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REPORT

REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR RIO+20: WORKSHOP ON THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION JEDDAH, 3-5 OCTOBER 2011

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held a workshop on the institutional framework for sustainable development in the Arab region (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 3 to 5 October 2011), in collaboration with the Presidency of Meteorology and Environment (PME) of Saudi Arabia and in association with the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The goals of the workshop were: (a) to create a clear concept regarding the institutional framework for sustainable development at the national and regional levels that promotes complementarities between the three pillars of sustainable development, namely the environmental, social and economic pillars; (b) to evaluate the framework based on strengths and weaknesses; (c) to specify the needed and suggested reforms to face the emerging challenges to sustainable development. This workshop offered a chance to bring the views of member countries and stakeholders closer and reaffirm the importance of cooperation between all interested parties in order to reach a unified Arab position.

The workshop ended with a series of recommendations regarding international, regional and national concerns. It aims to support countries of the region in negotiating a clear position regarding international environmental management within the framework of Rio+20, while taking into consideration the consequences of the Solo Dialogue and Beijing Dialogue. The recommendations encouraged member countries to promote the national committees responsible to prepare for Rio+20 at the national level. This report includes a brief presentation of discussions and recommendations.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held a workshop on the institutional framework for sustainable development in the Arab region in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 3-5 October 2011. The workshop was held in collaboration with the Presidency of Meteorology and Environment (PME) of Saudi Arabia and was part of the series of national and regional preparatory meetings leading up to Rio+20. The goal was to discuss ways to reform the institutional framework for sustainable development at the national, regional and international levels in the light of the emerging challenges. The workshop was organized under the auspices of Prince Turki Ben Nasser Ben Abdelaziz, president of PME, and in association with the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

2. The goal of this workshop was:

(a) To discuss the existing institutional framework for sustainable development in the Arab region at the national and regional levels, evaluate the framework based on strengths and weaknesses and specify needed reforms to face emerging challenges to sustainable development;

(b) To support Arab countries in negotiating a clear position on the issue of international environmental management within the framework of Rio+20, building on the outcome of the Solo Dialogue;

(c) To prepare a position statement on the issues cited above for submission to the Arab Preparatory Conference for Rio+20 that will be held in Cairo, 16 and 17 October 2011.

3. The workshop dealt with the following essential topics: (a) national and regional experiences in terms of the institutional framework for sustainable development; (b) findings of the Regional Review of Institutions for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region led by ESCWA; and (c) the results of the study conducted by UNEP on the institutional framework for sustainable development. The participants also discussed international environmental management, the outcome of the Solo Dialogue, options for institutional reform based on national and regional specificities and the road map for Rio+20.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

4. At the end of the workshop, the drafting committee made a series of recommendations that were addressed to the international community, the Arab region and the countries of the region.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

5. Participants called for the reinforcement of the institutional framework for sustainable development to achieve the following goals:

(a) To integrate environmental, social and economic dimensions in a balanced and coherent manner;

(b) To achieve the sustainable development goals that were set by major international conferences (including the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1992; Agenda 21; the Millennium Summit, 2000; and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 2002) and to address the gaps in the institutional framework for sustainable development;

(c) To address member country needs, including developing countries;

(d) To promote the role of international bodies and organizations concerned with sustainable development and related regional, national and local institutions;

(e) To avoid commercial barriers and the use of environmental considerations as conditions for development assistance;

(f) To ensure that developed countries fulfil their obligations towards developing countries so they can achieve sustainable development by providing additional specific and appropriate funding, supporting technology transfer and settlement and building capacity;

(g) To promote coordination between institutional frameworks at the international, regional and national levels and promote coordination and coherence between the agencies and institutions of the United Nations;

(h) To activate and promote the participation of civil society and representatives of concerned sectors at all levels, within the efforts to achieve sustainable development and full participation in the production process and to adopt and implement related policies and decisions;

(i) To support international donors, funds and regional financial institutions that serve Arab countries and enable them to achieve sustainable development and to avoid placing additional burdens on developing countries.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE ARAB REGION

