



**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/SDPD/2011/WG.7/Report
11 October 2011
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING SERIES FOR RIO+20: WORKSHOP ON ECONOMIC POLICIES SUPPORTING THE TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY IN THE ARAB REGION BEIRUT, 20-21 JULY 2011

Summary

The Regional Workshop on Economic Policies Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy (Beirut, 21-22 July 2011) brought together representatives of Arab countries to tackle the reform of economic policies in order to facilitate the channeling of capital into green areas and to stimulate a fair, advantageous and timely transition to a green economy in the region.

The workshop aimed at developing concepts of green economy and building consensus regarding its potential in the Arab region, as well as the policy balance needed to develop such an economy within the region. It also strived to build the capacity of participants to develop fiscal policies as a means of transformation to a green economy, and provided a regional platform for representatives of Ministries of Finance and other relevant participants to share experiences, knowledge and lessons learned among themselves and with representatives of member countries involved in preparations for Rio+20 Conference.

Participants discussed the basic concepts of a green economy and the role of Finance Ministries and fiscal policies in the achievement of such an economy. The workshop resulted in a joint statement that identifies regional priorities from an Arab perspective for moving towards a green economy in the Arab region. A series of recommendations were made for future consideration in the preparations for Rio+20 Conference.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) convened a regional workshop under the theme of “Economic Policies Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy”, which took place at the United Nations House in Beirut on 20 and 21 July 2011. The workshop was organized by ESCWA in partnership with the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan, Lebanon, as part of regional preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), known as Rio+20 Conference, to be held in 2012.
2. The workshop came under ESCWA’s mandate to lead regional preparations for Rio+20 Conference, which includes a series of national and regional workshops and seminars targeting different stakeholders such as government, civil society and the private sector. This workshop specifically targeted the public financial sector and sought to advocate for the reform of economic policies in Arab Countries in order to facilitate the channeling of capital into green areas and to stimulate a fair, advantageous and timely transition to a green economy.
3. The workshop responded to the above mandate and sought to ensure the Arab region was prepared for Rio+20 Conference. The theme was identified in view of growing regional interest in developing financial mechanisms to ensure transformation to a green economy. By discussing the subject of green finance, the workshop constitutes one of several milestones in the regional consultative process leading to Rio+20 Conference.
4. The objectives of the workshop were to:
 - (a) Discuss with policy-making staff of Ministries of Finance in the Arab countries the available options for economic policy reform and financial instruments supporting an advantageous transition to green economy in the Arab region;
 - (b) Support Arab countries to position themselves in relation to issues being negotiated at Rio+20 Conference, notably in relation to green economy and the institutional framework for sustainable development and how to translate them at the national level.
5. The workshop comprised eight sessions, each devoted to a specific topic for discussion. Chapter I of this report highlights the main conclusions and recommendations of the workshop, while chapter II provides a summary of the discussions within each session.

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6. The workshop tackled important issues such as sustainable public procurement, environmental taxation, green investment incentives and green financing. It provided a regional review of the institutional framework for sustainable development and discussed the experiences and achievements of Arab countries in the area of sustainable development and the transition to a green economy, as well as regional and international cooperation within this framework. Discussions led to the following results and recommendations:
 - (a) The need to prepare economic and technical feasibility studies for environmental projects to be submitted to financial, economic or planning authorities, highlighting the financial benefits and advantages expected from their implementation projects and whether these benefits are expected within the short or long-term. This process would be included as part of policies that take into account the principles of environmental accounting;
 - (b) Follow two main tracks for transition to a green economy:

