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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON THE INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS INITIATIVE: UNLOCKING INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS AND MOBILIZING FINANCIAL RESOURCES IN THE ARAB REGION RABAT, 17-18 APRIL 2013

Summary

In partnership with the Ministry of Equipment and Transport of Morocco, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held an expert group meeting on the Infrastructure Investments and Public-Private Partnerships Initiative: Unlocking Infrastructure Investments and Mobilizing Financial Resources in the Arab Region (Rabat, 17-18 April 2013). This meeting aimed to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experience and good practices in elaborating and financing infrastructure projects in the Arab region. It also served as a platform to launch the ESCWA initiative on partnership between the public and private sectors mentioned in its title.

This document reviews the meeting discussions, and presents the conclusions and recommendations made by the participants.

CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1-3	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. MEETING CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	4-5	3
II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION	6-15	4
A. Enabling the participation of the private sector in infrastructure investments: Project selection, structuring, execution and financing in different institutional frameworks	7-11	4
B. Mobilizing financial resources for infrastructure investments and PPPs in the Arab region	12-13	5
C. ESCWA Infrastructure Investments and PPPs Initiative	14-15	5
III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK	16-21	6
A. Venue and date	16	6
B. Opening	17-19	6
C. Participants	20-21	6
<i>Annex.</i> List of participants		7

Introduction

1. In partnership with the Ministry of Equipment and Transport of Morocco, the Economic Development and Globalization Division (EDGD) of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held an expert group meeting on the Infrastructure Investments and Public-Private Partnerships Initiative: Unlocking Infrastructure Investments and Mobilizing Financial Resources in the Arab Region (Rabat, 17-18 April 2013). The meeting brought together more than 140 participants from the Arab region, representing both the public and private sectors.
2. The overall objectives of the meeting were: (a) to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experience and good practices in elaborating and financing infrastructure projects in the region; (b) to provide an opportunity to discuss the challenges faced by ESCWA member countries in creating an environment conducive to the development of infrastructure through public-private partnerships (PPPs); (c) to raise awareness of the potential for PPP among different parties involved in infrastructure development in the region; (d) to serve as a platform for the launch of the ESCWA Infrastructure Investments and PPPs Initiative.
3. Each session of the meeting was structured to assure interaction between participants from the public and private sectors, in order to gain insights on how to set up the institutional and regulatory framework to promote PPPs in project implementation. The ultimate objective was to identify feasible approaches and viable solutions based on the experience of public officials and private sector investors. The meeting also served as the first step in laying the groundwork for the successful implementation of the previously mentioned ESCWA initiative.

I. MEETING CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4. The meeting participants reached the following conclusions:
 - (a) PPPs are a powerful, internationally recognized instrument for stimulating progress towards meeting the infrastructure demands of developing countries and regions, using financial and operational resources together with an innovative approach to the private sector;
 - (b) PPPs are initiated and facilitated by Governments in partnership with the private sector; both parties recognize the need for a dedicated PPP policy which requires skilled and experienced government and public sector officials to be implemented;
 - (c) The knowledge, expertise and financial resources of international financial institutions, private sector companies and other stakeholders are essential to the successful implementation of PPPs;
 - (d) A strong and feasible programme of PPP projects and cooperation between all stakeholders are also essential.
5. Participants welcomed the initiative of ESCWA to support Governments in the Arab region to develop PPP and unlock infrastructure investments, in close collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). They recommended the following:
 - (a) Establishing a PPP network of experts and senior advisors from both the public and the private sectors in ESCWA member countries;
 - (b) Exploring the possibility of a master class on PPP for senior advisors and decision-makers to encourage the development of PPP policies that incorporate best practices and high-level contributions from the private sector;

(c) Investigating the establishment, under the auspices of the ECE International PPP Centre of Excellence, of international PPP specialist centres on different areas of potential public-private partnership in the Arab region, including renewable energy, infrastructure and Islamic finance.

