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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

15th Meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM)

Beirut, 1 June 2011

**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE THEMATIC WORKING GROUP ON THE MILLENNIUM
DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE ARAB REGION SINCE
THE 14TH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM
BEIRUT, 11-12 NOVEMBER 2010**

Summary

Since the 14th session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), which was held in Beirut from 11 to 12 November 2010, the Thematic Working Group (TWG) on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) where ESCWA is designated to be the convener of this TWG, have successfully launched of *'The Third Arab Millennium Development Goals 2010 and the Impact of the Global Economic Crises'* in December 2010. Moreover, the members of the TWG have been holding activities to accelerate the attainment of the MDGs in the region that will all serve in the preparation of the upcoming 2012-2013 Arab MDGs joint report. This report indicates the actions undertaken by the TWG on Arab MDGs, and the progress achieved in implementing these actions since the 14th RCM (UN House, Beirut, 11-12 November 2010).

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Introduction

- 1- The Thematic Working Group on the Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region¹, succeeded to prepare throughout the period June 2009 - August 2010 a LAS-UN joined flagship publication titled “The Third Arab Report on the Millennium Development Goals 2010 and the Impact of the Global Economic Crises”, that was adopted and launched by the council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs during the inauguration Session of their 30th session (LAS headquarter, Cairo, 12 December 2010).
- 2- One day prior to the last 14th RCM (Beirut, 11-12 November 2010), the TWG on MDGs in the Arab region met at the UN house, Beirut, on 10 November 2010. The group discussed the existing challenges facing its work and the lessons learnt during the preparation of the above mentioned report and brainstormed about the upcoming joint output for 2013-2014.
- 3- During 2011-2012, the members of the TWG on MDGs in the Arab region will continue working on MDGs related activities within the framework of their respective agencies. The outcome of these efforts will serve into the preparation of the upcoming joint output 2012-2013.

I – The Launch of 2010 Arab MDGs Report

- 4- The Launch of “*The Third Arab Millennium Development Goals 2010 and the Impact of the Global Economic Crises*”(The Report) was convened at LAS Secretariat in Cairo, on 12 December 2010 at the opening ceremony of 30th session the council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs (12-13 December 2010). The launch was attended by 18 Arab ministers of social affairs, Ms. Amat Al-Alim Sosowa, Assistant Secretary General and Chair of United Nations Regional Development Group, Ms. Marie Simonen, Assistant Secretary General and General Director of UNFPA, in addition to the top management of the UN agencies members of the TWG on MDGs in the Arab region. The launch was also attended by local and international press.
- 5- During their 30th session, the council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs discussed the recommendations of “*The Report*” and mainly the cooperation between Arab countries and the UN agencies on the attainment of the MDGs by 2015. The session concluded by a set of decisions related to economic and social development in the Arab region as well a consensus on draft decisions related to MDGs achievement by 2015 to be raised to the 2nd Arab Social and Economic Summit (Sharm El-Sheikh, 19 January 2011).
- 6- The 2nd Arab Social and Economic Summit (Sharm El-Sheikh, 19 January 2011), reviewed the recommendation of “*The Report*”, and called the League of Arab States to continue

¹ The Thematic Working Group (TWG) on the Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region MDGs was established pursuant to the decisions of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) taken at its 12th meeting held in Beirut on 13-14 September 2008. The 12th RCM agreed on “the establishment of three proposed thematic working groups (TWGs), subsidiary to RCM, focusing on **MDGs in the Arab region**, climate change, and food security, respectively.”

coordinating with the UN agencies working in the Arab region (members of the TWG) to provide assistance to Arab countries to implement the recommendations of “*The Report*”, mainly those related to policy making and the acceleration of the attainment of the MDGs in the region in general.

II- The upcoming activities of the TWG on MDGs in the Arab Region

7- As stated in paragraph (3) of this report, the members of the TWG on MDGs in the Arab region will continue in their MDGs related activities during 2011-2012 within their respective framework.

8- To maintain, coordination and cooperation, ESCWA as the convener of the TWG requested its colleagues in this group to report on their MDGs activities².

