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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

**Report****Sixth meeting of the Executive Committee  
Marrakech, Morocco, 15-16 June 2019****Summary**

The Executive Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its sixth meeting in Marrakech, Morocco, on 15 and 16 June 2019. The meeting agenda contained a set of items including the implementation of recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its fifth meeting, the implementation of the Beirut Consensus on Technology for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region, an evaluation of Executive Committee meetings and ESCWA sessions, and preparations for the thirty-first ESCWA session.

The Executive Committee also discussed several regional and global issues, notably the Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2018-2019, monitoring and evaluating Arab economic integration, a social expenditure monitor for Arab States, multidimensional poverty in the Arab region, and a methodology for institutional capacity assessment in conflict-affected countries. Moreover, the Committee considered the social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls, a proposal to rethink barriers to women's economic participation in the Arab region, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region.

The present report summarizes the discussions under each agenda item and sets out the recommendations adopted at the meeting.

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## **Introduction**

1. At its twenty-eighth session, held in Tunis from 15 to 18 September 2014, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted resolution 320 (XXVIII) on redesignating the Technical Committee as the “Executive Committee” and amending its terms of reference to empower it to facilitate direct communication between the secretariat and member States on regional development, economic and social issues, and to submit resolutions directly to the Economic and Social Council, if necessary.
2. The Executive Committee held its sixth meeting in Marrakech, Morocco, on 15 and 16 June 2019. It discussed the items on its agenda, including the implementation of recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its fifth meeting, the implementation of the Beirut Consensus on Technology for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region, an evaluation of Executive Committee meetings and ESCWA sessions, and preparations for the thirty-first ESCWA session. The Executive Committee also considered several regional and global issues, notably the Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2018-2019, monitoring and evaluating Arab economic integration, a social expenditure monitor for Arab States, multidimensional poverty in the Arab region, and a methodology for institutional capacity assessment in conflict-affected countries. Moreover, the Committee discussed the social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls, a proposal to rethink barriers to women’s economic participation in the Arab region, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region.
3. The present report summarizes the discussions under each agenda item and sets out the recommendations adopted at the meeting.

### **I. RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AT ITS SIXTH MEETING**

4. At the closing session of the sixth meeting of the Executive Committee, representatives of member States thanked Morocco for its generous hosting of the meeting. They also congratulated Ms. Rola Dashti on her appointment as Executive Secretary of ESCWA and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, and expressed appreciation for her participation in the meeting.
5. The Executive Committee adopted the following recommendations on items set out in the meeting agenda.

#### **A. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ESCWA MEMBER STATES**

6. The Executive Committee made the following recommendations to ESCWA member States:
  - (a) Welcome the efforts of the ESCWA secretariat in implementing recommendations made by the Committee at its fifth meeting, take note of implemented activities under the Beirut Consensus on Technology for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region, and continue sending responses to the guiding questionnaire on implementing the Beirut Consensus at the national level, while taking into account that the final compiled progress report will be sent to member States before the thirty-first ESCWA session to review information and data accuracy;
  - (b) Take note of the system of indices and scoreboards established by the ESCWA secretariat to monitor and evaluate economic integration, and cooperate with the secretariat to develop and use the system as an interactive tool for monitoring trade openness;
  - (c) Commend the project on a social expenditure monitor for Arab States proposed by the ESCWA secretariat to develop a framework covering the dimensions and indicators of social expenditure, noting the importance of adapting the monitor to Arab States’ varied contexts, and collaborate with the secretariat to

develop and use the framework to identify different aspects of public expenditure and promote social development and macrofiscal sustainability;

(d) Implement time use surveys in response to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, so as to consider ways to enhance women's economic participation;

(e) Stress the important role of the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development as a platform for bringing together all sustainable development stakeholders, and take note of the report of the 2019 Arab Forum that was held in Beirut from 9 to 11 April 2019 and submit it as a document containing key messages from the Arab region, represented by Iraq which chaired the 2019 Arab Forum, to the 2019 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, to be held in New York from 8 to 18 July 2019, while underscoring the importance of linking those messages to national sustainable development efforts;

(f) Underline the importance of reforming the United Nations development system to increase efficiency and the importance of the regional dimension in the system's work, and the pivotal and vital role of the regional commissions in supporting an integrated approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and enhance and cement the role of ESCWA as a coordinating secretariat for the regional collaborative platform comprising United Nations entities to avoid duplication and ensure programme alignment, and as a regional administrative services centre for those entities;

(g) Take note of the ESCWA Executive Secretary's vision to keep pace with organizational reforms, respond to the region's development priorities, and implement the 2030 Agenda through the following:

- (i) Developing the secretariat's internal structure;
- (ii) Increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the secretariat's work;
- (iii) Facilitating administrative procedures;
- (iv) Maximizing benefits from new technologies;

(h) Adopt the recommendations by ESCWA subsidiary bodies set out in the following reports:

- (i) Report of the Committee on Transport and Logistics on its nineteenth session ([E/ESCWA/C.5/2018/6/Report](#));
- (ii) Report of the Statistical Committee on its thirteenth session ([E/ESCWA/C.1/2019/8/Report](#));
- (iii) Report of the Committee on Technology for Development on its second session ([E/ESCWA/C.8/2019/14/Report](#)).

## B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ESCWA SECRETARIAT

7. The Executive Committee made the following recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat:

(a) Deepen the examination of social aspects in the Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region prepared annually by the ESCWA secretariat, including poverty and unemployment challenges, and the impact of population growth dynamics on employment needs, and consider the possibility of altering the Survey's structure to better reflect the challenges facing the region;

(b) Develop the system of indices and scoreboards for monitoring and evaluating economic integration into an interactive platform that assists decision makers in assessing the impact of trade agreements on the economy and on achieving the SDGs through policy simulation models;

(c) Continue developing the social expenditure monitor project and adapt it to member States' varied contexts, and send a background paper highlighting the importance of the project to the member States that are yet to partake in the project;

(d) Continue providing support in implementing the Arab Strategic Framework for the Eradication of Multidimensional Poverty 2020-2030, and develop a knowledge database on multidimensional poverty and inequality to support policymakers in identifying priority areas for intervention and assessing their impact on eradicating poverty;

(e) Analyse the results of time use surveys as a method to deepen understanding of women's economic participation in Arab countries so as to enhance it;

(f) Assess opportunities in "the future of work" and the changing nature of labour markets so as to increase women's economic participation in the Arab region;

(g) Disseminate widely the report on the social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls (July 2016 – June 2018) and send it to various international and regional actors, including civil society organizations, to increase awareness on the impact of Israeli occupation on Palestinian women;

(h) Develop a trust fund at ESCWA to support Palestine, aimed at increasing resources within the ESCWA secretariat to supporting the Palestinian people and institutions in achieving sustainable development, building their capacity and empowering them to realize their inalienable rights, and communicate with member States to urge them to finance the fund;

(i) Develop the proposed methodology for institutional capacity assessment in post-conflict settings, and work with willing member States on applying it to strengthen institutional capacity so as to limit the impact of conflict and its repercussions for development;