II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

6. The meeting was carried out over five sessions divided between two working days. The core themes discussed were as follows:

(a) Enabling the participation of the private sector in infrastructure investments: projects selection, structuring, execution and financing in different institutional frameworks;

(b) Mobilizing financial resources for infrastructure investments and PPPs in the Arab region.

A. ENABLING THE PARTICIPATION OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS: PROJECT SELECTION, STRUCTURING, EXECUTION AND FINANCING IN DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

1. *Morocco*

7. The first session focused on the host country, Morocco, with the Director of Public Enterprises and Privatization of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, Mr. Samir Mohammed Tazi, showcasing the efforts of the Government to promote infrastructure projects through a concession-based legal framework which has demonstrated its effectiveness, as investments almost doubled between 2006 and 2012. In particular, he highlighted the vital importance of a project being financially viable from both the public and private sectors' perspective, in order to ensure 'win-win' solutions. This session also benefited from contributions across several agencies of the Ministry of Transportation, the National Ports Agency, the National Railways Office, the Airports Authority and the Highways of Morocco, together with the relevant experience of the Ministry of Agriculture in irrigation projects implemented with private sector participation.

2. *Egypt*

8. The next session was on Egypt, the first country in the region to adopt a comprehensive approach to PPPs, including a framework law and a dedicated central unit. Mr. Atter Hannoura, Director of the PPP Central Unit at the Ministry of Finance, discussed how projects face two types of challenges: limited capacity within public administration, in particular in terms of identifying and preparing projects suitable for implementation through a PPP structure; and financial constraints given the poor situation of procuring entities. He further emphasized the importance of learning from past errors, noting that based on the learning curve it has developed in recent years, Egypt is now in a position to elaborate a comprehensive programme of projects in the most challenging areas of social infrastructure, education and health.

9. The perspectives of public officials in Morocco and Egypt were complemented by the experiences of private developers: Taqa, the Abu Dhabi energy company, owner and operator of the largest power plant in Morocco, under contract with the public utility ONE (Office National de l'Electricité); and Orascom Construction Industries, winner of the bid for the first wastewater project awarded under the "New Cairo" Egyptian PPP scheme.

3. *Libya and Tunisia*

10. Libya and Tunisia, both countries in transition, were represented by officials from the ministries of infrastructure and planning who spoke about the challenges faced by their countries following the profound transformation of their political regimes.

4. Iraq

11. The final session of the first day of the meeting was dedicated to Iraq. Mr. Mhand Hsam Al Den Mhamd Amin, Chief of Staff in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Infrastructure, discussed the lack of capacity within public organizations as a major obstacle and announced the forthcoming promulgation of a law on PPP. As a resource-rich country, Iraq should be in a more positive situation; however, the lack of actual delivery of projects is holding back the development of the country. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and other international institutions are working to support the Government in its redevelopment efforts and in promoting private sector participation.

B. MOBILIZING FINANCIAL RESOURCES FOR INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS AND PPPS IN THE ARAB REGION

1. *Combining funding from international financial institutions with private capital for the Ouarzazate solar power project, Morocco*

12. The second day was focused on financing topics. The Ouarzazate solar power project in Morocco, once completed, will be the largest independent project of concentrated solar power (CSP) in the world. The project has demonstrated how strong commitment and cooperation among international financial institutions, represented in Rabat by the World Bank and the European Investment Bank, were instrumental to achieving extremely low project costs, while promoting competition between power developers. The result, with the winning consortium led by ACWA Power International, is an electricity tariff well below original expectations, even if further improvements in the cost base are essential to making CSP technology viable in commercial terms. In addition, a single-purpose agency dedicated to the implementation of the solar project, the Moroccan Agency for Solar Energy (MASEN), effectively coordinated the different aspects of state involvement and support for the project, providing the financial structure to intermediate funding from international financial institutions to the project company, as a debt with an equity component.

