservation (LCEC) and Tunisia’s National Agency for Energy Management (ANME). In the case of Jordan, it was judged by ESCWA that given the multiple organizations active at the national level, that at a later stage of the Project and after consultation and approval of Sida, a Funding agreement will be signed in compliance of the ESCWA rules regarding the Implementing Partners. For the case of Morocco, it was not possible since the initiation of the consultation early 2018 to have the proposed draft of LoA signed between ESCWA and the ONNEE and it is suggested to follow-up from ESCWA side and decision of keeping Morocco among the targeted countries will be then taken by ESCWA and Sida.

4. The roles and responsibilities of the national and regional partners and institutions was also discussed, such as through the existing MoU between ESCWA and the League of Arab States (LAS) and the signed LoU with the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO).
5. The session also highlighted the project's linkage to the Arab Region Sustainable Development Agenda, ESCWA's Mandate and Strategic Framework, Sustainable Development Goals and Sweden's Regional Strategies and Studies.
6. Lebanon and Jordan shared their enthusiasm with ESCWA on this project, whereby Jordan also indicated that this project will not only be beneficial to the electricity sector in rural areas but also to the agricultural sector and water pumping. Lebanon's LCEC also expressed their interest in this project's ability to reach rural areas and empower women. AIDMO stressed on the importance of this regional initiative for the Arab countries and they welcomed their collaboration with ESCWA in framework of this Project and the areas of sustainable development.
7. ESCWA clarified that the intended objectives of this Project is not only to provide more electricity in rural areas but also to provide energy services and develop entrepreneurship, gender empowerment and creation of new businesses through an integrated approach.

B. GENDER MAINSTREAMING STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

8. In this session, gender mainstreaming was addressed through the various components of the project undertaken to enhance rural development and during the project life cycle since its formulation, implementation, monitoring and phase-out. For example, engendering the main implementation period involves ensuring that at least a critical mass of 30% of women is represented at the project's highest decision-making level.
9. Engendering the Project Monitoring and Evaluation period includes processes to monitor and review the gender specific results of the project, support in enhancing women's ownership, developing a set of gender disaggregated performance indicators with gender disaggregated data, and addressing gender equality issues.
10. Engendering the Phasing-out period includes the passing on of the responsibilities to gender aware local partners and ensuring that skills and expertise on mainstreaming gender equality in related areas of rural development are effectively transferred.
11. Other gender mainstreaming aspects include having women as members of the Steering Committee (SC) and as Local Facilitating Teams (LFTs) for national coordination; involving Women's associations in each pilot country as an implementing partner and equal women participation at various national and regional capacity buildings, among many others.
12. The session also stressed the importance of reflecting the characteristics of each of the rural communities in the pilot countries in terms of challenges and traditions, the social composition and the status of women, rural policies and potential for implementation, indicators of achievements, property rights for pilot projects and the agriculture and tourism.
13. This session also highlighted why policies affecting gender mainstreaming change and the key drivers behind it: factoring gender in energy development, the role of feminist ideas through national and international research, civil society's engagement with the state, feminist advocacy on the importance of energy access and the role of citizens and elites.

C. PROMOTING RENEWABLE ENERGY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT: COUNTRY PERSPECTIVE

14. During this session, the three pilot countries (Jordan – Lebanon – Tunisia) presented their country perspectives on renewable energy applications in the rural areas of their respective countries.

Jordan

15. Sustainable development of the remote and rural areas and the mitigation reduction from rural to urban areas are two very important issues for the Government.
16. Tapping renewable energy resources, particularly solar energy, represents the key element in providing affordable and reliable modern energy services for electrification and water pumping purposes in the off grid rural areas.
17. The relevant challenges to energy access services in these areas which need to be tackled are: (i) the difficult topography of the sites reflected in the installations work, (ii) the need for a storage system which increases the cost of the solar systems, and (iii) the required set of laws, regulations and policies concerning RE utilization in remote and rural areas.

Lebanon

18. Although the electrification rate in Lebanon is higher than 99.5%, the supply to rural areas is still limited.
19. Lebanon's highest coverage of solar PV implementation is in Metn and Bekaa while the regions with the least coverage are the North and Nabatiye. Lebanon has also launched several projects including solar water heaters, solar PV for water pumping and street lighting.
20. While there is gender equality in Lebanon's most sectors, a gap still persists in the political, legal and economic sectors.