9- The members of the TWG replied as follows:

A- WHO³:

The WHO regional office is currently developing a Regional Health Observatory (RHO) a regional mirror to the Global Health observatory (GHO) at the following link (<http://www.who.int/gho/en/>). The RHO will have a section on the health-related MDGs for the EMR countries (which include all LAS countries, except Algeria, Mauritania and Comoros).

B- UNDP⁴:

UNDP is currently involved in a related activity (with the League of Arab States (LAS)) on compiling all human development and MDG related data for Arab countries in a socio-economic database. The database could provide an empirical basis for the forthcoming AMDGR report as well as provide input for innovative contributions such as the calculation of an MDG achievement index.

C- UNEP⁵:

In terms of their continuing work relating to the MDGs, UNEP’s primary focus has been MDG 7 and their activities revolved around 6 sub-programmatic areas:

- a. Climate Change (including support to countries of the region in meeting their obligations under the UNFCCC, capacity building in terms of adaptation to climate

² E-mail dated 4 May 2011.

³ E-mail dated 9 May 2011.

⁴ E-mail dated 5 May 2011.

⁵ E-mail dated 11 May 2011.

change and assistance with the development of Greenhouse Gas Inventories, thus providing the data from the region to assess CO2 emissions);

- b. Disasters and Conflicts (including support to Lebanon in the implementation of a project with UNDP, funded by the Greek Government on Environmental Quality Monitoring, focusing on coastal and marine sensitive areas, air pollution and socio-economic development in the coastal zone);
- c. Ecosystem Management (including work on the Mesopotamian Marshlands on Iraq to support restoration and rehabilitation, activities relating to biodiversity conservation and support to countries in meeting their obligations under the biodiversity-related Multilateral Environmental Agreements);
- d. Environmental Governance (including information for decision-making through production of State of Environment reports and capacity building of member states in Integrated Environmental Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment towards sustainable development, support to countries with respect to Multilateral Environmental Agreements and participation in policy dialogues with governments through regional fora. This also includes UNEP's work under One UN activities.);
- e. Harmful Substances and Hazardous Wastes (including work in the region supporting countries to meet their obligations under the Montreal Protocol on ozone depleting substances to ensure compliance and also development of Green Customs Network);
- f. Resource Efficiency (including support to countries in terms of sustainable consumption and production as well as the promotion of the Green Economy as a tool for sustainable development and job creation).

D- UNICEF MENARO⁶:

- a. UNICEF MENARO ensured the wide dissemination of the "*The Third Arab Millennium Development Goals 2010 and the Impact of the Global Economic Crises*" to UNICEF Country Offices in the Region, as well as HQ divisions and offices;
- b. Inputs from "*the Report*" were used by UNICEF MENARO in its 2010 Regional Annual Report that serves as the basis for the Executive Director's Annual Report to the Executive Board;

⁶E-mail dated 23 May 2011

- c. A pocket size country-by-country booklet on the status of the MDGs was published in March 2011 and disseminated to Country Offices in the Region; these are also available online on UNICEF MENAR intranet Web site;
- d. With the aim of supporting the attainment of the MDGs with equity and strengthening the evidence-base, UNICEF MENARO completed and launched a Health Equity Study earlier this month (May); similarly a regional equity study is in the process of being finalized (to be ready in August 2011), focusing on the identification and analysis of existing socio-economic and political disparities from child rights perspective, to be accompanied by country-by-country profiles of the same;
- e. UNICEF Jordan together with the UNCT is focusing on the application of the MDG Acceleration Framework through its current country programme of cooperation;
- f. The current crop of new country programmes of cooperation in the Region (6 at the moment - Algeria, Iran, Morocco, Oman, Syria and Yemen) all have as their overarching theme - support to national development plans for the reduction of disparities and attainment of the MDGs with equity.

E- **ILO**⁷:

- a. Employment and decent work is a target under goal 1 of the MDGs. Hence, all the work of ILO does to support in terms of supporting employment strategies, youth employment, social protection, enterprise development, and mainstreaming gender in the world of work, contributed in a way or another to the achievement of the MDGs. Further, all the work ILO does in relation to promotion of social dialogue and tripartism is related to the improvement of governance structures, which is also part of the Millennium Declaration.
- b. As for country-level initiatives that we are implementing and which directly contribute to the achievement of the MDGs, ILO indeed is part of three joint UN initiatives in Lebanon, the OPt, and Syria.