6. The participants addressed the following recommendations to the Arab region:

(a) To invite the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment to modify the name of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR) as follows: Arab Committee for Sustainable Development. Also, to include stakeholder representatives of the three pillars of sustainable development (environmental, social and economic), in the membership of the council;

(b) To encourage Arab countries to harmonize country-level institutional frameworks for sustainable development with international and regional frameworks;

(c) To merge the two technical, social and economic committees of the Economic and Social Council into one committee that takes charge of the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development and includes representatives of related sectors in the membership of the committee;

(d) To include Arab countries in the Economic and Social Council through high-level representatives from environmental, social and economic sectors;

(e) To modify the name of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment as follows: Council of Ministers for Sustainable Development;

(f) To modify the name of the Ministerial Economic and Social Council as follows: Ministerial Council for Sustainable Development;

(g) To invite the Arab Summit to consider modifying the name of the Arab Economic Development and Social Summit as follows: Arab Summit for Sustainable Development.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO COUNTRIES OF THE REGION

7. The participants addressed the following recommendations to the countries of the region:

(a) To ask the concerned Arab countries to accelerate the implementation of the institutional framework for sustainable development while respecting the related decisions of the Arab Summit and the

Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment. To also encourage Arab countries to learn from the experiences of other countries in the region;

(b) To spread the concept of sustainable development and strengthen its foundation within all segments of society through all available means;

(c) Encourage Arab countries to update their data and information concerning the three dimensions of sustainable development by creating a web page for sustainable development;

(d) To ask ESCWA to reformulate the Regional Review of Institutions for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region for 2011 in the light of Arab experiences that were reviewed during the workshop;

(e) To encourage Arab countries to harmonize country-level institutional frameworks for sustainable development with international and regional frameworks.

II. TOPICS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

A. ROAD MAP FOR RIO+20

8. Ms. Hanan Atallah, representative of ESCWA, discussed the road map for Rio+20 and highlighted the need for the institutional framework for sustainable development in Arab countries and the need for an Arab perspective on Rio+20. She reviewed current regional preparations for Rio+20 that include the following: (a) preparing regional reports; (b) drafting an Arab declaration to emphasize the political will to achieve sustainable development in the Arab region; (c) organizing regional and national consultation meetings that target all stakeholders; and (d) participating in global meetings.

9. Mr. William Chambers, representative of UNEP, presented the current situation of the institutional framework in the negotiations for sustainable development leading up to Rio+20. He reviewed preparations for Rio+20 and highlighted competition between concerned organizations and ministries that could prevent the region from negotiating a unified position on the conference. He noted national and regional efforts and asked Arab countries to support the role of UNEP and its efforts in this field.

10. The two presentations were followed by interventions by representatives of Arab countries and experts who discussed the importance of climate change at the regional level and the importance of the Arab Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change, issued by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment at its nineteenth session in December 2007. The representative of ESCWA spoke about activities that are taking place within the framework of the regional initiative for the assessment of the impact of climate change on water resources in the Arab region. She emphasized that a project is being implemented by ESCWA in collaboration with a number of regional organizations to do the following: (a) consolidate the efforts of Arab countries to evaluate the negative impacts of climate change; and (b) prepare plans and policies to adapt to and mitigate the possible effects of climate change on water resources, crop production and environmental, social and economic conditions. Participants also discussed the importance of creating development institutions that are transparent and accountable and an international system that meets the requirements of Arab countries and lays the foundation for good governance.

B. REGIONAL REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION

11. Ms. Maissa Yousef, representative of ESCWA, presented the main results of the Regional Review of Institutions for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region in 2011 (E/ESCWA/SDPD/2011/WG.6/2). She reviewed achievements in sustainable development at the national and regional levels in preparation for Rio+20. She discussed the developments and changes in the conceptual framework of sustainable development that took place between the first Rio conference in 1992 and Rio+20 which will take place in

2012. She emphasized the results of international conferences and conventions on issues of sustainable development and corresponding regional declarations. She then reviewed national and regional institutional frameworks in the Arab region and concluded with some of the major challenges and barriers to creating effective institutional frameworks for sustainable development.

