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MANAGEMENT ISSUES**STREAMLINING THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION***Consideration of ESCWA intergovernmental machinery***Summary**

The intergovernmental machinery of ESCWA has been gradually developed since 1992 with the establishment of the Statistics Committee, which is a subsidiary body of the Commission. In 2002, ESCWA reformed its programme structure in order to bring it into line with the outcome of the Millennium Declaration. No changes were introduced to the intergovernmental structure given that most subsidiary bodies to the Commission were established after 1995.

This document presents the following: (a) the current programme and intergovernmental structures; (b) the major findings from the evaluation of the intergovernmental sessions held in the biennium 2004-2005 and the exchange of information with other regional commissions; (c) the current reform process of the United Nations and its immediate impact on the work of ESCWA; and (d) the proposal by the secretariat to strengthen the intergovernmental machinery of ESCWA.

The Commission is invited to review the document and provide guidance to the secretariat on the course of action that needs to be taken prior to the twenty-fifth session, with a view to strengthening linkages among the subprogrammes and enhancing programme coherence.

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Introduction

1. In 2002, ESCWA carried out major restructuring in the form of changes in its programme structure in order to bring it into line with the outcome of the Millennium Declaration. At that time, no changes were introduced to the intergovernmental structure given that most existing subsidiary bodies to the Commission had been established after 1995.
2. From 2001 to 2003, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted audits of the five regional commissions and recommended, among others, that the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions needed to undertake an overall reassessment of their respective intergovernmental machineries aimed at streamlining the processes and avoid duplication, and at enhancing the overall coherence and effectiveness of intergovernmental bodies.¹
3. In 2004, the secretariat of ESCWA initiated the evaluation of the conduct of intergovernmental sessions to assess their quality and effectiveness, with a view to improving future sessions. Additionally, ESCWA initiated consultations among the five regional commissions in September 2005 aimed at sharing experiences on the overall assessment of intergovernmental machineries.
4. This document presents the following: (a) the current programme and intergovernmental structures; (b) the major findings from the evaluation of the intergovernmental sessions held in the biennium 2004-2005 and the exchange of information with other regional commissions; (c) the current reform process of the United Nations and its immediate impact on the work of ESCWA; and (d) the proposal by the secretariat to strengthen the intergovernmental machinery of ESCWA.

I. CURRENT PROGRAMME AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURES

5. ESCWA was established by the General Assembly in 1973 as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in order to facilitate concerted action for the economic and social development of the countries of Western Asia by promoting economic cooperation and integration in the region. The ESCWA intergovernmental machinery consists of the Commission itself as the highest body within the organization and, reporting to it, the subsidiary bodies of the Commission, which are the legislative and consultative committees.
6. The intergovernmental machinery of ESCWA has been gradually developed since 1992 with the establishment of the Statistics Committee. Prior to the reform in 2002, ESCWA had six legislative committees on the following: (a) energy; (b) liberalization of foreign trade and economic globalization; (c) social development; (d) statistics; (e) transport; and (f) water resources. The Consultative Committee on Scientific and Technological Development and Technological Innovation was established in 2001 as an expert body subsidiary to the Commission.² This particular Committee was established in line with the establishment of all legislative committees, namely, through the adoption of relevant resolutions by the Commission that defined the terms of reference. By contrast, the Consultative Committee on Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), equally established in 2001 to support the programme of work pertaining to social development, was established pursuant to ESCWA resolution 227(XXI) of 11 May 2001 on the adoption of the final reports of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission, including those of the Committee on Social Development. Consequently, there were no clear terms of reference that had been endorsed by the Commission.
7. The reform of ESCWA identified four regional priority issues central to the Millennium Declaration. Economic analysis and forecasting and statistical capacity-building continued to underpin the fundamental

¹ United Nations, "Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on its audit of the regional commissions" (6 May 2004), para. 71.