- (i) First track: Fulfill all environmental obligations before approving new projects;
 - (ii) Second track: Encourage existing facilities to improve their environmental performance and provide them with related government assistance in addition to assistance from specialized institutions, within a set timeframe.
- (c) Call on Arab governments to adopt a green economy, encourage public-private partnerships and establish specialized funds to speed up the process of transition towards a green economy at the national and regional levels (including activating and supporting the Arab Environment Facility);
- (d) Call on Arab governments to develop legal and political systems that encourage the private sector to shift towards a green economy, with a focus on all sectors having an environmental dimension;
- (e) Encourage Arab governments to create an investment climate that attracts projects and technologies in line with green economy principles;
- (f) Create national and regional institutional frameworks to facilitate coordination among all agencies concerned with the transition to a green economy;
- (g) Emphasize the need for industrialized countries (Annex I Parties to the Kyoto Protocol) to meet their commitments towards developing countries as recommended by the charters of the various international conferences, as a prelude to the achievement of sustainable development, including the transition to a green economy and the reduction of carbon emissions. Commitments include the provision of financial and technical assistance, technology transfer and capacity building, in addition to compensation for previous periods where no appropriate environmental measures were taken;
- (h) Earmark funds for environment-related projects during the preparation of national budgets and development plans in the Arab countries;
- (i) Encourage banks to fund projects that include an environmental dimension in the context of the transition to a green economy (taking into account the experience of the Central Bank of Lebanon);
- (j) Adopt a unified Arab position against any discriminatory taxes on fossil fuels and emphasize the sovereignty of States in the exploitation of their natural resources, taking into consideration the circumstances and conditions of countries whose economies depend on fossil fuels;
- (k) Promote cleaner use of fossil fuels and renewable energy sources, including needs in terms of the transfer and development of technology;
- (l) Consider any efforts by Arab governments to reduce poverty levels through the adoption of a range of projects within this framework, as an integral part of the transition to a green economy;
- (m) The need for specialized organizations, including relevant United Nations organizations, to provide technical and capacity building support to concerned ministries and agencies, in the area of assessing economic, environmental and social impacts that may result from financial measures having an environmental purpose, prior to their adoption;
- (n) Reaffirm the “polluter pays” principle, as well as the common but differentiated historical responsibility, in environmental legislation;
- (o) Encourage Arab governments and concerned organizations to raise awareness, develop human skills and capabilities, and to conduct studies and research in the field of green technologies;

(p) Affirm the importance of marketing green economy principles and concepts and clarify its benefits for sustaining development to all segments of society including decision-makers, businessmen and individuals;

(q) Emphasize the importance of Arab coordination in the field of policies and international environmental negotiations in order to achieve the desired effect, especially those related to Rio+20 Conference, in view of the convergence between environmental objectives of the different Arab countries and the clarity of the features of international environmental negotiations, in addition to the importance of coordinating Arab positions with that of the Group of 77;

(r) Call for raising awareness on the benefits of green public procurement and its importance in achieving a green economy, and secure the infrastructure and resources needed for its adoption;

(s) Emphasize the principle of gradual transition to a green economy, according to country specificities and levels of development and through the use of appropriate policies;

(t) Urge Arab governments to build the institutional capacity needed to keep pace with global changes in dealing with environmental issues, in addition to negotiating capacities in this area and to introduce the concept of medium-and long-term environmental strategies within the financial and public management strategy of the state;

(u) Emphasize the importance of involving all concerned national and regional institutions in the Arab countries in preparation for Rio+20 Conference and the shift towards a green economy, rather than involving environmental bodies only, with the aim of achieving sustainable development objectives in its three pillars (economic, social and environmental). This is especially in view of the growing importance being assigned to the social dimension as a result of repercussions of the so-called Arab spring taking place across the Arab region;

(v) Develop a system to measure progress made by the Arab countries towards the achievement of a green economy. The system, to be based on key performance indicators (KPIs), should reflect issues including, but not limited to, the level of pollution, negative environmental impacts and positive steps taken by each country to preserve the environment. By allowing comparisons between the Arab countries, the proposed system will create a competitive environment that would stimulate them to achieve progress in this area.

II. MAIN TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

A. OPENING STATEMENTS AND INTRODUCTORY SESSION

7. Mr. Fareed Bushehri, Regional Officer, Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (DTIE), UNEP Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA), welcomed delegates and noted that many people in the region are living on less than \$2 a day. In addition, while environment degradation has been evident over the past 20 years, only 2 per cent of GDP is currently being spent on the environment. To highlight an example, when one examines forestry and ecosystems, the movement of finance towards a green economy appears to be decreasing. It is clear that economic reforms and government support through creative public policies are needed to address such problems.

8. Ms. Lamia Moubayed, Director of Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan, outlined the institute's 15 year history of strengthening public finance. She highlighted the significant role Governments can play in the green economy through public procurement. She advised delegates that the Institute is helping to draft a Lebanese National Strategy for Sustainable Public Procurement and highlighted the positive example of Tunisia. She reminded delegates that unsustainable practices have a significant long term cost.