12. Mr. Mohammed el Aawah, representative of UNESCO, presented the main results of the Programme on Man and the Biosphere. The programme promotes the creation of biosphere reserves and has been active for 40 years. He noted the importance of the link between scientific awareness and sustainable development. He clarified that natural processes can be considered as laboratories for sustainable development, and practices derived from those processes are being tested to reconcile human and natural activities. He indicated that there are around 850 biosphere reserves in the world, 26 of which are located in Arab countries. The Arab network of the programme was established in 1997 in Jordan and the global network seeks to promote cooperation to solve environmental problems, stressing the importance of coordinating efforts to achieve sustainable development.

13. The participants highlighted the importance of the ESCWA study, which included all Arab countries and allowed them to give their opinion during international meetings and influence negotiations of Rio+20 at the global level. The participants highlighted the importance of integrating the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development, without preference to any dimension and considering the green economy as a tool to achieve sustainable development and not as a substitute for it. They stressed the need to achieve sustainable development and eliminate poverty, bearing in mind the environmental attributes of Arab countries and the importance of providing prosperity to the citizens of this region. Some delegations expressed their refusal to allow environmental standards to be used as commercial barriers or prerequisites for humanitarian aid.

14. The participants affirmed the responsibility of developed countries to fulfil their obligations to support developing countries in achieving sustainable development through providing additional specific and appropriate funding and supporting technology transfer and capacity-building. The participants called upon countries to update their data and information on environment and sustainable development and raise awareness on the concept of sustainable development at all levels. The participants discussed the importance of promoting coordination at the national level through committees for sustainable development, at the regional level through the League of Arab States and at the international level, encompassing all bodies and institutions, through the United Nations and the League of Arab States.

15. The participants noted the need to invite all related ministries to take part in the League of Arab States meetings on sustainable development and encourage the participation of civil society in efforts to achieve sustainable development and support the progressive approach in the implementation process. Many delegates stressed the importance of promoting UNEP without burdening developing countries, according to the principle of shared but differentiated responsibility and without transforming the programme into an agency for the environment. The participants stressed the importance of increasing the funding for UNEP and supporting its role in providing support at the national level like the United Nations Development Programme. They also highlighted the importance of showing developed countries demonstrating the required political will. The delegates expressed interest in a study on how to strengthen mechanisms adopted by the League of Arab States to achieve sustainable development. The participants pointed out the importance of reinforcing the role of JCEDAR and the Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States. They also highlighted the possibility of establishing a council for sustainable development in the League of Arab States.

C. INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

16. Mr. William Chambers, representative of UNEP, discussed the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome and the options for broader institutional reform for international environmental governance. He spoke about the

weakness of international environmental governance, the lack of funding and the problems that face UNEP, including the misuse of funds in programme initiatives and the lack of strong leadership and political influence within the United Nations system. He discussed such challenges as the need to enhance capacity-building to fulfil many special obligations and the lack of implementation mechanisms. He then presented the results of the Belgrade Process and the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome, including the identification of gaps that were not specified within the tasks of the international environmental governance system, and the discussion of broader options for reforms. He concluded with a review of the best options for institutional frameworks including: (a) promoting UNEP; (b) establishing the World Environment Organization as a specialized agency; (c) establishing a comprehensive organization for sustainable development or reforming the Economic and Social Council and the Committee on Sustainable Development; and (d) integrating existing institutions.

17. Mr. Samir Ghazi, representative of PME, Saudi Arabia, and assistant to the head of the Environmental and Sustainable Development Affairs Department, explained the goals of the Solo Dialogue including supporting the Rio+20 preparation process and discussing institutional evolution at the national and regional levels. He presented the results of the Solo Dialogue concerning the institutional framework for sustainable development and the results of the high-level United Nations Conference for Sustainable Development known as the Beijing Dialogue. He discussed the issues and challenges that were addressed by the conference and reviewed its results concerning the challenges to sustainable development such as the food crisis, loss of biodiversity, energy, desertification, water scarcity, poverty, prevention of infectious diseases, natural disasters and the green economy as a means to achieve sustainable development rather than a substitute for it. He concluded with a number of suggestions to overcome the challenges that may prevent the achievement of sustainable development in Arab countries.