² See ESCWA resolution 225 (XXI) of 11 May 2001 on the establishment of an ESCWA consultative committee on scientific and technological development and technological innovation.

work of the Commission for carrying out its analytical and normative activities. Consequently, the programme structure adopted by the Commission in 2002 comprised the following six subprogrammes:³ (a) integrated policies for the management of regional resources for sustainable development; (b) integrated social policies; (c) economic analysis and forecasting for regional development; (d) regional integration and responding to globalization; (e) information and communication technology for regional integration; and (f) comparable statistics for improved planning and decision-making.

8. In 2003, the Commission decided to establish a seventh legislative committee, namely the Committee on Women, to underscore the importance of the empowerment of women and of improving their status in the region.⁴ Moreover, in 2005, the Commission endorsed the introduction of a new subprogramme on advancement and empowerment of women within the framework of the draft programme of work for the biennium 2006-2007.⁵ The revised programme structure of ESCWA for the biennium 2006-2007 was subsequently approved by General Assembly resolution 59/275 of 23 December 2005 on programme planning.

9. The Commission and all legislative and consultative committees meet biennially, with the exception of the Committee on Transport, which convenes annually.⁶ While the thematic and cross-cutting approach adopted for the programme structure had enabled the secretariat to carry out more multidisciplinary activities, given the comparative advantage of ESCWA, the intergovernmental structure remained sectoral.

10. Two out of the seven subprogrammes, namely, "integrated policies for the management of regional resources for sustainable development" and "regional integration and responding to globalization" each possesses two legislative committees to guide the formulation and prioritization of their respective programmes of work. However, one subprogramme, namely, "economic analysis and forecasting for regional development" has no legislative committee to guide its programme of work. The intergovernmental and programme structures are illustrated in the annex.

11. The Advisory Committee was established pursuant to resolution 175 (XV) of 18 May 1989 on strengthening of the role and performance of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. It plays a consultative role and functions as a major means of communication between member States and the ESCWA secretariat on important matters requiring attention during the periods between the biennial sessions of the Commission. The Committee consists of heads of diplomatic mission in the host country of the Commission and a high-level representative of the host country. Additionally, the quarterly meetings of the Advisory Committee provide an opportunity to consider emerging issues and challenges faced by member countries and to follow up on the implementation of related resolutions.

II. MAJOR FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL SESSIONS AND THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION WITH OTHER REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

A. MAJOR FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL SESSIONS HELD IN THE BIENNIUM 2004-2005

12. The secretariat conducted an evaluation of nine legislative sessions held in the biennium 2004-2005. This evaluation was conducted through a questionnaire to the heads of delegation to solicit consolidated

³ See ESCWA resolution 238 (S-IV) of 11 March 2002 on the revised medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 and revised programme of work and priorities for the biennium 2002-2003.

⁴ See ESCWA resolution 240 (XXII) of 17 April 2003 on the establishment within the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia of a committee on women.

⁵ See ESCWA resolution 266 (XXIII) of 12 May 2005 on the adoption of the draft programme of work for the 2006-2007 biennium.

⁶ See, respectively, ESCWA resolution 228 (XXI) of 11 May 2001 on the change in the timing of the sessions of the six subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; and ESCWA resolution 229 (XXI) of 11 May 2001 on the frequency of the sessions of the ESCWA Committee on Transport.

views rather than to collect individual views of delegates, thereby aiming to avoid a weighted response in favour of the host country that naturally enjoys a larger number of representatives during such sessions. In some cases, randomly selected interviews were conducted to obtain additional information.

13. The nine questionnaires yielded an average response rate of 70 per cent, with the highest response rate, at 100 per cent, for two sessions, and the lowest at 43 per cent.

14. In general, the sessions were well attended by representatives of member Governments, particularly from the host country. The sessions held after February 2005 faced some difficulties owing to the prevailing security situation in Beirut, which was the venue for all the sessions with the exception of the twenty-third session of the Commission, which was convened in Damascus.

15. In most cases, member Governments expressed their satisfaction with the timeliness and relevance of issues covered in the agendas.

