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## **Report**

### **Final Consolidation Workshop on Sustainable Energy Access for Rural Areas Beirut, 22 September 2016**

#### **Summary**

The final consolidation workshop on Sustainable Energy Access for Rural Areas was held at the sidelines of the International Beirut Energy Forum on 22 September 2016, as part of the United Nations Development Account project entitled "Building capacities in developing appropriate green technologies for improving the livelihood of rural communities in the ESCWA region".

The workshop presented the project accomplishments and the activities performed in collaboration with government representatives and experts from financial and research institutions in member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). It addressed the socioeconomic situation in rural areas and suggested policy tools, good practices and business models for the development and dissemination of appropriate green technologies in Arab rural communities. Participants also discussed the proposal of creating green rural enterprises in the field of renewable energy applications as a means to create incentives for women entrepreneurs.

This report presents a summary of the workshop discussions and main conclusions and recommendations.

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## **Introduction**

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has implemented the United Nations Development Account (DA) project titled "Building capacities in developing appropriate green technologies for improving the livelihood of rural communities in the ESCWA region" during the period 2014-2016. The aim was to strengthen the capacity of Arab States to mainstream appropriate green technology initiatives into national development programmes and policies, in line with the Secretary-General's Initiative on Sustainable Energy for All and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Goal 7 which calls for ensuring access to sustainable modern energy for all by 2030

2. Two specific project targets were set: (a) to build the capacity of public and private development institutions to assess green technology needs in rural areas and to mainstream appropriate green technology (AGT) initiatives; and (b) to widen the knowledge of policymakers and decision makers on policy options, helping them to create an environment conducive for investment in AGTs in rural areas.

3. ESCWA organized a consolidation workshop to conclude project implementation. The agenda included a review of project accomplishments and activities, with a view to sharing lessons learned, highlighting examples from participating countries and initiating a discussion on options for the way forward. The workshop was convened at the sidelines of the seventh edition of the Beirut Energy Forum, which took place from 21 to 23 September 2016. The relevant documents are available from [www.unescwa.org/node/44098](http://www.unescwa.org/node/44098).

## **I. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION**

### **A. ENERGY FOR IMPROVING RURAL LIVELIHOODS**

4. The first workshop session focused on sustainable energy access as a means for social inclusion in rural areas. Participants also touched on the socioeconomic context, the need for green technology assessments and appropriate policy tools, and efforts of financial institutions to promote green technologies. The example of Banque du Liban was presented in that regard. Such efforts could improve rural livelihoods and develop local economies, especially through the promotion of small agribusinesses and industries, and of traditional manufacturing.

5. The interventions and discussion revealed that renewable energy (RE) sources could help to improve living and health standards and enhance environmental sustainability, in addition to creating new job opportunities. The lack of access to affordable modern energy services was usually associated with poverty in rural areas, and the widespread adoption and installation of RE technologies remained challenging at the technical, financial and policy levels. Capacity development and inclusion efforts should target disadvantaged groups, such as youth and women, whose access to basic services should be facilitated. Adoption of AGTs, such as RE technologies, would be sustainable if additional "value" to rural businesses was generated. Rural development was addressed through different national policies in the Arab countries, most often in the agricultural sector. There was a need for a conducive framework for investment in AGTs, based on participative and comprehensive policy formulation processes and action planning. Appropriate financing mechanisms were key for the promotion of AGTs/RE.

### **B. CASE STUDIES ON BEST PRACTICES AND POLICY OPTIONS**

6. The keynote presentation of this session was on the success story of Bangladesh, a pioneer country in introducing microcredit, working with poor people in rural areas, empowering women and lending without collateral, in order to ensure energy access through the deployment of RE technology. The country's vision, known as the Three Zeros Theory, is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals with regard to achieving zero poverty, zero unemployment and zero emissions. About 1.7 million solar home systems were installed in Bangladesh by the end of August 2016; more than 325,000 biogas plants were constructed; around 950,000

cooking stoves were installed; 6,000 bank jobs were created, the economic power of rural people was increased; the quality of health was maintained; and people's well-being was enhanced.

7. The representatives of Jordan, Oman, Lebanon, Mauritania, the State of Palestine and the Sudan presented the national approaches to the dissemination of RE technology and solutions in rural areas, discussing good practices, challenges and lessons learned.

