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Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda

**Implementation of the Beirut Consensus on Technology  
for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region**

**Activities undertaken by the ESCWA secretariat**

**Summary**

At the close of the thirtieth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), held in Beirut from 25 to 28 June 2018, member States adopted the Beirut Consensus on Technology for Sustainable Development in the Arab region. The present document, equivalent to a periodic report, reviews key activities undertaken by the ESCWA secretariat to implement the Consensus. Activities set out in the Consensus are presented in bold, followed by undertaken activities and measures.

The Executive Committee is invited to take note of those activities and comment thereon.

## Introduction

1. At the close of the thirtieth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), held in Beirut from 25 to 28 June 2018, member States adopted the [Beirut Consensus on Technology for Sustainable Development in the Arab region](#).
2. At the fifth meeting of the Executive Committee, held in Beirut on 18 and 19 December 2018, the ESCWA secretariat presented a comprehensive vision of activities ([E/ESCWA/EC.5/2018/4](#)) that it would undertake to implement the Consensus. The Executive Committee welcomed the proposed vision, and requested that the secretariat continue presenting periodic reports on the implementation of the Beirut Consensus and develop a timeframe for the proposed activities.
3. The Executive Committee also requested that ESCWA prepare a follow-up mechanism on the implementation of the Consensus at the national level. The secretariat developed a questionnaire that covered all aspects of the Consensus through specific questions, whose responses would determine whether a measure had been implemented in a member State. State representatives can refer to the questionnaire to present progress in implementing the Consensus under item 4 (b) of the agenda for the sixth meeting of the Executive Committee.
4. The present document, equivalent to a periodic report, reviews key measures undertaken by the ESCWA secretariat to implement the Consensus. Activities set out in the Consensus are presented in bold, followed by undertaken measures.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIRUT CONSENSUS ON TECHNOLOGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION**

5. The Consensus confirmed the commitment of member States to place technology and innovation at the heart of an inclusive and sustainable development process in the Arab region. It stressed the importance of developing strong technology ecosystems and quality education systems to ensure decent employment opportunities. It also highlighted the role that technology can play in achieving social integration, good governance and environmental sustainability, and in preventing conflicts and reducing their threats and the risk of disaster. Member States affirmed their commitment to mobilizing and increasing financing and investment at the national and regional levels in the field of technology and innovation, especially in the least developed countries, to support national development processes and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They emphasized the importance of the work conducted by the ESCWA secretariat and its impact on regional cooperation and integration, and requested that the secretariat further its activities in that regard, while focusing on operationalizing the role of technology and innovation in stimulating development, as follows:

**(a) Foster coherent regional responses to rapidly evolving technological advancements, supporting norms and standard-setting and fostering an enabling ecosystem, anchored in the 2030 Agenda, with a focus on the most vulnerable segments of society**

#### Undertaken measures

6. The ESCWA secretariat has undertaken several regional initiatives to support member States' efforts in keeping pace with rapid technological advancements, including the following:
  - Developing a regional framework at the start of 2018 for Internet governance issues entitled the [Arab Roadmap on Internet Governance](#). The secretariat is implementing the framework by holding meetings with stakeholders. For example, an Arab regional dialogue and [expert group meeting on the Internet governance-cybersecurity nexus](#) was held in Beirut from 4 to 7 December 2018;

- Preparing a report on digital development in the Arab region, which reviews the status and inclusiveness of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and digital technologies, and their role in empowering the most vulnerable social groups and in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The regional report, to be published in September 2019, will focus on national reports currently being prepared by 10 countries. ESCWA has developed a guiding model containing a set of tools that highlight links between the SDGs and the action lines of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to assess the status of digital development, focusing on specific policy areas. To support countries in preparing national reports and to prepare the regional report, ESCWA held two regional meetings, the [first](#) in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, on 6 and 7 February 2019; and the [second](#) in Beirut on 19 and 20 March 2019. Participants discussed draft national reports and data collection methods, in line with the guiding model;
- ESCWA is preparing a study on promising innovation and technology prospects for achieving the SDGs in the Arab region. The study presents approaches to innovation policies that can be adopted to devise solutions to sustainable development challenges. A preliminary version of the study will be published in the last quarter of 2019. ESCWA is also preparing a study on the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on development in Arab countries, which will be discussed at an expert group meeting in July 2019, in collaboration with the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization;
- In the context of supporting the development of norms and standards, ESCWA is preparing a study on intellectual property systems to support innovation in the Arab region, which will be published in late 2019.