(j) Support Yemen in preparing an integrated national development vision – economic, social and institutional – for the post-conflict phase, and mobilize extrabudgetary resources for that purpose;

(k) Continue providing technical support to member States on voluntary national review (VNR) processes and on benefiting from their results following VNR submissions;

(l) Continue coordinating with the League of Arab States and regional organizations on implementing the 2030 Agenda, and work with the League of Arab States to formulate a long-term development vision for the Arab region;

(m) Strengthen dialogue between statistical offices and decision makers in the region to align priorities for monitoring progress in implementing the SDGs, and support the reconstruction of statistical systems in conflict-affected countries;

(n) Continue working on the proposed theme for the thirty-first ESCWA session, namely youth issues in the Arab region, while taking into account the importance of involving civil society and the private sector in the session, and include the demographic dividend issue in the background paper that will be prepared by the secretariat for the session;

(o) Intensify efforts to transform knowledge generated by the secretariat through studies and reports into tools and interactive platforms, to be used by willing member States in decision-making;

(p) Develop a trust fund for building the capacity of young people in the Arab region and training them on sustainable development issues through their work at ESCWA, thus allowing them to gain experience in working for the United Nations;

(q) Prepare a report on progress in implementing the ESCWA Executive Secretary's vision for developing its work, to be presented at the Executive Committee's seventh meeting.

## II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

### A. FOLLOW-UP ISSUES

#### 1. *Implementation of recommendations made by the executive committee at its fifth meeting* (Agenda item 3)

8. The representative of the secretariat, with reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/3](#), made a presentation on progress in activities undertaken by the secretariat pursuant to recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its fifth meeting (Beirut, 18-19 December 2018). He gave an overview of the recommendations and the measures taken to implement them, including launching a report in late 2018 on the status of financing for development in the Arab region and contributing to the 2019 global report on the same topic, and developing a proposal on establishing an Arab forum on tax policies. He said that in the field of statistical capacity-building, ESCWA had launched a data portal equivalent to a data one-stop-shop covering all Arab countries. Regional workshops had been held to consider climate change issues, and to support member States in preparing national reviews on implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years (Beijing+25). The representative of the secretariat said that the ESCWA secretariat had signed a technical cooperation framework with Iraq, which had not been completed when the document on the implementation of recommendations was published. The secretariat was also completing the formulation of frameworks with Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen.

9. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of the State of Palestine said that he commended the secretariat's activities pursuant to the Committee's recommendations, but States' aspirations might go beyond implementation levels in some cases, such as increasing human cadres in the field of financing for development. He enquired about the development of the framework for economic and social indicators and metadata for the Arab region mentioned in the document; whether it had been adopted in consultation with planning bodies, policymakers and statistical bodies, and about the extent of cooperation with the League of Arab States in that regard. Concerning activities related to Palestine, he requested further details on progress in completing the establishment of the Palestine Unit and on the project on estimating the cost of Israeli occupation on the Palestinian people.

10. The representative of Yemen stressed that it was vital to rebuild statistical systems in conflict-affected countries, including Yemen. The representative of Qatar said that the resolution to establish the Palestine Unit was made when Qatar was chairing the ESCWA session, and that his country was prepared to assist in finding ways to mobilize resources to implement the resolution and avoid limiting the Unit's activities to calculating the cost of occupation. He proposed that the ESCWA secretariat establish a trust fund for that purpose to ensure the continuity of activities, and to send an official communication to member States urging them to contribute to it. The representative of Morocco said that his Government was working with ESCWA to determine new technical cooperation fields, and was in the process of signing the second version of a cooperation framework with ESCWA. He requested clarification of the proposed mechanism for establishing a forum on tax policies in the Arab region, and noted the need to devise a mechanism for evaluating implemented technical cooperation activities.

11. The representative of Iraq thanked ESCWA for its efforts in completing the cooperation framework signed in late May, affirming that Iraq was looking forward to further cooperation with ESCWA, especially in the field of statistics. The representative of Jordan stressed the importance of the support provided by ESCWA in the fields of statistics, technology and social protection, and noted the need to agree on a forward-looking project that enabled the Arab region to achieve the SDGs. The representative of Lebanon commended current collaboration with ESCWA on supporting women's empowerment, especially in organizing seminars and workshops, indicating a workshop on Lebanese women's political participation that was held in Beirut in April 2019. He thanked ESCWA for its technical support to Lebanon in preparing its Beijing+25 report.

12. In response, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA affirmed that work in the field of statistics was being conducted with official statistical bodies in each country, and built on national development plans and priorities. She added that given the increasing need for data, it was possible to extend the scope of collaboration and hold meetings that included planning bodies so as to ensure the consistency of priorities. She stressed that collaboration with the League of Arab States was strong in various development fields, not only in statistics. Regarding support to Palestine, she recalled that ESCWA had established the Palestine Unit using resources from its regular budget because of a lack of support and resources. The Unit was undertaking several activities, such as the note by the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan, in addition to various studies and capacity-building meetings. She welcomed the proposal by the representative of Qatar on finding new ways to mobilize resources, especially by establishing a trust fund within the secretariat to support Palestine-related activities.

13. Regarding statistical systems, she said that it was vital to use new technologies in data collection, especially in conflict-affected countries such as Yemen. ESCWA was working with other United Nations entities to put Yemen back on the “statistics map”, and would be discussing alternatives to the traditional statistical system with the Yemeni Government. She clarified that the Arab forum on tax policies, whose establishment ESCWA was proposing, would be tantamount to a network for exchanging expertise, stimulating dialogue and reviewing global experiences. She confirmed that ESCWA would advance its work on financing for development and find ways to increase human cadres in that field, would strive to support all member States regardless of their income level, and would focus on issues of importance to the whole region, such as creating productive employment opportunities for young people, supporting innovation and creativity, and considering “the future of work” in a changing world.

*2. Implementation of the Beirut Consensus on Technology for Sustainable Development  
in the Arab Region: activities of the ESCWA secretariat  
and activities of ESCWA member States  
(Agenda items 4 (a) and (b))*

14. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/4](#), the representative of the secretariat presented the measures taken to [implement the Beirut Consensus on Technology for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region](#), which was adopted by member States at the thirtieth ESCWA session (Beirut, 25-28 June 2018). He gave an overview of implemented measures and those under implementation pursuant to recommendations made by member States to the ESCWA secretariat under the Beirut Consensus, including supporting the use of geospatial information systems and big data in statistics; sustainable consumption and production technologies in Arab countries; and considering inclusiveness and empowerment through digital finance in the Arab region. He noted a series of studies published or that would be published by ESCWA in 2019 on technology for sustainable development, including the Arab Digital Development Report, studies on innovation and entrepreneurship to create employment for young people and women, a policy brief on using technology as a tool to make cities safe and combat violence against women, and a report entitled “Science and technology parks: global outlook with a focus on the Arab region”. In the context of implementing the Beirut Consensus, he said that ESCWA had held meetings and forums to raise awareness and exchange experiences on technology and development issues, notably the Arab Regional Dialogue and Experts Meeting on Internet Governance and Cybersecurity Nexus, the Arab High-level Forum on the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and a workshop on investing in sustainable technology and attracting investors.