9. Mr. Djamel Eddine Djaballah, Director, Department of Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development, League of Arab States, outlined the important role the League has played in harmonizing different Arab Government approaches, even before the Rio Earth Summit. He referred to the involvement of the League in the Arab Declaration on Development and the Environment and the role played by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, reminding delegates of the enormous task that lies ahead and the responsibilities owed in view of the move towards a green economy.

10. On behalf of ESCWA, Ms. Anhar Hegazi, Deputy Executive Secretary a.i., pointed out the significant environmental challenges that face the region and the need for a clear vision on how to move to a green economy. She emphasized that reforms are needed to improve existing economic and institutional structures and that the workshop presents an opportunity to address the conditions for and benefits of a green economy. In addition, she mentioned the great value of the workshop due to its high level of attendance and pointed out the need to specifically address the social implications of a transition to a green economy.

11. Mr. Alain Bifani, Director General of Finance, on behalf of H.E. Mr. Mohammad A. Safadi, Minister of Finance, Lebanon, agreed that the challenges faced were both economic and environmental. He stressed the need for a general framework and further motivation to achieve the goal of a green economy. He recognized there exists an opportunity for improvement and welcomed the current focus on the public sector. The importance of effective public-private partnership was highlighted as a main aspect of reform. He welcomed the workshop as providing a platform to learn from the experiences of others and anticipated a statement on an agreed, common position.

12. The introductory session included two presentations by ESCWA. The first presentation introduced the concept of a green economy, highlighting the reasons why it is currently under consideration at Rio+20 Conference and identifying the different green economy policy tracks, in addition to the roles of different stakeholders in managing the transition to such an economy. Acknowledging the multitude of challenges associated with a transition to a green economy, the presentation stressed the importance of having a homogeneous position by Arab countries at Rio+20 Conference regarding the issues under discussion and of developing a unified Arab action framework. The presentation gave an overview of the Arab regional preparations for Rio+20 Conference, including regional reporting, a series of consultative meetings targeting different stakeholders, Arab ministerial-level actions and participation in global events. In conclusion, the presentation highlighted the importance of the current workshop within these preparations, listing its expected outcomes.

13. The second ESCWA presentation introduced possible options for economic policy reform in order to stimulate the transition to a green economy, in preparation for their detailed discussion during the workshop. In particular, issues related to public financing of the green economy, fiscal stimuli for encouraging green private investments, sustainable public procurement, green incentives and environmental taxation were discussed. Finally, regional and global cooperation experiences of financing the green economy were highlighted.

14. In the ensuing discussion, participants agreed on the importance of considering the positions of the Group of 77 and the different Arab countries in Rio+20 Conference global preparatory meetings in order to ensure that outcomes of the Arab preparatory meetings are in line with these positions. The cost of financing the green economy in the Arab region was a significant concern for a number of participants, who emphasized the importance of studying the relevant economic implications in detail.

B. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

15. The second session of the workshop focused on the institutional framework for sustainable development, one of the thematic focus areas of Rio+20 Conference. It comprised presentations by three invited speakers, with the addition of a case study from Jordan. The Moderator, H.E. Mr. Rafie Al-Issawi, Minister of Finance, Iraq, introduced all speakers.

16. In his presentation, H.E. Mr. Jihad Azour, former Minister of Finance in Lebanon, highlighted the changing role of the Ministries of Finance as partners within an institutional framework for sustainable development. While the Arab countries did not suffer the consequences of the global financial crisis to the same extent as other more globalized economies, a number of challenges face the region, including recent political changes and increasing difficulties in managing public institutions. Under such circumstances, Mr. Azour argued for a shift to programme budgeting and proposed three additional roles for the ministries of finance: managing assets and liabilities; coordinating economic management; and spearheading accountability and transparency.

17. Mr. Atif Kubursi, Professor of Economics at McMaster University in Canada, explored the foundations of sustainable development, explaining a number of economic myths relating to natural and produced capital. Only a measure of net savings in gross national income, which takes into account the depletion of natural resources and damage caused by carbon emissions, can effectively measure true growth. The speaker concluded with the presentation of a closed-system economic model that takes into account the interactions between the environment and the economy.