1- Lebanon: MDG-F programme on conflict Prevention and Peace Building in North Lebanon which ILO is specifically supporting local socio-economic development initiatives with UNDP and contributing to Palestinian-Lebanese dialogue forums to discuss employment rights of Palestinians in Lebanon.

2- OPt: MDG-F Programme on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, in which the ILO is taking the lead on the outcomes related to the economic empowerment of women.

⁷E-mail dated 24 May 2011

3- Syria: we are part of an Integrated Community development and MDGs Upscaling Programme in which we are directly working with UNPd on the employment component through improving employability and creating sustainable job opportunities for young women and women in very poor areas in Syria.

F- ITU⁸:

1. The strategic goal of ITU-D is threefold, and includes:
 - To promote the availability of infrastructure and foster an enabling environment for telecommunication/ICT infrastructure development and its use in a safe and secure manner
 - To provide assistance to developing countries in bridging the digital divide by achieving broader telecommunication/ICT-enabled socio-economic development
 - To expand the benefits of the information society to the membership in cooperation with public and private stakeholders, and to promote the integration of the use of telecommunications/ICTs into the broader economy and society as drivers of development, innovation, well-being, growth and productivity globally.
 - To achieve all the previous goals, ITU organizes workshops, conferences and
 - forums in the Arab Region to realize the MDGs, this includes but not limited the following:

a- Regional Initiatives

The Hyderabad Action Plan includes regional initiatives that should help achieve economic of scale in ICT development. During the WTDC-10 preparatory process, Arab region selected its initiatives and the top projects that best met its particular priorities to be achieved at 2011-2014 which are:

Initiative	Project
Broadband access network	Link the Internet Exchange Points Project
Digital broadcasting	Mobile TV and the IPTV Project
Open-source software	Establishment of network for support the open-source software Project
Arabic digital content	Establishment of Arab Digital Documentation Centre Project
Cyber security	Arab PKI Forum

⁸E-mail dated 26 May 2011

b- Connect School, connect a community Initiative:

This Project is designed to promote broadband connectivity in schools in remote, rural or underserved areas. This Project aims to improve ICT access and use by school children and members of the local community, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups such as women and girls, indigenous and rural people, older persons and persons with disabilities. This initiative will be achieved in Mauritania and Comoros.

2. ICT for illiteracy eradication of Arab women:

ITU has financed a feasibility study on the use of ICTs for Arabic illiteracy eradication for women, this study identifies existing experiences in literacy training in general and more specifically the use of ICTs for literacy training. . ITU will jointly develop a training materials in cooperation with UNESCO and ALECSO to be posted in websites and use them for joint and individuals training opportunities. This open source materials will be used to eradicate the illiteracy for Arab Women using ICT

3. Connect Arab States Summit:

The overall objective of the Connect Arab States Summit which will be in Doha in November 2011 is to mobilize the human, financial and technical resources to support a rapid, region-wide transition to digital infrastructure and services, widely recognized as the engine of future economic prosperity and sustainable development.

4. Human Capacity Building:

Building on its launch of the ITU Academy (<http://academy.itu.int>), an initiative to streamline ITU's extensive capacity-building efforts in ICT and telecommunications, ITU Academy aimed at integrating and providing education, training and information resources on information and communication technologies (ICTs), ITU Academy provides an integrated and streamlined approach to the Telecommunication Development Bureau's (BDT) capacity building activities. Centre of Excellence of ITU is a key training delivery mechanisms for Arab states and provides high level face to face and online training courses.

5. Other objectives to achieve MDGs

1. Special program for the LDCs in the Arab region delivers targeted and highly differentiated assistance and provide ICT solutions for disaster mitigation.
2. Child on line protection by promoting the adoption of policies and strategies.
3. Emergency telecommunications, ITU promote the use of any form and means of communications that can contribute to universal access.
4. Persons with disabilities initiatives creating awareness and skills to mainstream disability issues, equal opportunities and right of persons with disabilities.