2. *Financial markets and alternative sources of funds for infrastructure investments: Multilaterals, institutional investors, project finance and bonds, and Islamic finance*

13. The role of institutional investors and of alternative financial instruments in infrastructure financing was debated in the last morning session. CDG Capital Infrastructures, the Moroccan partner of InfraMed Infrastructure, outlined the broad parameters that institutional investors look at when considering investment in an emerging country, as well as the bottom-up approach taken to mitigate risk when structuring a deal. The development of capital market solutions with the issuance of project bonds were at the core of a BNP Paribas presentation, which also compared project bonds to project finance loans. The European project bonds initiative, promoted in a presentation by the European International Bank could be an important tool to encourage an increase in long-term capital market financing for infrastructure projects. Given their intrinsic nature as asset-backed transactions thus linked to the “real economy”, infrastructure and PPP projects should also be ideal candidates for Islamic financing, as noted during the Islamic Development Bank’s presentation. In this changing environment, the traditional project finance market still has a role to play. The Arab Petroleum Investments Corporation (APICORP) provided an overview of the project volumes and deals in the Middle East and North Africa region since the beginning of the financial crisis, which was particularly pronounced in 2012. It noted that the two most significant trends were the low impact of the crisis on the energy sector, and the increase in the participation of local banks.

C. ESCWA INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS AND PPPS INITIATIVE

14. The final panel was chaired by representatives of ESCWA and ECE, joined by ADEREE (Agence Nationale pour le Développement des Energies Renouvelables et de l’Efficacité Énergétique, Morocco).

15. The meeting was ended by a discussion of the way forward that highlighted the importance of creating an international network for PPP experts and senior advisors in the Arab region, hailing from both the public and the private sector. Preliminary action towards the establishments of PPP specialist centres in member countries, in particular focusing on renewable energies, infrastructure and Islamic finance, were underlined as activities to be promoted, in close cooperation with ECE and in the framework of the ESCWA initiative on the Infrastructure Investments and PPPs.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

16. The Expert Group Meeting on the Infrastructure Investments and Public-Private Partnerships Initiative: Unlocking Infrastructure Investments and Mobilizing Financial Resources in the Arab Region was held at CAC (Centre d'Accueil et de Conférences) in Rabat, on 17 and 18 April 2013.

B. OPENING

17. The opening session featured three keynote speakers. Mr. Aziz Rabbah, Minister of Equipment and Transport of Morocco, delivered the welcome address, thanking ESCWA for choosing Morocco as a partner for its first initiative in the area of infrastructure and PPPs. He emphasized the importance of political stability, strong institutions and governance to attract private investments, together with positive messages on the free market and state non-interference in the economy. He pointed out that annual infrastructure investment needs in Morocco are estimated at 10 per cent of GDP, with the Government aiming to promote private participation for the development of airports, railways, ports, and to benefit from private sector competition to lower operational and maintenance costs.

18. Mr. Abdallah al-Dardari, Chief Economist and Director of EDGD, underlined the significance for the Arab region of initiatives to exchange experiences and knowledge among member countries. His speech focused on opportunities for the creation of employment driven by investments in infrastructure and the need to achieve the right balance between public and private interests.

19. Mr. Geoffrey Hamilton, Chief of Section, Economic Cooperation and Integration Division at ECE, concluded the opening remarks with an introduction to the role and activities of the ECE International PPP Centre of Excellence. He welcomed the opportunity to exchange knowledge and expertise between the two regions, particularly on the fundamental stages of capacity-building and project elaboration in countries beginning to introduce PPP as an instrument to deliver infrastructure investments.

C. PARTICIPANTS

20. The expert group meeting was attended by more than 140 participants that included government officials; representatives of development banks; private sector investors and developers involved in infrastructure; experts in infrastructure investment and PPP; as well as representatives from several regional and international organizations.

21. Participants came from Canada, Egypt, France, Iraq, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and Yemen.

Annex*

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