18. Mr. Clive George, Associate at the Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, presented the key findings of the study carried out for ESCWA on the institutional framework for sustainable development in the Arab region. The presentation discussed the influence of new and emerging environmental concerns in the region, including climate change, the global economic crisis, rising food prices, the region's current political upheavals and the increasing global relevance of emerging economies. The presentation concluded that the future economic and social development of the Arab region could benefit considerably from green economy initiatives, but that such success is dependent on precise economic policies in areas such as economic diversification, agricultural development, rural-urban linkages and regional economic integration. Notably, the presentation included a number of positive case examples from the region and other developing countries.

19. The evolution of the Jordanian institutional framework for sustainable development was presented by Mr. Mutasim Al- Kilani, Head of the Sustainable Development Division at the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation in Jordan. Environmental issues remained within the mandate of the Jordanian municipalities until 2003, following which a Ministry of Environment was established and a new law concerning the environment was passed. In 2002, a high national committee on sustainable development was also established, therefore a number of structural modifications and changes should be introduced to its mandate. The presentation argued that current preparations for Rio+20 Conference necessitate the reactivation of the committee, and proposed that two sets of tasks be undertaken by the committee, both short term and long term, and including the development of a national consensus on green economy.

20. Discussions focused on the need for regional cooperation given the similarities in the environmental challenges faced by all countries in the region irrespective of their economic structure, which opens the door for cooperation in areas such as energy and water. The importance of government spending aimed to protect the environment was emphasized, but also the need to invest in the environmental sector as a productive sector where competitive advantages exist. Finally, Arab countries were advised to develop their capacity to measure deviations in any of the three poles of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental).

C. ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMICS AND FINANCE

21. ESCWA presented a paper outlining the need to introduce climate change and natural resources constraints into financial policy-making in order to enable the transition to a green economy. The presenter noted that moving to a green economy requires a shift in consumer preferences by ensuring real pricing and inciting less demand for carbon-intensive products. She provided examples from the United States of America and China, where environmental considerations were included in recovery plans. She noted that environmental accounting provides a good platform to integrate green economy issues into accounting and

other financial practices and stressed the important role of governments, which should ensure that unsustainable activities are not supported while initiating targets and standards and investing in related public projects. She also noted that banks and insurance companies should play a more prominent role in facilitating the transition.

22. A presentation on the Cost of Environmental Degradation in Lebanon was delivered by Mr. Wissam Kanj, Head of Irrigation Department at the Ministry of Energy and Water in Lebanon. He noted that the annual cost of degradation amounts to US\$655 million per year representing 3.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in Lebanon and that the cost of environmental degradation to the water sector amounts to US\$175 million/year representing over one per cent of the Lebanese GDP. The danger posed to environmental resources is worsened by climate change and urbanization.

23. Mr. Sergio Margulis, Sustainable MED Program Manager at the World Bank presented a paper on the Cost of Environmental Degradation on the GDP in the Arab Region. He emphasized that environmental protection is being integrated within the development framework, concerning economic growth, alleviating poverty, economic competitiveness and access to markets. He also noted that climate change has become a mainstream concern but that the question of who should pay for its impact remains. He noted that in the end, though developed countries should assume some responsibility, developing countries must be prepared to act as no matter what assistance is given, the problem will worsen without their active involvement. He highlighted that the World Bank has conducted an assessment of the cost of environmental degradation for a number of Middle East – North Africa (MENA) region countries and that it is now preparing a Green Growth study for the MENA region with a focus on water, land and energy.

24. ESCWA presented a paper on the System of Environmental Economics Accounts (SEEA) for ESCWA Member Countries in which the speaker noted that much conventional accounting assesses economic performance without dealing with the issue of sustainable growth. She noted that there is a need to consider accounts in an integrated manner as the economy is a subset of the environment. She noted that SEEA involves various steps and requires physical accounts, monetary flow accounts, assets accounts and environmentally-adjusted accounts and that it is necessary in order to protect the fragile environment. She stressed that there is still a need to help Arab Countries to enact proper legislation, to ensure enforcement, to use common concepts, to enhance the quality of data, and to share lessons learnt and best practices.