Tunisia

21. ANME plays an important role in Tunisia by implementing the state's policies for energy conservation through promoting energy efficiency, renewable energies and energy substitution.
22. Some challenges persist in Tunisia's rural development despite the apparent improvement in RE applications (wind, solar, pumping) and rural electrification.
23. Securing energy and water supply, improving living conditions especially for women and generating employment opportunities are the main obstacles, especially with high cost of RE and the lack of funding for rural areas.

D. CONFLICT SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS AND ACTION PLAN

24. ESCWA presented and discussed the Risk Log Matrix' which is the strategy to manage the possible and different type of risks that might occur during the implementation of the Project.
25. During the consultation process, ESCWA shared the Project "Risk Log Matrix" with key stakeholders and national implementing partners and their inputs were integrated to the Risk Log Matrix presented during the meeting.
26. The "Risk Assessment" will be updated regularly based on ongoing feedback from the implementing partners and pilot countries and during the implementation of the Project activities.

E. SUSTAINABILITY AND NATIONAL OWNERSHIP ASPECTS

27. As part of the inception phase and as a result of the consultation process, ESCWA finetuned the sustainability aspects of the Project outputs in terms of national level ownership of the outcomes of the pilot projects, reporting on the effectiveness of gender equality and gender mainstreaming

efforts and activities, as well as local buy-in and ownership, given the criticality of these cross-cutting issues to the successful implementation and sustained success of the project's goals and objectives. These sustainability aspects were discussed during this session in terms of environmental sustainability, gender equality, human rights-based approach and capacity development.

28. The Project Governance and Sustainability hierarchy diagram was presented. The regional knowledge hub, secretariat, steering committee and project team were discussed and agreed upon.
29. During this session, the project's approach and ownership was presented and discussion focused on the following aspects that are considered to ensure ownership of the project outcomes and objectives by the different stakeholders as follow:
 - strong linkages considered in the design of the Project components and outputs which would contribute to the sustainability of the Project outcomes and would enhance the ownership of all involved partners during the process of implementation.
 - Bottom up and multi-stakeholder participatory approaches are being anticipated as an effective method for rural development initiatives;
 - Strong involvement of the Local Facilitating Teams (LFTs), the Gender Network and the Arab-Rural Practitioners Network;
 - Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF): to bridge the communication gap between the various stakeholders, build effective and sustainable partnerships for coordination, wide dissemination of Project results and lessons learned;
 - Communication plan to ensure stakeholders' engagement and provide accurate access to relevant information and ownership.
30. ESCWA consulted with the participants on the name of the project. A total of 16 suggested names were voted upon with REPREA receiving the most votes followed by REGEND/REGENDA. It was agreed to consider the name of REGEND given it also include the gender aspect which is one of key component of project activities and objectives.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

1. The First Coordination Meeting of the Project was held at the UN-House, ESCWA premises in Beirut, Lebanon, on the 25th – 26th of September 2018.

B. OPENING

2. The meeting was formally opened by Ms. Roula Majdalani, Director of Sustainable Development Policies Division (SDPD), ESCWA. The project background was presented and the meeting objectives and agenda were outlined.

C. PARTICIPANTS

The workshop was attended by 15 participants. The participants included representatives from the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (MEMR) in Jordan, the Lebanese Center for Energy Conservation (LCEC) in Lebanon, the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO) in Morocco, the National Agency for Energy Conservation (ANME) in Tunisia, as well as a representative from the department of energy of the League of Arab States (LAS) in Cairo and experts from the ESCWA Centre for Women (ECW).

D. AGENDA

3. Presentations and discussions were made over five sessions. The agenda of the meeting is summarized below:

Opening session

Overview of the project scope, objectives and outcomes of the Inception Phase

Gender mainstreaming strategy and action plan

Promoting renewable energy for rural development: country perspective

Conflict sensitivity analysis and action plan for the project

Sustainability and national ownership aspects of the project

Coordination Meeting with Tunisia's focal point

Coordination Meeting with Jordan's focal point

E. EVALUATION

Overall, participants agreed or strongly agreed that this Coordination Meeting met their expectations (9 out of 11) and achieved its purpose (9 out of 11). Most participants agreed that all five sessions of this meeting were relevant, useful for their work and that it provided a forum for information exchange (8 out of 10). However, three participants (out of 11) strongly disagreed that sessions 1 and 2 were relevant, useful and that presenters were knowledgeable and attentive; the same two participants disagreed on the relevance and usefulness of session 3, and the presenter's knowledge and preparation.

ANNEX

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