18. The participants discussed the need for technical capacity-building and the provision of funding to support the institutional framework at the national level. They stressed the importance of links between regional organizations to avoid duplication of their work and achieve complementarities at the international and regional levels. Some participants praised the role of regional organizations in promoting sustainable development. They invited rich countries to provide developing countries with the funding they need to achieve sustainable development. The participants also pointed out the weakness of the ministries of environmental affairs in Arab countries which reflects badly on sustainable development policies and plans. They called for the promotion of regional organizations that deal with environmental affairs and the provision of sufficient funding from the United Nations organizations without imposing any obligations on Arab countries.

D. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO PROMOTE THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

19. Experts and representatives of Arab countries discussed the main three goals of Rio+20 that include the following: ensuring political commitment to sustainable development; evaluating progress towards achieving internationally agreed obligations; and dealing with the main emerging challenges.

20. Ms. Khawla Matar, representative of the United Nations Information Centre, pointed out many regional challenges to achieving sustainable development, particularly ensuring political commitment in Arab countries and the great need to raise awareness on the concept of sustainable development at all levels. She stressed the importance of reconsidering this concept and simplifying it at the national level. She clarified that the problem stems from the absence of institutional thinking in the Arab region at all levels and not only within governments. She stressed the need to advance in the fields of education, health and women's affairs in Arab countries and to give them more support when it comes to major issues. She mentioned that the absence of trust between all institutions in the region and governance and transparency issues at the national level are among the rising challenges facing the region, and that these countries do not possess the ability to keep pace with the development of other countries.

21. Mr. Joey Ghaleb, Lebanon, stressed the importance of the economic crisis and economic stagnation that have affected negotiations for Rio+20 and other conferences. He gave a number of suggestions including promoting the green economy, conducting short-term social and environmental initiatives and unifying the concepts of sustainable development. He also stressed the need to cooperate with decision makers and eliminate competition between the environmental, social and economic sectors. He concluded by stressing the importance of spreading awareness on concepts like consolidation of development plans, activation of initiatives and provision of the necessary financial and technical resources to implement them.
22. Mr. Seif El-Chakhsi, Oman, noted that complementarities between institutional policies in Arab countries and the environmental, social and economic sectors are needed to achieve sustainable development. He reminded the audience of the need to increase the per capita income in most Arab countries where income has decreased with deteriorating environmental conditions. He noted the lack of practical plans and successful models in the studies and reports prepared by regional organizations. He praised the establishment of the national centre for field research in Oman, a step to overcome the challenges to achieving sustainable development.
23. Ms. Asma Abahussain, Bahrain, explained that Arab countries do not give enough attention to the environmental dimension and that the environmental reports are not regularly issued. She stressed the need to involve members of parliament and decision makers in efforts to achieve sustainable development, pointing out that stability and transparency are requisite elements of this goal.
24. Ms. Rafia Ghubash, president of the Arab Network of Women in Science and Technology, United Arab Emirates, stressed that the political situation and efforts to promote stability are two essential issues in the Arab region. She emphasized the importance of a unified Arab position with a programme of action that includes the priorities of the region.
25. Mr. Emad Eddine Adly, general coordinator of the Arab Network for Environment and Development, highlighted the need to focus on the national and local framework in order to make the regional framework successful. He noted the importance of political will and the need to take the privacy of each country into consideration. He also highlighted the need to integrate sustainability into national plans for a specific amount of time. He suggested that JCEDAR should be restructured and regular meetings of ministers for the environment should be attended by ministers for other sectors.
26. The representative of Saudi Arabia discussed the need to transition from the negotiation of declarations to implementation. He indicated the need to evaluate the priorities set by the first Rio Conference in 1992, such as eliminating poverty, reducing debt, managing natural resources, reducing pollution and noted the need to re-examine all these priorities in preparation for Rio+20.
27. The representative of Morocco gave great importance to spreading a communication culture instead of creating structures and naming councils or committees. He also stressed the need to work within a participatory approach to make decisions and exchange knowledge in the Arab region.
28. Mr. Nouri El-Sousi, expert on environment and sustainable development, Tunisia, called for the promotion of the concept of the institutional framework for sustainable development through specialized Arab research centres.
29. Mr. Abd-El-Kader Ahmad Ma'moun, head of the Environmental Affairs Department, Ministry of Environment and Forests and Urban Development, pointed out the importance of establishing security and stability in the Sudan, for they affect sustainable development.
30. Mr. Suleiman Al-Katabri, head of the Sectoral Policies Department, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Yemen, stated that the national strategy for the environment is still being prepared. He stressed the importance of integrating principles of sustainable development into the