15. With regard to implementing the Beirut Consensus at the national level, the representative of the secretariat said that the secretariat had prepared a questionnaire reflecting all aspects of the Consensus through specific questions, whose responses showed whether a certain measure had been implemented. The questionnaire had been sent to member States’ focal points in early May 2019. The questionnaire had been developed pursuant to a recommendation made by the Executive Committee at its fifth meeting on developing

a mechanism to follow up on the implementation of the Consensus at the national level. The secretariat had received responses to the questionnaire from some member States.

16. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Morocco enquired whether ESCWA had developed the questionnaire in consultation with countries regarding its content, and not only the mechanism and objective. He requested that the deadline be extended for completing the questionnaire. The representative of Jordan requested that the secretariat notify countries of its comments on their responses, thus allowing further discussion and progress in implementation. The representative of the State of Palestine commended the secretariat's efforts in developing a mechanism to follow up on the implementation of resolutions at the national level, and stressed that follow-up was a continuing process that did not end with the completion of the questionnaire. The representative of Oman enquired about the possibility of submitting follow-up reports that were not consistent with the questionnaire. He added that his country had sent a response to the secretariat, but it did not cover all the questions because of the tight deadline, and that the questionnaire would be submitted again upon completion. The representative of Lebanon confirmed that his country was committed to using technology to move forward in the development process. The Ministry of Technology and Investment had been established to move towards a "modern economy" in the public and private sectors. He expressed his country's pride in hosting the thirtieth ESCWA session at its headquarters and that the Beirut Consensus had emanated from that session. The Lebanese Government was working tirelessly to empower women and young people as entrepreneurs through projects such as Lebanon Connect, which was an application that connected members of the Lebanese diaspora to facilitate the exchange of expertise and experiences, and to find economic opportunities in Lebanon and abroad.

17. In response, the representative of the secretariat confirmed that the questionnaire had been developed as guidance only, but its use allowed for the systematic collection of responses. The main aim of the follow-up process was to strengthen the Executive Committee's working mechanisms and highlight States' role therein by underscoring their commitment to the resolutions it had adopted and by following up on their implementation. The questionnaire had also been designed to support focal points in working with national bodies involved in implementing the Beirut Consensus to receive the required information and report on its implementation. He said that the draft questionnaire had been presented to the ESCWA Committee on Technology for Development at its second session, held in Beirut on 20 and 21 March 2019, and that the secretariat had taken note of the comments when preparing the final version that had been sent to member States in early May 2019. The questionnaire was an effort by the secretariat to clarify the measures required for implementing the Beirut Consensus at the national level, but States were free to adapt it or to adopt another method for reporting on implementation. The secretariat had not set a deadline for its completion because the follow-up process would take months after which ESCWA would produce a compiled report of national contributions for presentation at the thirty-first ESCWA session, to be held in 2020. The secretariat hoped that contributions from all member States would be included in the report.

## B. REGIONAL AND GLOBAL ISSUES

### 1. *Summary of the Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2018-2019* (Agenda item 5)

18. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/5](#), the representative of the secretariat made a presentation on the Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2018-2019. He considered the pace of economic growth, indicating that the growth rate had reached 2.3 per cent in the Arab region in 2018 compared with 1.7 per cent in 2017, and that trends differed between country groupings. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Mashreq countries had registered positive growth, while growth in Maghreb countries had slowed in 2018 because of the economic situation in Libya. The Arab least developed countries witnessed an economic contraction in 2018, but were expected to register positive growth at 0.3 per cent in 2019. He added that crude oil production had increased in the region, which was projected to cause a rise in oil revenues.



19. He said that labour force participation in the region was the lowest worldwide, with significant disparities between men and women. Continuing crises and conflicts in countries like Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen had hampered labour market development in the Arab region, which was witnessing increasing displacement with the total number of forcibly displaced persons rising from 12.7 million in 2010 to 29 million in 2016. Youth unemployment had hit 26.1 per cent in 2018, and the region had continued to rank last globally in gender equality with a 40 per cent gap in the same year. However, the region had great potential and opportunities for achieving development despite the challenges it faced, especially in the fields of digital technology and innovation. He added that the potential benefits of energy and technological innovation would play a crucial role in increasing added value, industrial growth and employment, and that growth could become inclusive through implementing financial integration measures based on digital technology, facilitating access to financial services for vulnerable social groups with no recourse to banking facilities, and other services. He stressed that the Arab region, with its wealth of resources, educated youth and strategic geographical location, had the opportunity to lead in digital economy, with technologies aimed at achieving structural transformation and sustainable development.

20. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Yemen noted that the summary of the Survey lacked data on Yemen, and that social development was not sufficiently covered in the analysis. It was vital to address poverty rates and the major humanitarian crises in some Arab countries, and the report should probably also tackle humanitarian work. The representative of the State of Palestine added that it was necessary to focus more on the social aspects of the Survey and link them to the economic situation in the region, especially with regard to poverty and social services. It was important to be aware of the region's demographic trends and their impact on increasing unemployment and on future employment needs, particularly to facilitate planning processes. It was also vital to understand the impact of reduced support and assistance on social services and the living conditions of vulnerable groups. Representatives stressed that the Survey should cover the region's progress, not only the challenges it faced.

21. In response, the representative of the secretariat said that the document and the presentation provided an overview of a report that would later be published, and therefore did not cover the whole report. The complete report would focus as much as possible on social issues, progress and opportunities mentioned in the presentation. He noted that the structure of the Survey was the same for all regional commissions to allow comparison, and that the agenda for the sixth meeting of the Executive Committee covered issues such as poverty, social expenditure monitoring and women's economic participation, which complemented the Survey, noting that the Survey was by nature simply a survey. The secretariat would however consider the possibility of amending the Survey's structure.

*2. Assessing Arab economic integration: trade in services as a driver of growth and development, and monitoring and evaluating Arab economic integration*  
(Agenda items 6 and 7)

22. With reference to documents [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/6](#) and [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/7](#), the representative of the secretariat presented the work of ESCWA in assessing Arab economic integration, focusing on the system of indices and scoreboards established to monitor and evaluate economic integration in the Arab region. He said that the system highlighted the benefits and costs of integration policies, and assisted in identifying necessary reforms to move forward with Arab economic integration. In general, research showed that significant untapped potential existed for using integration to achieve development in the Arab region. The monitoring system developed by ESCWA measured real economic openness, and evaluated countries' performance in economic integration and their contribution to the group's integration level.

23. The representative of the secretariat presented the electronic platform under development by ESCWA for the monitoring and evaluation system, which would provide data on Arab countries' trade and on existing trade agreements and include a tool to model the impact of Arab countries' trade policies on their economic performance and integration. The platform would allow users to select a given country, indicator or trade

agreement and search related information. He requested that member States assist in developing the platform by commenting on its structure and uses.