**(b) Provide evidence-based policy advice to promote structural transformation through technology to enhance productivity and sustainability, thereby addressing the root causes of multidimensional poverty, promoting economic and social integration, creating decent employment, and research the impact of technology and innovation on sectoral employment generation**

#### Undertaken measures

7. The ESCWA secretariat is currently working on preparing reports and holding meetings on technology's role in achieving structural transformations and in creating employment opportunities. Activities undertaken in this field include the following:

- Publishing a report in the final quarter of 2019 on the inclusiveness of and empowerment through digital finance and its prospects in the Arab region, which considers the enabling environment required to benefit from financial technology (FinTech) and the opportunities it provides in the region;
- Preparing a study on employment in the Arab region for 2019, focusing on shortfalls in private enterprises' productivity in several Arab countries and on the role of innovation in increasing productivity and determining employment growth patterns in the private sector;
- Publishing a report entitled "[Fostering innovation in small and medium enterprises in the Arab region](#)" in 2018;
- Launching in 2019 a second round of a survey on using geospatial information systems in statistics related to the environment, land use and climate change, to improve the quality of information available to decision makers;
- Holding a workshop in the second half of 2019 on integrating administrative data, big data and geospatial data to collect SDG indicators;
- Holding a workshop on planning to conduct population and housing censuses using technology in selected Arab countries in Beirut, from 24 to 27 July 2018, aimed at enhancing dialogue between users and producers of population and housing census data and improving their use in planning research and development;

- Holding an expert group meeting on sustainable consumption and production technologies in Arab countries in Amman on 17 and 18 June 2019, to support member States in transferring and adapting sustainable technologies in the agricultural sector;
- Organizing the [second Arab High-level Forum on WSIS and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), held in Beirut from 19 to 21 March 2019 (detailed below);
- Holding an expert group meeting in Beirut in November 2018 on artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies and their impact on various industrial sectors.

8. The ESCWA secretariat, through its activities in the field of economic modelling, continues to provide technological tools to assist decision makers in developing evidence-based policies to achieve structural transformations. It is currently working with the Egyptian Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform to develop a dynamic visual interface to review outcomes of economic modelling activities in order to make the process more interactive and assist decision makers in clearly identifying policy alternatives.

9. The secretariat formed a team of specialists comprising ESCWA staff members to follow up on big data issues, so as to assess Arab countries' readiness to benefit from them, especially in development planning, and to measure progress in SDG implementation. This is part of ESCWA efforts to complement traditional statistical data using new data sources, including administrative data, big data and geospatial information. Expected accomplishments from such efforts include building capacity to measure SDG indicators.

**(c) Raise awareness on technologies for the inclusion of youth, older persons and persons with disabilities in areas including education, employment and access to public services, and develop informative material on the role of technology in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the Arab region**

#### Undertaken measures

10. The ESCWA secretariat is preparing a report, to be published in the last quarter of 2019, on innovation and entrepreneurship to create employment opportunities for women and young people. The report reviews the status of women and young people in terms of education and employment, linking it with innovation and entrepreneurship in the Arab region. It highlights the importance of developing entrepreneurship in the Arab region to achieve the SDGs, and presents proposals to stimulate entrepreneurship to create new employment opportunities for women and young people. To increase awareness of youth integration technologies, ESCWA held a workshop, in collaboration with the Hariri Foundation for Sustainable Human Development, on the theme "[The impact of frontier technologies on education and youth: educational seminar](#)" (Beirut, 30 November 2018).

11. The ESCWA secretariat is preparing a study entitled "Technology as renewed hope for gender equality in the Arab region", to be published in the last quarter of 2019. The study develops a vision on using ICTs to strengthen the implementation of all SDG 5 targets to achieve gender equality. In March 2019, the secretariat issued a policy brief entitled "[Technology as a tool for making cities safer and combating violence against women](#)", which underscores the link between the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It also analyses technology's positive role in combating violence against women.

12. The ESCWA secretariat continues to provide various information material to increase awareness on the role of new technologies in sustainable development, especially nanotechnology, biotechnology and artificial intelligence.

**(d) Share experiences and best practices in technology transfer and adaptation through North-South and South-South cooperation, building member States' capacity to access financial resources**

Undertaken measures

13. The ESCWA secretariat is developing policy guidelines for technology transfer, development and use at the national level, aimed at forging partnerships between universities, the industrial sector, research centres and other specialized bodies to support the development of domestic industries. The ESCWA Technology Centre held a training workshop on [technology transfer and innovation to support excellence and innovation units in Yemen](#) (Amman, 15-20 December 2018), attended by 14 participants from Yemeni academic institutions. The workshop aimed to build the capacity of Yemeni academic institutions in establishing excellence units concerned with providing effective support in science, technology and innovation to academics and entrepreneurs.

14. The ESCWA Technology Centre published a report entitled "[Science and technology parks: global outlook with a focus on the Arab region](#)" in early 2019. The report, which focuses on the governance of science and technology parks, was discussed at a regional workshop held in Khartoum from 22 to 24 October 2018. In 2019, the Centre will hold an expert group meeting to discuss a report on global standards for the management of science and technology parks, and to coordinate efforts in that field in the Arab region.