16. The overall evaluation yielded the following results:

(a) Identification by member Governments of priority agenda items covered by the concerned session;

(b) Requests by member Governments to include specific issues in the agendas of subsequent sessions;

(c) Expressed needs for the secretariat to carry out site visits aimed at increasing interactions with member Governments;

(d) Proposals relating to the structure and timeframe for the future sessions of the concerned intergovernmental bodies;

(e) Wide acknowledgement by member Governments that the sessions contributed towards the strengthening of networking among member countries;

(f) Recognition by member Governments that the sessions provided useful opportunities to share experiences with other members.

17. The responses to the questionnaires and the interviews did not capture the views of the heads of delegation with regard to the role of the legislative committees in terms of providing clearer direction, focus and coherence to the work of the relevant subprogrammes; and of making more effective use of the multidisciplinary capabilities of the Commission in order to address the development challenges of the region.

B. EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION WITH OTHER REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

18. Most regional commissions carried out an overall assessment of intergovernmental machineries and subsequently introduced adjustments to their respective structures, with a view to increasing the ownership of member countries. The sharing of experiences with the other regional commissions, which took place in Beirut in September 2005, revealed that the overall assessment of the intergovernmental machineries needed to be an ongoing and internally driven exercise in close consultation with member Governments. Those regional commissions expressed that the interaction between the secretariats and the member countries could be strengthened by streamlining the structure of intergovernmental bodies and by increasing the frequency of sessions.

19. In 2005, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) carried out a comprehensive review of its intergovernmental machinery in the context of the overall ECE reform, which was called for by its member

Governments in the light of the expansion of the European Union. As a result, both intergovernmental and programme structures were revised to enable the secretariat of ECE to respond better to the needs of its member Governments. While the Commission remains the highest decision-making body of the organization and is responsible for taking strategic decisions on the ECE programme of work and for providing a forum for high-level policy dialogue on economic development for the region, the recently established Executive Committee is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the overall guidance set by the Commission. Between the biennial sessions of the Commission, this Executive Committee is expected to act on behalf of the Commission and can seize itself of all matters related to ECE activities within its terms of reference. The membership of the Executive Committee comprises representatives of all ECE members.

20. Through the ongoing dialogue with its member Governments, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) continues to adjust its intergovernmental machinery, with special focus on enhancing partnerships based on comparative advantage and pooling of resources. Several important forums were established, including the African Development Forum, in 1999; the ECA/Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Ministerial Consultation, known as the Big Table, in 2000; and, more recently, the annual Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, in 2002. These forums have helped to bring senior policymakers from member Governments closer to other important stakeholders both within and outside the region, and to address and form common positions on critical development issues for Africa.

21. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) carries out its overall assessment of the intergovernmental machinery every five years through regular consultation with its member Governments. Such assessments are carried out in line with the programme priorities determined by the Commission in order to ascertain that the structure of intergovernmental machinery remains closely aligned with the programme structure. The Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR), which convenes monthly and as required, plays an important role in ensuring regular consultations.

22. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) includes the Committee of the Whole, which normally meets at United Nations Headquarters in New York with permanent representatives of ECLAC if and when required during the years in which the Commission does not hold a biennial session. Additionally, the Committee of High-level Government Experts is a subsidiary of ECLAC that acts as a forum devoted to the analysis of various aspects of the implementation and appraisal of development strategies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

III. CURRENT REFORM PROCESS OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND ITS IMMEDIATE IMPACT ON THE WORK OF ESCWA

23. The 2005 World Summit reaffirmed the key values and commitments of the United Nations, and placed special importance on the development issues to which the regional commissions can provide valuable inputs. At the same time, the Summit stressed the need to strengthen further the United Nations by reinvigorating its intergovernmental organs and by adapting them to the contemporary requirements of member Governments.⁷ Most development issues highlighted in the 2005 World Summit Outcome are directly relevant to ESCWA member countries, including the importance of peace and collective security, and the strong links between development, peace and security, and human rights.

24. In the light of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions initiated the reassessment of the role, functions and comparative advantages of the regional commissions. They agreed that the common strategic objectives of the regional commissions needed to be as follows: (a) to reduce poverty and address development disparities among countries/subregions within a

⁷ See General Assembly resolution 60/1 of 16 September 2005 on the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

region; (b) to foster economic integration at the subregional/regional level; (c) to promote the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally agreed development goals in the region; (d) to support South-South cooperation, both intraregional and interregional; and (e) to promote the economic, social and environmental aspects of security and peace-building at the subregional/regional levels.