24. He said that trade in services played a key role in stimulating economic integration and driving sustainable development, given that it was pivotal in production, employment, investment and trade, and in determining the extent of integration in global value chains. Trade in services was negotiated by various bodies such as the World Trade Organization, and in agreements including the Greater Arab Free Trade Area Agreement, the deep and comprehensive free trade agreements with the European Union, and the General Agreement on Trade in Services. Liberalizing trade in services was expected to increase revenue and foreign investment and to reduce poverty.

25. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Tunisia commended both reports on economic integration and the presentation made by the representative of the secretariat. He said that the presentation was a good technical demonstration for experts and non-experts alike, which provided a set of keys for considering Arab economic integration. No other comments were made on those two items.

### 3. *Social expenditure monitor for Arab States* (Agenda item 8)

26. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/8](#), the representative of the secretariat presented a proposed framework for monitoring social expenditure in Arab States. He said that development challenges were becoming more urgent by the day, including reducing poverty and inequality; providing decent employment opportunities; ensuring good public services in health care, education, housing and social protection; strengthening gender equality; and creating fiscal space to finance those priorities. He added that allocating budgets to social development priorities in a way that contributed to macrofiscal sustainability was a major challenge facing Arab Governments, especially when fiscal space was limited. In many cases, budgets, which supported various and interlinked programmes and policies, were allotted inadequately and insufficiently to meet citizens' needs and achieve the SDGs.

27. He said that the proposed framework considered the following seven dimensions of public social expenditure: education; health and nutrition; housing and community facilities; labour market interventions; job creation programmes; social protection programmes; art, culture and sports; and environmental protection. Each dimension included some indicators common to all countries and others that could be adapted to national specificities. He added that the indicators had been designed to identify the aim of expenditures and their beneficiaries, such as children, young people, adults, women, pregnant women, older persons, conflict survivors, persons with disabilities, persons with health issues, and poor and non-poor households. Work was underway on detailed metadata based on definitions inspired by SDG metadata, the classification of government financial statistics, and national account classifications. He added that statistical guidelines would be prepared in line with international statistical principles and standards.

28. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Tunisia stressed that the ESCWA project was vital for countries like Tunisia, where sugar subsidies, for example, assisted poor consumers but not to the same extent as well-off sweet dealers, who bought sugar at low prices and sold sweets in the market at inflated prices. Reforms were therefore necessary in the fields of social services and government subsidies. He said that the ESCWA project proposed a tool to rationalize subsidies and generate data on social services and beneficiary groups. The representative of the State of Palestine confirmed that the project was important for Arab countries, and that his country was collaborating with ESCWA to adopt the framework in the context of technical cooperation activities provided by the secretariat. He enquired about the framework's flexibility and adaptability, and whether its dimensions and indicators were fixed or adaptable according to a country's situation, given that there were services related to water, transport and other infrastructure not covered by the framework. He also asked about the sources of information to be incorporated in monitoring frameworks, and whether the Government would be the information source, or citizens benefiting from the services, or both, for there were some groups that benefited from two sources for the same social service.

29. The representative of Qatar highlighted his country's experience in economic empowerment, based on targeted social protection laws and effective support aimed at vulnerable groups, and sectoral strategies that assigned roles to public institutions for providing social services in a way that avoided duplication, indicating that charity work was pivotal in Qatari society to support citizens and residents alike. He said that Qatar was a donor country, which provided significant external support in the fields of health, education and economic empowerment, and presented a successful model for social service provision. Qatar might therefore need a monitor that measured expenditures such as external support, which the proposed model did not cover. The representative of Iraq said that it was vital to devise ways to expose duplication and identify the various bodies that provided support to the same groups, recalling that Iraq was preparing its 2020 budget using programme-based budgeting and that it welcomed any support from ESCWA in that regard.

30. The representative of Yemen said that the ESCWA social expenditure monitor was exceptional qualitative work, and requested that support be provided for its implementation in his country. He confirmed that he would send an official request through the channel for technical cooperation services, enquiring whether the framework could be expanded to cover the special circumstances caused by the conflict in Yemen, especially assistance for treating the injured, facilitating the return of displaced populations, and tackling the humanitarian dimension in general. He said that social expenditure was the first to be reduced in conflict situations, while security and defence financing remained untouched. He proposed that ideas be presented on determining a standard social expenditure share of gross domestic product (GDP) that guaranteed the State's ability to provide basic social services. He also enquired about the monitor's ability to measure the impact of expenditure on development.

31. The representative of Mauritania said that his country had developed a single window for all types of support provided by the State to poor groups and those at risk of poverty, and that households within those groups received monthly transfers with support conditioned on sending children to school, conducting health checks, and vaccinating children. Mauritania had received support from the World Bank to strengthen its social services system, and it was prepared to exchange experiences in that field under the ESCWA project. The representative of Morocco stressed that it was vital to include information on expenditure as a share of GDP to enable international comparisons. The representative of Saudi Arabia enquired whether categorizing households as poor or not poor would be based on national, regional or international poverty lines. She also asked about the agreed definition of early marriage, and if the monitor would measure benefits to society as a whole resulting from social expenditure.

32. In response, the representative of the secretariat thanked representatives for their interest in the project, and for their interventions that reflected a desire for collaborating with the ESCWA secretariat in its development. He reaffirmed that the proposal was a draft for discussion and adaptation, and that flexibility and the ability to take into account country specificities and circumstances were a key focus of the proposal. He said that the secretariat was holding an expert group meeting in Beirut on 24 and 25 June 2019 to review and revise the proposed framework, and would conduct discussions with each country that joined the project. Regarding agreed definitions, he said that an international definition of early marriage existed (under the age of 18), but that it could be reviewed in the context of a given country. The same applied to the poverty line, and regional meetings should assist in determining common denominators between countries and identifying the adaptation margin. He added that information and data would be extracted from various sources, including surveys on income, health and national accounts. The Executive Secretary requested that countries join the project, which would link all social policies to their impact on the ground. It was therefore a highly significant approach for all policymakers.

*4. Multidimensional poverty in the Arab region: regional  
and national reduction efforts  
(Agenda item 9)*

33. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/9](#), the representative of the secretariat made a presentation on multidimensional poverty, which ESCWA had been working on for seven years to resolve the

conundrum of low poverty rates in the Arab region as measured by international assessments. The situation on the ground showed that poverty remained a major challenge in the region, impeding the achievement of sustainable development, alongside political instability, conflict and various economic, social and environmental challenges that exacerbated poverty and its impact. ESCWA and its partners had developed a multidimensional poverty index that took into account the region's specificities and that highlighted the wide prevalence of poverty therein. The index showed that two thirds of the region's population were either poor or at risk of poverty. Significant disparities existed between countries, geographic areas and households' social and economic situations.

34. He stressed that the political will of Arab Governments to tackle poverty was clear, as reflected in the adoption of the Arab Strategic Framework for the Eradication of Multidimensional Poverty 2020-2030 at the fourth session of the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit held in Beirut on 20 January 2019. ESCWA had supported the framework's development and had assisted in building policymakers' capacity in implementing the regional framework and national frameworks on poverty reduction, in updating policies, and in developing plans and budgets. ESCWA was also organizing training workshops and preparing studies in that regard, notably the 2017 Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report whose methodology and data ESCWA was advancing and updating.

35. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Mauritania expressed reservations about the data on his country that were set out in the document presented to the Committee. The representative of the State of Palestine said that it was vital to ensure a flexible approach and guarantee that tools provided by ESCWA were adaptable to each country's context. In his country, adopting the education indicator as one of the three dimensions of the multidimensional poverty index would not provide an accurate picture of poverty, since Palestinians did not lack education but faced various challenges from the occupation which deteriorated their living conditions and caused poverty that should be measured using suitable dimensions. He added that there was great interest in measuring poverty, and that it was important to reach national consensus on suitable dimensions and to resolve the issue of periodic data updating.

36. In response, the representative of the secretariat said that flexibility and adaptability were vital, and that ESCWA was working with five countries on designing a national road map that took into account the specificities of varied contexts. ESCWA had also received requests in that regard from three other countries. He added that the data presented in the document were sourced from a report published in 2017 and were being updated, which explained the presence of old data on Mauritania. The importance of the social expenditure monitor lay in linking between financial policies and poverty, which would highlight the effectiveness of social expenditure policies. Those two projects connected description and analysis to policy results in practice, while taking into account that social expenditure did not only aim to reduce poverty but also covered other social dimensions highlighted in the monitor, such as social protection, employment programmes, and expenditure on sports and culture. The Executive Secretary said that it was vital to develop a framework for GCC countries, since all countries could benefit from ESCWA work if it was suitably adapted. It was important for the region to generate data on poverty in accordance with an index developed in line with its circumstances and diversity, rather than the international community publishing data in accordance with global indexes that did not represent the region.

##### *5. Social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls* (Agenda item 10)

37. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/10](#), the representative of the secretariat made a presentation on a periodic report prepared by ESCWA on the social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls, focusing on developments covered in the last issue of the report (July 2016 – June 2018). She said that the Executive Committee, at its fifth meeting, had requested the secretariat to continue preparing the report and to present its key findings. The report highlighted the destructive impact of the Israeli blockade on Gaza that had begun 12 years ago and the resulting humanitarian crisis, and their impact on women. The report also showed the various aspects of stalled development in the West Bank, and its effects on health,

livelihoods and women's economic prospects. The report indicated that Israeli occupation policies impeded the achievement of the SDGs in the occupied Palestinian territory, including SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment.

38. She said that significant developments had occurred in the period covered by the report, including increased violence by settlers in 2017. The Palestinian Government had made considerable efforts in women's empowerment, such as adopting the 2017-2022 National Policy Agenda: Putting Citizens First in which it set out a plan to strengthen women's participation, create job opportunities for them, and combat violence against them. The Government had reaffirmed its commitment in that regard in its national plan on implementing Security Council resolution 1325 in the State of Palestine over the period 2017-2019.

39. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of the State of Palestine thanked ESCWA for its efforts in describing the situation of the Palestinian people in the report and in the note by the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan. He enquired whether ESCWA had collaborated with the Palestinian Government when preparing the report on the social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls, indicating that it did not include key developments in the Government's work aimed at improving their situation, such as adopting a gender-sensitive budget and establishing a national observatory for violence against women.

40. In response, the representative of the secretariat said that the report covered a specific period and therefore could not include developments that had occurred outside that period. The first draft had been sent for review to the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs, and ESCWA had taken all its comments into account. She requested that the representative of Palestine urge national institutions to submit required information and data within the deadline, to enable the secretariat to include them in ESCWA reports before publication.

*6. Rethinking barriers to women's economic participation in the Arab region*  
(Agenda item 11)

41. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/11](#), the representative of the secretariat made a presentation on barriers to women's economic participation in the Arab region. She said that women's economic empowerment was at the heart of the SDGs, but the average women's formal labour force participation rate in the region had reached 22.3 per cent in 2018 compared with a global average of 53.7 per cent and a regional men's participation rate of 77.5 per cent. Situation analyses often overlooked gender inequalities at the public and private levels and in the economic, social, political and legal fields. She proposed that the scope of the analysis on women's economic participation be extended to include issues with significant impact on their participation, such as women carrying out unpaid care work and violence against women.

42. She said that there was a significant gender gap in the Arab region in the distribution of unpaid care work, the largest in the world. Estimates showed that women carried out 80-90 per cent of all unpaid care work in Arab countries. That gap had a direct impact on women's ability to participate economically and on the structure of the labour market. She added that violence against women was a widespread phenomenon in the region, with one in three women reporting being subjected at least once in her life to a type of physical or sexual violence, usually by an intimate partner, which limited her access to education, work and participation and maintained her dependence. She indicated that the objective of measuring the time women spent carrying out unpaid care work and of estimating the repercussions of violence on their ability to work was to highlight the causes of low women's economic participation and to establish a foundation for policies aimed at increasing their economic participation rates and achieving the related SDGs.

43. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of the State of Palestine said that the presentation did not cover other significant obstacles to women's economic participation. The issue of unpaid care work had been discussed at the global level, but the document did not clarify whether ESCWA wanted to measure and

calculate it as part of countries' GDP, or to consider it as a factor limiting women's ability to participate economically. The link between women's economic participation and violence against them was complex and dialectical, since working women might be more able than non-working women to combat violence. The representative of Qatar said that high women's economic participation in his country compared with other Arab countries was not because they employed domestic workers, as mentioned in the presentation, but because of inclusive policies adopted by Qatar to empower women and the establishment of specific business incubators, technologies and infrastructure that helped women to participate economically and assume leadership roles, such as ambassadors and ministers. The representative of Yemen said that not including unpaid care work and unpaid agricultural work in GDP was not a new issue, and enquired whether any country had developed an approach to cover such work in their national accounts.

44. In response, the representative of the secretariat said that the aim of the ESCWA proposal was not to calculate a figure to be added to GDP, but rather to assess obstacles that were not normally taken into account when exploring low women's participation rates. The proposal aimed to identify options available to women in practice in circumstances that required her to undertake the majority of unpaid care work and to face the repercussions of domestic violence. In response to the intervention by the representative of Qatar, she said that she had considered the presence of domestic workers as a factor facilitating women's paid employment in Qatar and in Oman, where time use surveys showed that women spent less time doing unpaid care work compared with other countries. However, that was not the only factor raising women's economic participation in those two countries.

45. She stressed that it was vital to conduct time use surveys, especially to meet target 5.4 of SDG 5. ESCWA did not consider unpaid care work and violence against women as the only obstacles to women's participation, but it was proposing assessing them in that context to identify other obstacles that had not been deliberated to date. She said that ESCWA would consider opportunities provided by changes in the nature of the labour market and the "future of work" in the context of rapid technological and societal developments, to increase women's participation in the Arab region.