25. During the discussion it was stressed that environmental degradation has a disproportionate negative effect upon the poor. However, as developed countries are historically responsible for environmental degradation they have a moral obligation to help poorer countries improve their environmental performance. It was further noted that some developing countries emit high levels of pollution and thus should take on additional responsibilities. In order to support the efforts of developing countries there is a need for specialized funds that would facilitate the achievement of the millennium development goals (MDGs) and other internationally agreed targets. There is a need for a new understanding of the value of resources, e.g. currently the cost of fuel is low whereas its price should reflect its true value in order to promote a less carbon-intensive economy. An important lesson was noted in that there is scope to review pricing policies and subsidies to better direct funds towards needed sectors with a view to helping the poor and improving efficiency, thus improving environmental conditions. As the burden of environmental problems will be felt by developing countries, there is a need for these countries to pursue solutions themselves and not rely on other countries to lead the way.

D. ENVIRONMENTAL TAXATION

26. Mr. Walid Marrouch, Professor of Economics at the Lebanese American University, provided the basic theory behind environmental taxation, which forces polluters to internalize (artificially), i.e. to bear the costs of environmental externalities. He outlined public welfare losses associated with environmental externalities and the challenges of the global commons. He pointed out the difference between efficient taxation (which achieves its financial or other goals), and equitable taxation (which distributes a tax burden

fairly) and the difference between public “goods” and public “bads”, and the rivalry between uses of a “good”. The pros and cons of price (taxes) versus quantity (standards) policy instruments at the disposal of the regulator were also explored.

27. Mr. Abdul Kareem Ayed, Senior Economist, Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), addressed environmental taxes related to the petroleum industry. He pointed out that the environment is now on the global agenda and that the Kyoto Protocol as a means to address the challenges posed by climate change also faces difficulties, although negotiations are underway to extend it. He felt that oil revenues are very important for sustainable development in the Arab region, and emphasizes that developing the infrastructure and building the economy in the region will also draw on fossil fuels reserves. He reminded participants that there are differences in opinion regarding the concept of what is a green economy and that there is no consensus regarding benefits and challenges. On carbon taxes he noted that EU countries and Australia have plans to introduce such taxes in order to limit carbon emissions. Despite this, lower prices of oil are sought, as well as international stability in the oil market. He predicted that fossil fuels will remain the primary source of energy for the next two decades.

28. During the discussion that followed, one participant pointed out that it was clear that the region is in a difficult socio-economic situation, and that there is a need to address a green economy only within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, warning that raising environment-related taxes and increasing prices will create social injustice.

29. Another participant was skeptical about the effectiveness of environmental taxes citing the example of taxes on quarries, which did not impact the level of quarrying activities. In such a situation, environmental regulations are also necessary to stop pollution. He further noted the inability of taxes to address trans-boundary pollution.

30. The importance of incentives as complementary measures to environmental enforcement was pointed out by one participant, who also called for raising awareness regarding the financial and other types of benefits that producers can achieve by improving their environmental performance.

31. Finally, a participant stressed the importance of ensuring that a green economy contributes to greater equity in wealth distribution, highlighting the need for targeted financing to support development in impoverished areas, especially in light of the current political upheavals in the Arab region.

E. NATIONAL EXPERIENCES ON GREEN ECONOMY

32. The presentation on the Global Food Crisis and the Role of Food Security to Achieve Green Economy was presented by Ms. Reem M. I Al-Shamsi, FTA Negotiator, GCC Section, Ministry of Finance, United Arab Emirates. In her presentation, Ms. Al-Shamsi discussed the national environmental strategy and action plan, which focuses on five themes: fresh water, pollution, urban environment, marine environment and biodiversity. Within the urban environment, importance is being given to green buildings and the development of e-government. In 2011, 165 million dirhams were earmarked for environmental projects, including food security-related projects. On this last issue, the presentation stressed the importance of building national capacities, improving regional and global cooperation and a greater role for Arab regional organizations.

33. A presentation on Palestine’s Achievements in Transition to Green Economy was delivered by Mr. Anwar Muala, Director of Sustainable Development, Environment Quality Authority, Palestine. The presentation highlighted the integration of environmental concerns in various sectoral strategies, in addition to the development of a strategy on desertification and another on biodiversity, with dedicated budgets. Mr. Muala gave examples of specific green projects, including solar energy for street lighting, and a wastewater treatment bill that accompanies the standard water bill.

34. The Sudan's Experience in Supporting the Transition to Green Economy in Different Productive Sectors was presented by Mr. Ahmed Abdelkrim Atta Elfadeel Mohamed, Director of Regional and International Economic Blocs, General Directorate of Financial International Cooperation, Ministry of Finance and National Economy, the Sudan. The presentation stressed the need to properly direct agricultural investments so as to resolve challenges currently facing the development of the agriculture sector in the Sudan, including desertification and overgrazing, in addition to the importance of establishing microfinance programmes in agriculture.