15. The informal Arab working group on population and household censuses, which is supported by the ESCWA secretariat, is working on transferring expertise on the use of technology in conducting and analysing population and housing censuses, and integrating the geospatial dimension in those censuses, to improve data quality given that electronic questionnaires facilitate data validation after collection.

**(e) Coordinate national and regional policymaking on Internet governance, promote the Arab regional perspective in the international arena and provide support in researching and defining negotiation positions on contentious Internet governance issues**

Undertaken measures

16. Measures taken to coordinate regional policies and plans on Internet governance include developing a regional framework (mentioned above) on Internet governance issues entitled the [Arab Roadmap on Internet Governance](#).

17. The ESCWA secretariat, in collaboration with the League of Arab States, held an [Arab regional dialogue and expert group meeting on the Internet governance-cybersecurity nexus](#) (Beirut, 4-7 December 2018) in preparation for the fifth annual conference of the Arab Internet Governance Forum. Participants discussed trust, security and online safety and developments in the field at the global, regional and national levels.

**(f) Support in filling the legislative and regulation vacuum around unregulated frontier technology issues through policy-oriented research**

Undertaken measures

18. The secretariat is working on strengthening the role of the ESCWA Technology Centre in filling the legislative and regulation vacuum in various fields, including the environment, the climate, agriculture, energy and water. The Centre participated in developing the [Charter of Ethics of Science and Technology in the Arab Region](#) (in Arabic), as part of efforts led by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Charter was adopted at the Arab Summit held in Tunis on 31 March 2019.

**(g) Reinforce multi-stakeholder partnerships on technology and innovation, including convening the Arab High-level Forum on the World Summit on the Information Society and the Arab Internet Governance Forum**

Undertaken measures

19. The ESCWA secretariat organized the [Second Arab High-level Forum on WSIS and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), held at the United Nations House in Beirut from 19 to 21 March 2019, in collaboration with the Arab Regional Office of the International Telecommunication Union, the Lebanese Government, Ogero and the League of Arab States. The Forum was attended by over 120 experts, who discussed the links between WSIS outcomes and the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region.

20. With regard to forging partnerships, the ESCWA secretariat is working on intellectual property issues to stimulate innovation, in collaboration with the World Intellectual Property Organization, the League of Arab States and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization. The secretariat held an expert group meeting in Beirut on 17 and 18 April 2019 on intellectual property systems in the Arab region, in collaboration with those organizations. The secretariat will also hold an expert group meeting on innovation and technology for achieving the 2030 Agenda in November 2019, in collaboration with several international organizations and regional bodies concerned with innovation, technology and intellectual property.

**(h) Support member States in adopting emerging green technologies to address the main regional socioeconomic and environmental challenges**

Undertaken measures

21. The ESCWA Technology Centre supports member States' efforts aimed at benefiting from green technologies. The Centre's work programme for the coming period will focus on promoting green technology transfer and adaptation and expanding its use, with a special focus on priority sectors in the region, notably the agricultural sector. The Centre's work programme for 2019 includes studies and regional expert group meetings on agricultural technologies, particularly those related to rationalizing water use aimed at reusing waste water, reducing energy consumption and adapting the agricultural sector to climate change. The Centre is preparing technical reports in those fields: it has published a report entitled "[Policy options for promoting green technologies in the Arab region](#)". A second report on green technologies will focus on dealing with the remnants of conflict. A third report will consider the size of required investments and financing bodies for such sectors. The reports will be discussed at a meeting of the Centre's Technical Committee and at an expert group meeting, to be held in Amman from 17 to 19 June 2019.

22. The Centre held a workshop on [green technology investments and access to sustainable financing in the Arab region](#) (Beirut, 4-6 March 2019), in collaboration with the Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN) and the National Council for Scientific Research in Lebanon. The workshop concluded that shifting towards appropriate green technologies required sizeable investments that imposed additional burdens on national financial resources, thus necessitating recourse to existing global financing mechanisms, such as the Green Climate Fund. CTCN and the ESCWA Technology Centre pledged to assist countries that request support in that area.

**(i) Support networking and create a participatory platform for cooperation among Arab States on frontier technology issues**

Undertaken measures

23. Measures to implement the present item include intergovernmental meetings held or organized by ESCWA, such as the second session of the Committee on Technology for Development (Beirut, 20-21 March 2019) and a meeting of Arab e-government directors (Beirut, 19 March 2019).

24. The ESCWA Technology Centre is currently working on a project with donors to consider establishing an interactive platform to document the use of innovative green technologies in the Arab region. The Centre is also promoting a regional communication network for national technology transfer offices in several Arab countries.

25. ESCWA is designing a portal to empower small and medium enterprises in the Arab region by developing tools that meet their needs, especially those related to marketing, talent development and enabling environments.

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