*7. Supporting institutions in tackling weaknesses and fragilities: methodology  
for institutional capacity assessment  
(Agenda item 12)*

46. With reference to document E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/12, the representative of the secretariat made a presentation on a methodology developed by ESCWA to assess institutional capacity; in other words, human capacity and functional competencies assisting institutions in tackling challenges resulting from conflict and other forms of violence. He said that the methodology responded to a recommendation made by the Executive Committee at its fifth meeting, which requested the secretariat to support member States in building their institutional capacity to limit the impact of conflict and instability and their repercussions for achieving the 2030 Agenda. He added that the methodology's three main aims were to enable institutions to self-assess their capacity based on pre-defined priorities and objectives; support them in drawing on aggregated and analysed assessment results to design capacity-building programmes; and assist them in benefiting from exchanging experiences and from the capacity of other institutions participating in the assessment and in designing training programmes.

47. He said that the assessment could target several capacities, such as decision-making and implementation, policy and strategy design, budget development and implementation, and anticipating risk and taking into account the circumstances of a conflict. He reviewed the phases for implementing the proposed methodology and adapting it to an institution's context or the capacities under assessment, indicating that the methodology was being implemented in Iraq and Yemen and was being developed with participants in national preparatory and evaluation workshops. He stressed that it was important to recognize that institutional capacity-building was a long-term process, which greatly depended on periodic assessment and the success of resulting training programmes.

48. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Iraq commended the proposed methodology and the resulting progress achieved by Iraqi institutions in governorates liberated from Islamic State. Employees in some institutions had become qualified to train staff in Iraqi institutions in other governorates. The representative of Yemen also commended ESCWA efforts to build institutional capacity and develop the methodology to make it more user friendly and adaptable to current circumstances and priorities. He added that Yemen was expecting the assessment process to result in a programme on reconstruction and institutional development of various institutions' common competencies, and a training of trainers programme. He said that it was vital to rebuild institutions in the reconstruction phase, which should not be limited to re-establishing physical infrastructure. He requested that ESCWA provide support in formulating a long-term national vision on sustainable development in Yemen. The representative of the State of Palestine said that his country was interested in adopting the methodology to develop institutional capacity.

49. In response, the representative of the secretariat said that the methodology's development was a participatory process, and thanked Iraq and Yemen for their participation. He added that ESCWA was prepared to support any country that submitted a technical services request in that field. The Executive Secretary confirmed that the secretariat had registered the Yemeni request for support in formulating a development vision. She said that ESCWA would build on its experiences with other countries to provide that support.

### C. PROGRAMMATIC ISSUES

#### *1. Follow-up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region: activities of the Unit on the 2030 Agenda and outcomes of the 2019 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development (Agenda items 13 (a) and (b))*

50. With reference to documents E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/13(Part I) and [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/13\(Part II\)](#), the representative of the secretariat gave a presentation on the work of the Unit on the 2030 Agenda, which built on the following three pillars: coordinating between bodies tasked with following up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and involving all stakeholders; providing regional support to implementation, follow-up and review activities; and providing national support through capacity-building activities. She reviewed key activities undertaken by the Unit over the period 2018-2019 under the three pillars, including the Regional Meeting of Civil Society on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region (Beirut, 22-23 April 2018, and 8 April 2019), the Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda (Beirut, 24-25 January 2019), national capacity-building workshops, the 2018 and 2019 Arab Sustainable Development Forum, and a guide on preparing voluntary national reviews. She said that ESCWA had developed an SDG portal, equivalent to an electronic platform for disseminating knowledge, providing training and raising awareness.

51. She presented the outcomes of the 2019 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, clarifying the Forum's role in the global process to implement, follow up and review the 2030 Agenda. She said that partnerships with various United Nations organizations and the League of Arab States were vital in organizing the meeting. In 2019, over 380 participants had attended the Forum, and reviewed progress in implementing SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17. The Forum had concluded with a set of key messages on implementing, following up and reviewing the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region, and on the theme of the 2019 Forum "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality in the Arab region", which Iraq would submit to the 2019 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

52. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Tunisia noted the secretariat's efforts in holding the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, which reflected the success of participatory work and constituted a significant regional platform for dialogue. The representative of Egypt said that he had participated in the Forum as a speaker on the topic of inequality between countries. He congratulated ESCWA on the well prepared and organized discussions at the Forum, and enquired about the extent to which countries could benefit from the key messages in policymaking and about how to translate them into practice in the region in parallel with submitting them to the High-level Political Forum. He requested that countries be trained to use

the ESCWA SDG portal to maximize its benefit. He added that the main difficulty lay in managing trade-offs between SDGs, and that ESCWA should work with Governments to tackle potential conflicts between achieving economic growth and protecting the environment, for example. The messages were clear in theory, but it was also necessary to implement them in practice. The representative of Iraq thanked ESCWA for assisting her country in preparing its voluntary national review, which would be presented in July 2019.

53. The representative of the State of Palestine requested that ESCWA organize workshops to exchange experiences between countries that had presented their voluntary national reviews and those that were preparing them. He added that the activities of the ESCWA Unit on the 2030 Agenda could benefit from reorganized priorities and intensified efforts, because expectations were greater than what had been achieved thus far. For example, civil society was able to organize its own seminars and submit messages to the Arab Forum, and therefore was not in need of ESCWA efforts in that regard. He said that with regard to voluntary national reviews, ESCWA mainly focused on the preparation phase, and enquired about activities implemented in the post-review phase and about the Unit's plan to support countries in that phase. If only the ESCWA secretariat had presented the Unit's programmatic plan for 2020 alongside the programme of work for 2018-2019, so as to discuss needs and organize priorities with member States. He asked whether the electronic portal included all material on the 2030 Agenda produced by various United Nations organizations, to facilitate access and use by member States. He repeated a request that had been sent in writing to the ESCWA secretariat on sending a draft of the Arab Sustainable Development Report prepared by ESCWA to member States, so that they could review the data and contents related to them before the report was published, which would ensure that the region was represented in a way that countries could endorse and defend in the global review, so as to move towards achieving sustainable development. The aim was not to force countries' opinions on United Nations organizations, but to express non-binding views.

54. In response, the representative of the secretariat said that the role of ESCWA did not end with providing support in formulating and submitting messages; it also provided technical support in all areas of implementation. The presentation had reviewed only the Unit's activities, but all ESCWA divisions were supporting countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda. When messages were presented at the global level, leaders and high-level representatives from all countries, including Arab countries, adopted them, which would hopefully raise awareness among senior leaders and policymakers and push progress in implementation. The electronic platform would not be limited to ESCWA material, but would also include material from other organizations and academic institutions.

55. She said that regarding trade-offs in implementing the SDGs, ESCWA was preparing an implementation framework similar to the strategic framework for development and climate change, to address interlinkages and trade-offs between some SDGs such as economic development and its impact on the agricultural sector and food security. With regard to the Unit's activities, she said that the team had been completed only a year ago and was considering providing additional support to countries, especially through training workshops on preparing national reviews, with other relevant United Nations bodies. It was currently preparing a specialized seminar for the Arab region with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research.

56. Regarding the Arab Sustainable Development report, the Executive Secretary said that she had decided to respond to the request by member States on changing its preparation process by sending a draft to member States to comment on data (update or complete them), however noting that ESCWA had prepared the report with several other United Nations organizations working in the region, which complicated altering the analysis.