35. Government Policies and Programmes in the Syrian Arab Republic for the Implementation of a Green Economy were outlined by Ms. Rouida Nahar, Director of Clean Production and Renewable Energy Directorate and National Clean Production Center, Ministry of State for Environment Affairs, Syrian Arab Republic. The presentation highlighted the mainstreaming of environmental aspects into the 10th and 11th five-year development plans, and gave many examples of green measures taken, such as the new electricity law which allows private investments in production and distribution of electricity, a programme supporting water use efficiency in irrigation and organic agriculture, sustainable transport projects (hybrid busses and clean fuel), and public-private partnerships in the production of photovoltaic and solar water heater systems.

36. Mr. Sami Mati Polous, Deputy Minister of Planning in Iraq, gave an overview of Iraq's experiences in the transition to a green economy. He specifically highlighted the government policy in the area of poverty eradication, sustainable agriculture and rural development, including policies for land reclamation, rationalization of water consumption and improving crop structure. In addition, efforts are being exerted to increase the competitiveness of the industrial sector by reducing production costs, notably through energy efficiency measures.

37. In the discussion that followed, participants stressed the importance of private sector involvement in the transition to a green economy, in addition to the need for coordination within each country and between Arab countries in order to benefit from the different competitive advantages available. Participants raised the need to study the effect of environmental taxes before their enactment to identify any possible drawbacks for disadvantaged populations. In addition, the use of collected taxes needs to be transparent and linked to the purpose they were collected for, to ensure citizens feel that these taxes are being put to good use.

F. GREEN INVESTMENT INCENTIVES

38. Mr. Mohammed Taha Rafi, Operations Officer, International Finance Corporation (IFC) Middle East and North Africa, Pakistan, outlined how investments in climate change can provide good business opportunities. He pointed out that there are some countries that need more investments in water or other sectors, and the availability of banking instruments to encourage financing in these sectors. He also noted that there is a gap in the dialogue between the private sector and the public financial institutions to support green financing. The IFC aims to foster that dialogue and market financing solutions that target and support private sector market interests. He referred to the IFC Technology overview study regarding what green sectors could be targeted in various MENA countries.

39. Mr. Atif Kubursi, Professor of Economics, McMaster University, Canada examined the subject of green economy investments, outlining the importance of such an economy for employment creation and economic diversification, and potentially balancing and creating new synergies between engineering and economic sectors. He stated that it is important to note that a project can be bankable (in the long-run) but not able to access financing (in the short-run). He felt that Governments should proactively support research, development and green economy investments, thus reducing uncertainty regarding cost and other risks for the investors. Green economy investments are seen as a good way to generate employment through investment in local infrastructure or industry development.

40. Environmental loans as green incentives were examined by Mr. Mazen Halawi, Head of Section at the Financing Unit, Central Bank of Lebanon (BDL). He pointed out that the Lebanese subsidized interest

environmental loans programme differentiates between energy related and non-energy related projects and provides different conditions depending on the nature of a project (e.g. new versus existing project, rated versus non-rated project, etc.).

41. He explained that the economic sectors that can benefit from the Lebanese Government interest subsidy are industry, tourism, agriculture, information technology development, and artisanal projects undertaken by any private sector institution, with subsidized interest loans offered for certain sectors in addition to green loans. BDL incentives for green investments include the following:

- (a) Low interest rates to entrepreneurs;
- (b) Long loan maturity (payback periods) to entrepreneurs;
- (c) Commercial banks get an incentive for offering green loans by benefiting from an exemption from their required reserves at a rate beyond the value of the green loan (150 per cent).

42. Mr. Tansel Kilicarslan, Booz & Company, United Arab Emirates, outlined the “Green Sharm Initiative”, a green tourism concept for Sharm El Sheikh city in Egypt. The idea for the project arose because the loss of Sharm’s biodiversity was owing to ineffective waste management practices that threatened scuba diving tourism, an important source of revenue for the city. The initiative includes four greening areas (emissions, water supply, solid and liquid waste, and biodiversity) with 33 projects divided between “realistic green” projects that can be implemented in the short term, and “radical green” projects possible in the long term. The presentation highlighted the importance of having enabling programs that support the implementation of the whole initiative, including the following components: legislation and governance, funding and financing, marketing and branding, and awareness and community education.