8. The comments and interventions indicated that increasing RE deployment would not solve rural energy needs; special attention should be devoted to rural areas to improve energy access, production and sustainability there. Focus should also be placed on importing knowledge and localizing industries rather than importing hardware and assets alone. Financing means and regulations mechanisms should be put in place so as to encourage entrepreneurship. Safety nets for the private sector should encourage investment increases. The public sector would also be included, with the government being the main responsible actor. Efforts to improve people's livelihoods should not be restricted to the energy sector, especially in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### C. THE WAY FORWARD

9. Participants underlined that for the development of rural areas in the Arab region to be sustainable, new economic activities had to build on locally available resources, particularly RE ones. Gender disparity in the economy and the society was also hampering development. A three-pronged strategy was required, involving identifying appropriate RE technologies to suit local conditions and building business propositions around them; creating suitable financing models within the local banking structure or through donor/corporate social responsibility funding; and creating an enabling policy environment, favourable to green rural enterprises in the field of RE applications. The strategy proposed for future projects should also include additional incentives for women entrepreneurs. In other world regions, microfinancing organizations and/or favourable social and economic conditions were already in place. The specific challenges of the Arab region must be kept in mind while adapting approaches that were successful elsewhere.

10. Representatives of ESCWA member States also tackled ways to build the capacity of local rural communities; the role of subsidies for improving access to modern energy sources; coordination with and involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society, local municipalities and the private sector; ways to build an enabling political framework; and suggestions to scale up the project through the development of green rural enterprises, building on existing platforms and institutions.

11. In the case of Jordan, public awareness schemes and training programmes had been adopted in coordination with NGOs, and funds were allocated from the "Rural Fills Electrification Funds". In Lebanon, as per Decree No. 30/2012 of the Council of Ministers, the fields of lighting for saving energy; public lighting on the roads and solar heaters were developed. In Palestine, training programmes for improving the capabilities of local technicians were developed.

12. As for the proposal of adopting green rural enterprises as a way forward for the DA project, interventions focused on building sustainable energy entrepreneurship through the following means:

- (a) Focusing on critical enablers: enterprise and entrepreneur;
- (b) Combining services and building capital from multiple sources;
- (c) Customizing tools and activities;
- (d) Building partnerships;
- (e) Ensuring knowledge sharing.

13. Participants finally highlighted the importance of promoting and financing partnerships, bringing together hard and soft resources to launch sustainable enterprises, and delivering services and ensuring capital for local entrepreneurs. They underlined the role of civil society and local partners in promoting green rural

enterprises. A road map based on the workshop results was to be devised for each country. Entities should be identified that would be in charge of drafting proposals for green rural enterprises after discussion with local stakeholders, and of devising clear strategies and implementation plans.

## **II. ORGANIZATION OF WORK**

### **A. DATE AND VENUE**

14. The workshop was held in Beirut on 22 September 2016.

### **B. OPENING**

15. The Director of the Sustainable Development Policies Division (SDPD) at ESCWA delivered a welcome speech, and the Chief of the Energy Section at SDPD presented the objectives of the DA project, and its activities and accomplishments. She also provided an overview on the outcomes expected from the workshop.

### **C. ATTENDANCE**

16. Experts from ESCWA member States and representatives of Governments, the public and private sectors, financial institutions and civil society organizations attended the workshop. International experts from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and Economic Commission for Africa, and the Director of the League of Arab States' Energy Department also participated in the workshop.

### **D. EVALUATION**

17. An evaluation questionnaire was distributed with the aim of assessing the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the workshop. Responses were received from 21 experts. They rated the overall quality of the workshop as good to excellent (95 per cent of responses) and thought that the objectives of the workshop were met "to a satisfactory extent" and "to a great extent" (90 per cent of responses). All respondents found the preparations of the workshop good to excellent. Results also showed that 90 per cent of respondents rated the relevance of their own expertise to the subject as good to excellent; 85 per cent rated the relevance of other experts' expertise to the subject as good to excellent; 90 per cent rated the workshop as a good to excellent forum for exchange of information and experience; 95 per cent rated the workshop as a good to excellent opportunity to establish new useful contacts; 85 per cent rated the workshop as good to excellent for providing useful input for future work; and 90 per cent of respondents welcomed future follow-up activities.

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