25. Additionally, they agreed that the common functions of the regional commissions needed to focus on the following: (a) production of regional economic and social studies on trends, situations and policies in the various areas of work (analytical function); (b) preparation of policy recommendations/guidelines/norms and standards for policy debate or adoption/implementation (normative function); (c) provision of technical cooperation (capacity-building function); and (d) organization of multilateral dialogues, knowledge-sharing and networking at the regional level (convening power function).

26. The common areas of work identified by the regional commissions included the following: (a) economic analysis; (b) population issues and social development; (c) trade; (d) transport; (e) environment and sustainable development; (f) statistics; (g) gender; and (h) information and communication technology (ICT) for development.

27. The importance of the role of the regional commission was reiterated in terms of linking key global agreements, formulating and implementing national development policies and programmes, coordinating the work of the United Nations entities at the regional level and partnering with regional organizations and development banks. In order to forge a corporate identity and promote the visibility of the work of the regional commissions, the Executive Secretaries agreed to highlight the common strategic objectives and functions of the regional commissions into the respective strategic frameworks for the biennium 2008-2009.

28. In November 2005, the Secretary-General requested all United Nations entities to review all mandates that were older than five years and, equally, to reassess their priorities and programmes in the light of the Summit Outcome, with a view to realigning the work of the United Nations to current global priorities. Moreover, in order to ensure coherence and harmonization of this reassessment, the Secretary-General requested the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs (EC-ESA) and the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) to provide support to the economic, social and related development fields. The Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions were in close contact throughout the exercise that was steered by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), which in turn provides secretariat support to EC-ESA; and ESCWA participated fully as a member of EC-ESA.

29. Through the exercises on mandate review and the EC-ESA priority and programme review, the secretariat identified areas that needed a more holistic/comprehensive approach in the programme of work of ESCWA. Specifically, ESCWA could play a more prominent role in promoting economic and social dimensions of conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery, with a view to contributing to the work of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission. Similarly, youth and productive employment opportunities, and international migration and development, which are vital issues for the countries of Western Asia, were not reflected in the programme of work for the biennium 2006-2007. The promotion of socially inclusive macroeconomic policies, which was accorded high priority by the Commission at its twenty-third session,⁸ remains another area that requires the urgent attention of the secretariat, in addition to technology for development over and above the work of ESCWA on ICTs. The issues related to financing for development, which encompass domestic resource mobilization and foreign direct investment, are currently dealt with by two separate subprogrammes within the programme of work of ESCWA.

30. The identification of those programme areas helped the secretariat in preparing both the draft strategic framework for the biennium 2008-2009 and the proposed programme changes for the biennium 2006-2007, with the aim of realigning the programme of work of ESCWA to the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

⁸ See ESCWA resolution of 12 May 2005 on the Damascus Declaration on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals.

IV. PROPOSAL TO STRENGTHEN THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL MACHINERY OF ESCWA

31. The reform of the United Nations by the Secretary-General in response to the 2005 World Summit Outcome is expected to bring about incremental changes throughout the United Nations system for the next decade. Consequently, it provides an opportunity for the Commission to prepare itself for such changes by reviewing the current establishment and by planning ahead in consultation with member Governments and United Nations Headquarters.