## *2. Reports of ESCWA subsidiary bodies* (Agenda item 14)

57. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/14](#), the representative of the secretariat made a presentation on the reports of the following three ESCWA subsidiary bodies that had held their sessions in the period between the thirtieth ESCWA session and the sixth meeting of the Executive Committee: the report of



the Committee on Transport and Logistics on its nineteenth session; the report of the Statistical Committee on its thirteenth session; and the report of the Committee on Technology for Development on its second session. He presented key outcomes and recommendations set out in the reports, including approaches for resolving challenges presented by Executive Committee members such as rebuilding statistical systems in conflict-affected countries and adopting new technologies for data collection.

58. The Executive Committee adopted the recommendations presented in the three reports.

*3. Evaluation of Executive Committee meetings and preparations for the thirty-first ESCWA session*  
(Agenda items 15 and 16)

59. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/15](#), the representative of the secretariat reviewed an evaluation of Executive Committee meetings since the first meeting held in 2015 and of ESCWA sessions since the twenty-seventh session held in 2017. He stressed that evaluations by member States' representatives were vital in guiding ESCWA work, confirming the importance of both qualitative comments and quantitative scores. He said that the secretariat's approach to preparing the evaluation covered all meeting aspects, such as providing administrative services, technical services and documentation, formulating the agenda, and identifying strategic issues. The aim of the qualitative and quantitative evaluation was to assist the secretariat in improving meetings it organized to respond to member States' expectations and needs. That work was ongoing. In cases where quantitative scores were 3 over 5 or below, the secretariat would contact the representative who gave that score to assess the reasons behind it and ways to improve performance. Evaluations on the work of the Executive Committee and the ESCWA sessions reflected overall satisfaction, with scores of 4.2 or above.

60. Regarding preparations for the thirty-first ESCWA session, the representative of the secretariat said that it was expected to be held in Tunis in April 2020. In line with recent sessions, the thirty-first session would focus on one main theme in the ministerial segment that would be tackled in interactive discussion panels. The secretariat had proposed Youth issues in the Arab region as the theme of the thirty-first session. Around 60 per cent of the population was under 30, representing a significant demographic dividend, but many young people were not in education, training or the labour market, with youth unemployment reaching 30 per cent in the region. It was therefore necessary to tackle those challenges and devise solutions, in collaboration with youth representatives. A political statement was expected to emanate from the session, expressing member States' united position in that regard.

61. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Tunisia said that evaluation was important and that it was vital to provide the secretariat with complete and frank responses to its questionnaire. Tunisia was happy to be hosting the thirty-first ESCWA session, and logistical preparations with the secretariat were going well. He added that it was vital to involve civil society in the session. The representative of Jordan said that the Bretton Woods intuitions and other international organizations normally held their meetings in April, so it would be difficult for ministers to participate in all those events in the same month. The representative of the State of Palestine requested that the secretariat present to the Executive Committee a theme for discussion in a panel, similar to the panels held at ESCWA sessions, for State representatives to exchange experiences and discuss the topic with specialists. He asked why the secretariat had chosen youth issues as the theme of the next ESCWA session, since it had not sufficiently focused on young people in the past despite the importance of the subject. The representative of Yemen agreed with the representative of Jordan regarding the date of the ESCWA session.

62. In response, the Executive Secretary said that she was committed to prioritizing youth issues and integrating them into ESCWA work. Youth issues were one of her major concerns, since sustainable development was not possible without addressing such issues, devising solutions to the challenges faced by young people, and empowering them to increase their participation. She thanked the representative of Jordan for his comment on the date of the ESCWA session and confirmed that she would communicate with the

Tunisian authorities in that regard. She added that the secretariat would consider the best approach to ensure civil society participation, which might be to organize a specialized meeting prior to the session.

4. *United Nations reform: regional dimension and ESCWA vision*  
(Agenda item 17)

63. The representative of the secretariat gave a presentation on United Nations reforms targeting the areas of peace, security, administration and the development system. He said that the Secretary-General of the United Nations had set out eight initiatives for reforming United Nations work on conflict prevention, gender equality, good governance of the Organization, counterterrorism, human rights, humanitarian work, peacekeeping operations, and innovation and new technologies. Administrative reform priorities included strengthening decentralization to bring the decision-making process closer to beneficiaries, increasing trust and empowering managers, ensuring greater accountability and transparency, reducing duplication and eliminating overlapping structures, increasing support to field work, and reforming planning and budgeting processes. He added that development system reforms entailed supporting resident coordinators, and brokering a financing agreement that set out the commitments of States and the Organization to increase investment therein, identify financing mechanisms for implementing the 2030 Agenda, and strengthen partnerships to avoid duplication.

64. The Executive Secretary gave an overview of ESCWA efforts in keeping pace with system-wide reforms and in meeting the expectations and support needs of member States to implement the 2030 Agenda. She highlighted the importance of the regional role in the development system's new structure. She presented the new ESCWA motto and the secretariat's vision of its mission in achieving a stable, just and prosperous future for the region, stressing that she and the ESCWA team were working tirelessly on what they deemed a calling rather than simply a job. She said that she relied on Young ESCWA to assist her in internal reforms, aimed at advancing ESCWA work to strengthen its role as a regional centre for managing and disseminating development knowledge and to make it more progressive and flexible, indicating the importance of using new technologies to improve the secretariat's performance and the quality of services provided to member States.

65. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Tunisia welcomed the vision presented by the Executive Secretary on ESCWA reforms and her view of the United Nations reform process. He said that it was necessary to defend the pivotal role of the regional commissions in coordinating development work in their respective regions. He commended the passion evident in the Executive Secretary's statement and in the ESCWA team's performance. He said that despite the consequences of reform, including restrictions on financial and human resources, it was necessary to reaffirm the importance of the role of ESCWA in the region and of its support to Arab countries' development efforts. The representative of Egypt thanked the secretariat for its important presentation on United Nations reforms at all levels, and applauded the notion of working passionately beyond ESCWA mandates. He enquired about coordinating development work, about the difference between the United Nations Development Group that had become the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, and about the Regional Coordination Mechanism that had become a regional coordination platform, stressing the importance of defending the regional role in all cases. He said that he completely agreed with the ESCWA secretariat's vision and with the status assigned to youth in the Commission. The representative of Morocco enquired about assuming positions of responsibility at ESCWA and about Arab youth's weak representation in the United Nations, and requested that ESCWA provide support in that area.

66. In response, the Executive Secretary said that the reform of the development system was a comprehensive process that covered several pillars, including transforming the regional commissions into centres for managing development knowledge. She would strive to avoid administrative duplication by strengthening the role of the ESCWA secretariat in providing administrative support services to other United Nations organizations working in the Arab region. Regarding increasing Arab youth representation in the United Nations, she said that Kuwait had benefited from the opportunities provided by the Young Professionals Programme offered by the United Nations Secretariat. She proposed that a trust fund be established to build Arab youth capacity to work in the United Nations through that programme.

D. DATE AND VENUE OF THE SEVENTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
(Agenda item 18)

67. Participants agreed that the seventh meeting of the Executive Committee would be held at the United Nations House in Beirut in December 2019. The representative of Mauritania said that his country would like to host a meeting of the Executive Committee or an ESCWA session in the future.