constitution and dealing with emerging issues such as climate change. He also suggested that instead of developing new organizations, the performance of existing institutions should be evaluated and the needed modifications should be made.

31. Mr. Mohammed Abdel-Razzak, lecturer at the University of Thebes and adviser of PME, Saudi Arabia, said that national successful experiences in Tunisia, Morocco and Saudi Arabia required political will. He praised civil society organizations for supporting the path of sustainable development.

32. Mr. Firas Asfour, Head of the Department of Planning and Statistics in the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs, Syrian Arab Republic, stressed the importance of security and stability in Arab countries in order to achieve sustainable development. He noted the need to differentiate between the green economy and sustainable development in the Arab countries. He pointed out that concerned ministries in some Arab countries lack advisory councils, which weakens the institutional structure for sustainable development.

33. Mr. Wael Seif, lecturer at the University of Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, stressed the need to build the capacity of decision makers, encourage participation and increase awareness of the institutional framework of sustainable development.

34. Mr. Djamel Eddine Djaballah, plenipotentiary minister and Director of the Department of Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development, League of Arab States, noted the role of the League of Arab States in collaboration with JCEDAR, and stressed the role of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment in implementing regional initiatives and the ministers of environment as references in each country. He noted that representatives of Arab countries had suggested expanding the role of JCEDAR to include all sectors concerned with achieving sustainable development and promoting the role of United Nations organizations related to different sectors. He called for integrating media professionals and civil society organizations and enhancing their capacity to deal with environmental affairs.

35. The representative of UNEP Regional Office for West Asia noted the need for specialized committees or technical councils that collaborate to achieve complementarities between the three pillars of sustainable development.

E. THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: EXPERIENCES OF ARAB COUNTRIES

36. A group of Arab countries reviewed the institutional, executive and legal procedures adopted by their governments to promote and consolidate sustainable development and evaluate the results, including the achievements of governments and the challenges and barriers to sustainable development. They presented a group of initiatives for sustainable development at the national and regional levels and the lessons learned in this field at the national and local levels.

37. The representative of Oman presented the concept of sustainable development and the efforts deployed since 1972 to formulate sustainable development plans. He reviewed the basic regulations of the country and the eighth five-year plan that included all aspects of sustainable development. He gave an overview of the legislative framework in Oman and presented recommendations that included the establishment of a committee for sustainable development at the national level and the activation of civil-society participation in Oman.

38. The representative of PME, Saudi Arabia, gave a general overview of the results of international conferences, including the plan of Saudi Arabia to achieve sustainable development. He noted that the eighth plan for sustainable development included national policies that aimed to achieve sustainable development by harmonizing activities and protection, promoting and insuring the sustainability of natural resources, preserving non-renewable resources and searching for substitutes or additional resources. He noted the

adoption of the Islamic Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region. He gave an overview on the institutional framework for sustainable development in Saudi Arabia that included establishing legislative institutions and policies. He presented the tasks of the Environment Council and the National Committee for Sustainable Development in Saudi Arabia. He proposed that a sustainable development agency be established and outlined the organizational structure of this agency or any other institutions concerned with the implementation of environmental, social and economic integrity.