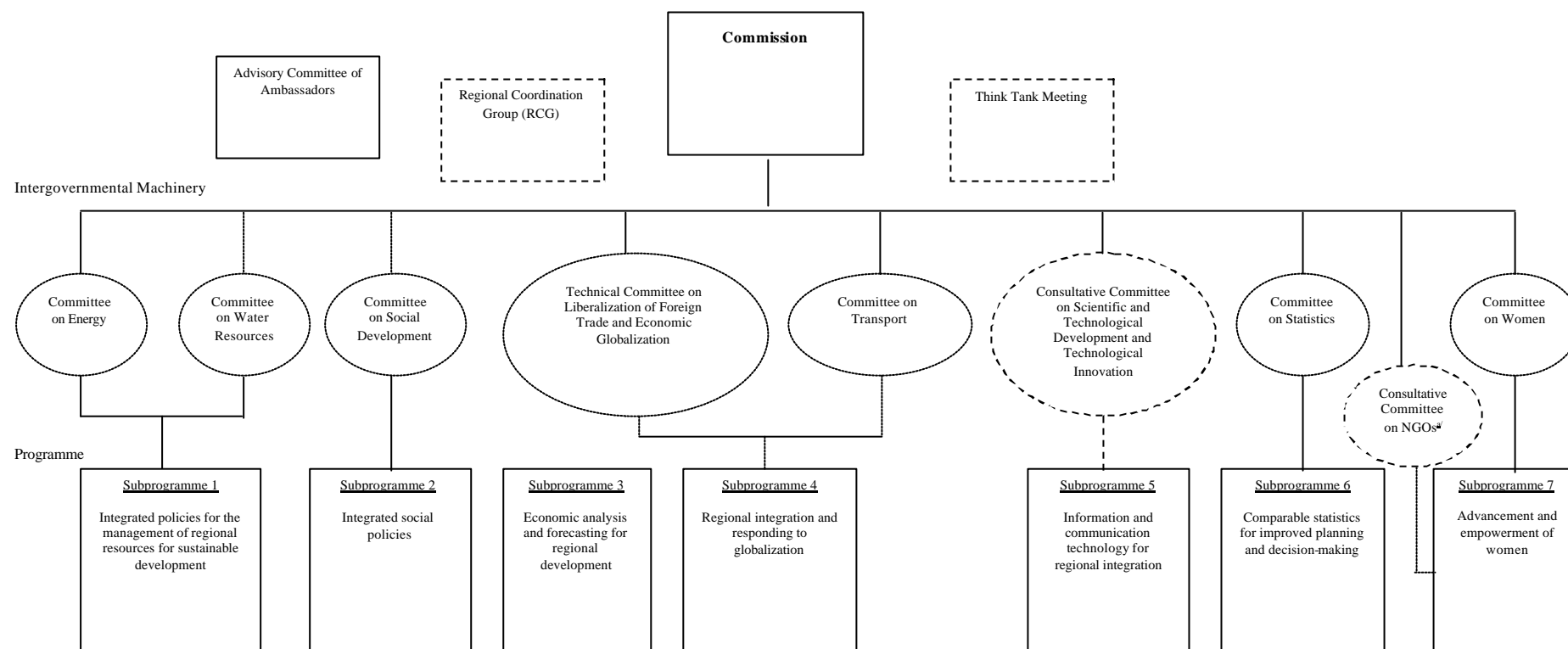
32. In this connection, it is beneficial for ESCWA to carry out an in-depth assessment of the intergovernmental machinery through a series of consultations between member Governments and the secretariat. Such an assessment must aim to identify an intergovernmental structure that can effectively strengthen interlinkages among the subprogrammes, and to bring about a coherent programme focused on the priority issues of the region.

33. A detailed methodology and work plans can be developed by the secretariat in close consultation with the Advisory Committee of Ambassadors, and can be relayed to the national focal points of all member Governments for endorsement as early as possible, and not later than 30 September 2006. Such a methodology and work plan needs to ensure the participation of all member Governments.

34. The recommendations formulated by the Advisory Committee and the secretariat will be submitted to member Governments in time for consideration and adoption by the Commission at the twenty-fifth session, to be held in spring of 2008.

Annex

ESCWA INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND PROGRAMME STRUCTURES IN 2006-2007



Notes: While the bodies in dotted lines are not part of the intergovernmental structure, they are advisory bodies to the work of the Commission.

^{a/} The Consultative Committee on NGOs was established by ESCWA resolution 227 (XXI) of 11 May 2001 on the adoption of the final reports of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission. It was originally attached to the Committee on Social Development and was shifted to serve the Committee on Women with the creation of Subprogramme 7.