G- **UNFPA**⁹:

The main UNFPA MDGs related activities for 2011 are the ongoing capacity-building workshops and meetings in the Arab countries in various issues related to Maternal Health (MDG5).

UNFPA has published the ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development, 1994) at 15 review titled “Looking Back, Moving Forward Results and recommendations from the ICPD-at-15 process”¹⁰. The review found that progress has been insufficient and uneven. The ICPD agenda has not affected the lives of all people equally, and an unprecedented level of solidarity and international cooperation is needed to achieve the shared objectives of the ICPD and the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Moreover, UNFPA is jointly working with LAS on the “Arab Women Maternal Health” project.

H- **ESCWA**:

ESCWA is preparing the 2011 MDGs report. The first draft of this report should be ready by the end of June-early July 2011. ESCWA will be glad to share this first draft with all UN agencies which comments and remarks will undoubtedly enrich significantly the report. Besides, ESCWA will be glad to invite all the UN agencies, the League of Arab States and a few other experts to attend an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) that is going to be held during 13-15 July to launch the 2011 MDGs report. This event will be a good opportunity to share our views on the content of the report and to work together to further improve the quality of this ESCWA’s report. Indeed, ESCWA’s 2011 MDGs Report will be policy oriented and will address the following issues for the Arab region:

- (1) The need for an inclusive, equitable and stable economic growth;
- (2) The creeping and increasing inequalities in their various forms as a cross cutting issue (rural/urban, gender, etc...);
- (3) The need for an integrated approach and a new development paradigm for the attainment of the MDGs in the light of the recent social changes in the Arab region.

The report will use a methodology to assess the progress made towards the attainment of the MDGs in the Arab world, in order to identify national and regional priorities that would allow to propose policies for the acceleration of the attainment of the MDGs that is, a situation analysis will identify the remaining challenges that each Arab country has faced at the national level, through a scan of the latest national and regional MDGs reports as well as the assessments of other reports, for example by NGOs and the civil society.

⁹ UNFPA Focal Point’s visit to ESCWA (27 May 2011)

¹⁰ http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2011/UNFPA%20ICPD%20Report_web.pdf

In this regard ESCWA in its upcoming 2011 MDGs report will identify priorities with multiplier effects at national and regional levels. On the national level, it addresses the problem of inclusive growth, gender imbalances, a comprehensive social policy and governance (political and institutional reforms) to accelerate the progress towards the MDGs, in the context of recent developments in the region. On the regional level, the report discusses how countries can benefit from regional cooperation on the fronts of conflict and peace issues in light of their potential spillover effects, intra-Arab trade integration especially enabling LDCs to widen their production base, expand markets, reap efficiency gains and contribute to provide a decent job for all, labour mobility and migration, water and food security, working towards and beyond 2015 in line with the last Millennium Summit.

ESCWA's report comes at a critical juncture in the Arab world. With only four years to the 2015 deadline, this report will "ring the bell", identify key drivers and advocate relevant policies to accelerate the process towards the MDGs.

Therefore, ESCWA 2011 MDGs report is going to provide policy recommendations allowing accelerating the attainment of the MDGs. A special emphasis will be given to the pressing specific problems associated with potential strong spillovers of LDCs and conflict countries which will not attain the MDGs without regional cooperation.

III - Upcoming 2013-2014 LAS-UN MDGs Arab Joint Report

10- ESCWA as the convener of the TWG on MDGs in the Arab region is currently coordinating with the other members of the TWG to prepare a concept note of the upcoming LAS-UN MDGs Report 2012-2013, that identifies gaps, cases where countries experienced retreat/regression in the attainment of MDGs.

11- All members of the TWG on MDGs in the Arab region will be invited to attend the EGM organized by ESCWA (13-15 July 2011) to brainstorm about the theme and the concept note to be prepared for our upcoming joint MDGs Report for 2012-2013, to review the ongoing MDGs activities by each agency, the ESCWA's MDG upcoming report for 2011, the participation of members of the TWG in each other MDG current activities, and other related issues.