39. The representative of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Jordan, reviewed efforts to implement the National Programme of Action and the related legislation. He explained that the institutional framework for sustainable development in Jordan includes the establishment of a Ministry of Environment and environmental policies and laws that seek to achieve sustainable development. He noted the formation of a national committee for sustainable development and highlighted the current efforts to promote the role of this committee to cope with emerging challenges at the national and international levels and to update the National Programme of Action, which is the framework to achieve sustainable development in Jordan.

40. The representative of the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs, Syrian Arab Republic, noted that in addition to a Ministry for Environmental Affairs, a Higher Council for Environmental Safety has been established. He noted constructive efforts to achieve sustainable development through participating in conferences and international summits, accessing international conventions and passing national legislation and laws that guarantee the application of international conventions. He affirmed the importance of integrating the environment into general policies and the tasks of related ministries. He concluded his presentation with suggestions that support the concepts of sustainable development in the Syrian Arab Republic including the following: (a) establishing a committee to raise awareness on environmental affairs; (b) integrating the concepts of sustainable development into school curriculums; and (c) evaluating the environmental impact of projects, establishing a methodology that guarantees surveillance and issuing national reports.

41. The participants discussed the importance of establishing a programme for professionals at the level of the League of Arab States to enhance capacity-building in the field of sustainable development. The discussions focused on the need for a political decision to adopt the concept of sustainable development in the Arab region. The participants confirmed that there is a need to learn from the experiences of developed Arab countries. They noted the need to care for people and work to eliminate poverty and illiteracy as a basis for the achievement of sustainable development.

42. The representative of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency spoke of the measures that were taken at the institutional, executive and legal levels in developing the institutional framework for sustainable development. He spoke of the formation of the National Committee for Sustainable Development the Technical Secretariat for Sustainable Development that included representatives of ministries and entities of the National Committee. The achievement of the general framework of the national strategy for development was made possible by joint efforts of all ministries and represented entities in the National Committee and the Technical Secretariat. He presented the national perspective on sustainable development set out by the national strategy. He noted challenges to sustainable development, but the progress of sustainable development can be supported by legislative and economic tools, in addition to tools to raise awareness of major national initiatives.

43. The representative of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Yemen, stated that many entities were established such as the Ministry of Water and Environment and the Environmental Protection Authority that include all public and private sector stakeholders and civil society organizations. He spoke about legal, organizational and environmental frameworks, social and institutional capacities and international conventions Yemen has ratified. He reviewed some of the institutional challenges that impede the efforts to achieve sustainable development.

44. The representative of Tunisia reviewed the efforts to achieve sustainable development, including the following: (a) ratification of international conventions in environmental fields; (b) elaboration of national strategies; (c) establishment of a fund to prevent pollution; (d) integration of the environment into various development plans; (e) publication of national reports on the state of the environment in Tunisia and a report on the indicators of sustainable development for follow-up and evaluation; and (f) development of the National Commission for Sustainable Development (1993) and specialized institutions such as the Tunisian Observatory for Environment and Sustainable Development. Within the framework of Tunisia's persistent efforts to progress at all levels, the Higher Council for Environment and Sustainable Handling of Natural Resources was established in 2010 to replace the National Commission for Sustainable Development. To overcome challenges in the Arab region, the speaker suggested the establishment of a specialized committee for sustainable development and centres or institutes dedicated to development and encouraging joint work.

45. The representative of the State Secretariat for Water and Environment, Morocco, presented steps taken towards achieving sustainable development, including the following: (a) development of the National Charter for Environment and Sustainable Development; (b) development of a plan of action emerging from the Strategy of Proximity to the Environment Sector; (c) establishment of regional observatories for environment and sustainable development; (d) implementation of national programmes that seek to promote complementarities between economic, social and environmental sectors; and (e) establishment of legal, economic and financial mechanisms to support the efforts deployed to achieve sustainable development, taking into consideration the mechanisms of international cooperation, capacity-building and media promotion. The representative of Morocco spoke about the National Charter and the methodology used to strengthen its legal and technical aspects.