E. OTHER MATTERS  
(Agenda item 19)

68. No issues were raised under this item.

**III. ADOPTION OF RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE EXECUTIVE  
COMMITTEE AT ITS SIXTH MEETING**

(Agenda item 20)

69. At the close of its sixth meeting, the Executive Committee adopted the recommendations submitted to it in an amended form, for inclusion in the present report on its sixth meeting.

**IV. ORGANIZATION OF WORK**

A. DATE AND VENUE

70. The Executive Committee held its sixth meeting in Marrakech, Morocco, on 15 and 16 June 2019. Pursuant to its terms of reference, which stipulate that the Chair of the ESCWA session shall be designated to chair the Executive Committee, the representative of Tunisia, in his capacity as Chair of the thirtieth session of ESCWA, was appointed Chair of the Committee. The representatives of Iraq and Qatar were designated as first and second vice-chairs, respectively, and the representative of Oman as Rapporteur.

B. OPENING

71. The Executive Committee opened its sixth meeting at 9 a.m. on Saturday, 15 June 2019 in Marrakech, Morocco. The representative of Tunisia, Mr. Abdelhamid Gharbi, Director of Sustainable Development at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chair of the sixth Executive Committee meeting, made a statement in which he welcomed participants and thanked Morocco for hosting the meeting. He said that the Arab region was facing various difficulties, including conflict, instability and numerous development challenges, most notably poverty which had an item dedicated to it on the meeting's agenda. He reviewed all the items on the agenda and thanked the secretariat for organizing the meeting.

72. Ms. Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, made a statement in which she thanked Morocco for hosting the meeting. She said that ESCWA would always support member States' efforts in achieving sustainable development. She added that the United Nations was undergoing reforms, the largest for decades. Reforms of the United Nations development system, especially its regional dimension, was one pillar of the process. ESCWA was conducting its own internal reforms based on the following two pillars: strengthening the role of ESCWA as a regional centre for managing and disseminating development knowledge and for providing administrative services to all United Nations organizations; and benefiting from new technologies to assist member States, and to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the secretariat's work, facilitate administrative procedures, and develop the internal structure to reflect the region's priorities in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

73. The representative of Morocco, Mr. Lahcen Daoudi, Minister Delegated to the Prime Minister in Charge of Public Affairs and Governance, made a statement in which he welcomed participants and expressed his happiness at Morocco hosting the meeting. He said that Marrakech was a beautiful city with a rich culture, and

that the first university in the world had been established by a woman in Kairouan, Morocco, not in the West. A great amount of knowledge had been generated in the Arab region and shared with the rest of the world, such as algebra. Gender equality had been more advanced in the region than globally, especially in *zakat* and property rights. He said that he did not encourage the use of terms like “developed countries” and “developing countries”, but rather “industrialized countries” and “non-industrialized countries”, since the former were not necessarily more culturally advanced than the latter. The Arab region, rich in civilization and culture, could control technology, science and other available tools to progress without losing its identity and values, provided that it achieved stability and literacy.

#### C. PARTICIPANTS

74. The sixth meeting of the Executive Committee was attended by representatives of ESCWA member States. The list of participants is set out in annex I to the present report.

#### D. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

75. The Secretary of the Commission presented the provisional agenda of the sixth meeting of the Executive Committee, and proposed that items 4 (a) and (b) be discussed together given their strong links, as well as items 6 and 7; 13 (a) and (b); and 15 and 16. At its first session, the Executive Committee adopted the agenda set out in document [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/L.1](#) and the organization of work set out in document [E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/L.2](#), as amended.

## Annex I

### **LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

#### Bahrain

Mr. Musa Abdullah al-Nuaimi  
Consultant  
Organizations Department  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Mohamed Taqra  
Director of Strategy and Policy  
Department of Development Policies  
and Strategies  
Ministry of Economy and Finance

#### Egypt

Mr. Mohamed Khalil  
Minister Delegate  
Deputy Head of Mission  
Embassy of Egypt to Morocco

#### Morocco

Mr. Lahcen Daoudi  
Minister Delegated to the Prime Minister  
in Charge of General Affairs and Governance

Mr. Aziz Ajbilo  
Permanent Secretary  
Ministry of General Affairs and Governance

#### Iraq

Ms. Fawz Ahmad Muhammad Salih  
Chief of the Population Policy Section  
Human Development Department  
Ministry of Planning

Mr. Mohamed Saidi  
Director of International Cooperation  
Ministry of General Affairs and Governance

#### Jordan

Mr. Malik Burayzat  
Arab Relations Manager  
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

Ms. Hannan al-Tozani  
Studies Administrator for the Head of Government  
Ministry Delegated to the Prime Minister  
in Charge of General Affairs and Governance

#### Kuwait

Ms. Iman Ibrahim al-Haddad  
Chief of the International Organizations Section  
Ministry of Finance

Ms. Maryam al-Daou  
Foreign Affairs Adviser  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International  
Cooperation

#### Lebanon

Mr. Ziad Attallah  
Ambassador of Lebanon to Morocco

#### Oman

Mr. Imad bin Taleb al-Ajami  
Director of the Department of Arab  
and International Organizations  
Supreme Council for Planning

#### Mauritania

Mr. Abbas Sila  
Director-General of Development Policies  
and Strategies  
Ministry of Economy and Finance

Mr. Khalid bin Taleb al-Zikwani  
Director, Directorate General  
of Social Sectors  
Supreme Council for Planning

#### State of Palestine

Mr. Mahmoud Ataya  
Managing Director  
Reform and Policy Priorities Unit  
Office of the Prime Minister

## Qatar

Mr. Tariq al-Ansari  
Director of the International Cooperation  
Department  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Mariam Abdul Rahman al-Jaber  
Third Secretary  
Department of International Cooperation  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Noura Nasser al-Muraikhi  
Director of the Strategic Planning Department  
Planning and Statistics Office

Ms. Najat Daham al-Abdullah  
Director of the Family Affairs Department  
Ministry of Administrative Development  
and Social Affairs

## Saudi Arabia

Ms. Samaher bint Saad al-Shalali  
Director of the International and Regional  
Relations Department  
Ministry of Economy and Planning

Mr. Abdulrahman bin Mansour al-Zamil  
Senior Expert on Sustainable Development  
Ministry of Economy and Planning

## Tunisia

Mr. Abdelhamid Gharbi  
Director of Sustainable Development  
Directorate-General for Multilateral Cooperation  
and Cross-cutting Issues  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

## United Arab Emirates

Ms. Hanan Abdullah al-Qadi  
Economist  
Ministry of Economy

Ms. Sumaya al-Janahi  
First Secretary  
Office of the Deputy for Economic Affairs  
Ministry of Economy

## Yemen

Mr. Muhammad Ahmad el-Hawiri  
Deputy Minister of Planning  
Economic Studies and Forecasts Sector  
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

Annex II

**LIST OF DOCUMENTS**

Title	Item	Symbol
Information note		E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/INF.1
Provisional agenda and annotations	2	E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/L.1
Organization of work	2	E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/L.2
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