46. The representative of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Physical Development, the Sudan, reviewed the plans and strategies for sustainable development, the goals of the five-year plans and the international conventions that ratify them including the adoption of national policies for sustainable development. He also made recommendations that promote participation and coordination in the field of sustainable development.

47. On behalf of the Palestinian delegation that could not attend the workshop, ESCWA presented the institutional framework for sustainable development and reviewed its progress and the difficult political conditions that impede it. The participants discussed emerging challenges to sustainable development, the strengths and weaknesses of the current framework and needed reforms to overcome these challenges.

48. The participants discussed the importance of documenting successful experiences in this field and relying on the professionals' experiences in the Arab region. Some participants stressed the need to promote the role of civil society organizations in the work of governments. There is a need to focus on economic and social factors to activate environmental actions and focus on cooperation and coordination between all related ministries. The participants stressed the need to clarify the concept of sustainable development in the Arab region and to specify the tasks and responsibilities of those concerned with sustainable development through dialogue between the League of Arab States and the ministers for the environment in the Arab region. The participants noted that competition between many ministries impedes the implementation of sustainable development programmes. They unanimously agreed to develop committees for sustainable development at the national level and to suggest sustainable development mechanisms to JCEDAR at its meeting in December 2011.

F. PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE PREPARATORY APPROACH OF RIO+20

49. Mr. Djamel Eddine Djaballah, representative of the League of Arab States, headed the discussion session on the choices and expectations of unifying the Arab position for Rio+20. He explained the progress of the preparation process in the Arab region through the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and JCEDAR. He emphasized the need to restructure the technical committee so its work includes not only environmental aspects but also the principles of sustainable development. He stressed the

importance of increasing cooperation at the national level and coordination between stakeholders at the regional level.

50. Mr. Samir Ghazi, representative of Saudi Arabia, noted the need to harmonize the technical and political aspects of the work of the League of Arab States. He called for the establishment of a committee for sustainable development that represents all entities related to environmental, social and economic concerns.

51. Mr. William Chambers gave an overview of the institutional reform suggested to the Committee for Sustainable Development and the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. He stressed the importance of preserving the existing organizations and promoting their role while increasing funding in order to deal with all sectors in coordination and cooperation with the Governments of Arab countries.

G. REPORT OF THE DRAFTING COMMITTEE AND THE PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE WAY FORWARD

52. The representative of PME, Saudi Arabia, headed the session along with the representative of the League of Arab States and ESCWA. The participants agreed to set a deadline of 10 October 2011 for receipt of all suggestions and comments in order to allow the action group of ESCWA to include them in the study before presenting them at the next preparatory meetings for Rio+20.

53. The participants made recommendations during the workshop. These recommendations were gathered and revised by the drafting committee to be discussed and modified by the participants. There was unanimous agreement to divide the recommendations into three categories: recommendations addressed to the international community, recommendations addressed to the Arab region and recommendations addressed to the countries of the region. They reviewed the recommendations, made some modifications and received the final copy at the end of the meeting.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE OF WORKSHOP AND DATE

54. The regional workshop on the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia from 3 to 5 October 2011. The work was distributed in eight sessions.

B. OPENING

55. The workshop took place under the auspices of Prince Turki Bin Nasser Bin Abdulaziz, president of PME, Saudi Arabia, and was opened with speeches by the organizers of the workshop. Mr. Mohammad el Aawah, representative of the regional office of UNESCO, gave a speech to welcome participants. He reiterated the commitment of UNESCO to achieve sustainable development in various sectors and he spoke of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development which will establish networks and links to promote exchange and interaction between parties in the field of education. The aim is to improve the quality of education and learning to achieve sustainable development.

56. Ms. Maissa Youssef, representative of ESCWA, noted that this workshop is part of the regional preparations for Rio+20. It seeks to gather opinions of governmental and non-governmental entities to create a unified Arab position for Rio+20.

57. Mr. Adel Farid Abdel Kader, officer in charge, UNEP Regional Office for West Asia, noted that the preparatory discussions for Rio+20 include international environmental management and revolve around five alternatives as follows: (a) improving UNEP; (b) establishing a new umbrella organization for sustainable development; (c) establishing an agency specialized in environmental affairs (world environment

organization for example); (d) reforming the United Nations Economic and Social Council and the Economic and Social Committee for Sustainable Development; and (e) improve and simplify institutional mechanisms.

58. Mr. Samir Ben Jamil Ghazi, assistant to the President for Environment and Sustainable Development, gave a speech on behalf of the president of PME, Saudi Arabia. He expressed the strong interest of Saudi Arabia in sustainable development issues and the importance of the meeting, which was held within the framework of joint environmental effort. It also represented one of the main Arab contributions in preparation for Rio+20, and other regions of the world are making similar contributions. He stated that the main goal of this meeting was to confirm political commitment, achieve sustainable development and consider ways to overcome challenges the region must face to implement the recommendations of major conferences and the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

59. Mr. Djamel Eddine Djaballah, Director of the Department of Environment and Sustainable Development of the League of Arab States, noted that the workshop took place within the framework of the regional preparations for Rio+20 and of joint work in the region. The League participated in the first Rio conference in 1992 and in follow-up conference in Johannesburg in 2002. Furthermore, during the two summits in Tunisia and Algeria, the League of Arab States took a series of initiatives for sustainable development that were adopted in the Arab region. He expressed the interest of the League of Arab States in discussions and meetings that seek to prepare a complete file on sustainable development in the region. He reviewed the challenges facing the Arab region, the costs of transitioning to the green economy and the ways to help developing countries build their capacity and skills and find needed funding.

C. PARTICIPANTS

60. Representatives of 11 Arab countries participated in the workshop along with numerous experts from the region. Representative of the League of Arab States also attended, along with representatives of regional organizations, academic institutions and civil society organizations. A list of participants in the workshop is annexed to this report.

D. ELECTION OF MEMBERS OF THE DRAFTING COMMITTEE

61. Upon the suggestion of the participants in the workshop including representatives of Arab countries, organizations and non-governmental entities, members of the drafting committee responsible for the text of recommendations and its revision were elected in the midst of negotiations between participants. The nominations included representatives of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, representatives of UNEP and ESCWA and two experts from Arab countries.

E. EVALUATION RESULTS

62. The evaluation of the meeting is based on the results of the survey conducted by ESCWA through an assessment form that was distributed to the participants after the end of the meeting. The form contained questions on different aspects of the meeting and its organization. Thirty-five completed forms were submitted to ESCWA, the results were analysed and the following observations were made.

63. The responses to the assessment were positive as 69.6 per cent of the participants said they benefited from the information they learned during the meeting. Furthermore, 70 per cent of the participants agreed that the topics of discussion were important to their field of work and experience. They also agreed that the meeting was a valuable opportunity to exchange experiences and information and to build useful work connections. More than 70 per cent of the participants praised the clarity of the presentations and the quality of written material that ESCWA distributed to them.

64. The participants made a number of observations concerning the results of this meeting. They all agreed on the need for updates on the implementation of the recommendations of the meeting and the need to

organize other workshops and meetings on cooperation efforts. A number of participants pointed out the need for a joint vision and a unified Arab position on the institutional framework for sustainable development to present at Rio+20. They also highlighted the need to clarify the Arab position in preparation for the conference.

F. AGENDA

65. During the first session of the workshop, the participants adopted the agenda as set out in E/ESCWA/SDPD/2011/WG.6/L.1. The agenda is as follows:

1. Opening of the workshop.
2. Election of the members of the drafting committee.
3. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational issues.
4. Road map to Rio+20.
5. Regional Review of Institutions for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region.
6. International environmental governance: challenges and opportunities.
7. Challenges and opportunities in promoting the institutional framework for sustainable development.
8. The institutional framework for sustainable development: experiences of Arab countries.
9. Panel discussion on the Arab preparatory approach to Rio+20: options and expectations to clarify the Arab position for Rio+20.
10. Report of the drafting committee and the panel discussion on the way forward.

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