43. In the ensuing discussion, participants stressed the importance of performing environmental impact assessments for all projects prior to funding, and of using marketing tools for the success of green economy projects, as they contribute to stakeholder engagement. Finally, the importance of a gradual, programmed and participatory transition to a green economy was highlighted.

G. SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

44. UNEP presented a paper on Sustainable Public Procurement in which the presenter focused on social issues such as unemployment, high population growth, rapid urbanization, rising incomes of the middle classes and associated impacts on the environment. He noted that seemingly simple things can have major environmental implications, such as the huge carbon footprint that arises from the use of plastic cups, fertilizers, transport, processing, etc. He noted that public procurement ranges between 8 and 30 per cent of countries GDP and that through making it more sustainable the buying power of the state and other major actors (big corporations, supermarkets, etc.) could quickly be harnessed to achieve sustainable development objectives. For example, it was through public procurement that computers started to be energy efficient. However, sustainable public procurement still faces many obstacles, such as the need for increased budgets as green products are often expensive while also do not cover the whole range of products. The challenge to promote sustainable public procurement in the region includes political willingness, institutional constraints, profitability and impact on Arab SMEs who may not be able to compete.

45. UNDP presented a paper on Green Public Procurement (GPP) in which it was noted that GPP consists in procuring goods with an emphasis on products which have been produced in a sustainable manner. He noted that GPP started as voluntary instrument but has increasingly become mandatory in the European Union (energy efficiency, green public transport, eco-labels on most appliances, etc.), with the objective of reaching near 50 per cent GPP by 2012. He also noted that a GPP training tool kit has been produced in order to improve its adoption and make it appear more rational. The toolkit provides guidance and allows an

orderly entrance into the GPP field. In one example, a European town saved Euro 1.5 million on a 6 million Euro contract by insisting on GPP.

46. Ms. Rana Rizkallah, Procurement Officer at the Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan, Lebanon, presented a paper on implementing the Marrakech Task Force (MTF) Approach to SPP in Lebanon. She stressed that through public procurement the public sector can establish new trends. She highlighted the role played by the Institut des Finance in promoting sustainability through training and capacity building and provision of advisory services to public entities. The aim is to implement an assessment, a legal review and a market analysis to test responsiveness to sustainable products in order to develop a strategic plan and capacity building programme. Products being promoted were subject to stringent selection based on a set of selection criteria, which covered various aspects. A draft national SPP plan is currently underway and will follow with appropriate capacity building programs.

47. During the discussion it was noted that procurement laws need to be harmonized in the Arab region as currently all countries have different laws. There is also a need to reinforce controls as the region is receiving products from various sources, some of which are of dubious quality. This should work in parallel with combating corruption so that SPP could really be enforced. It was also noted that there is a need to examine if GPP is in agreement with WTO rules and regulations. Moreover, it was noted that adopting GPP or SPP could be a complex exercise in the Arab world due to the multiplicity of sources of products and the competition faced by local products with those imported from other countries, such as China. Public procurement is already a difficult exercise in all countries and shifting to SPP is expected to exacerbate the problem. It was understood that public procurement has always been burdened by corruption problems but these could be minimized or managed through more efficient oversight and the application of the rule of law. In any case, corruption should not be an excuse to avoid SPP. Usually it is demand which drives supply, so if the government asks for green goods and services then green supplies will be provided.

H. REGIONAL AND GLOBAL COOPERATION

48. UNEP outlined details of its Green Economy Initiative and the Green Economy Report which addresses 12 global green sectors, some of which are key sectors for the region. The UNEP/ILO Green Jobs Report makes case for socio-economic green investment for job creation, while the UNEP/WTO Trade and Climate Change Report was also referred to. The point was made that a green economy goes beyond mitigating climate change or adapting to it, but encompasses a range of other environmental issues.

49. Mr. Najib Saab, Secretary General of the Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED) gave a presentation on A Green Economy in a Changing Arab World. He hoped that the Arab Spring will open the road for a sustainable economy, albeit prospects are not very promising at present. The current situation illustrates that it is difficult to instate change in countries in the absence of political will at the highest level. He hoped that the reforms sought or underway will combat corruption and improve the management of natural resources. AFED has prepared a handbook for companies that illustrates green purchasing and other issues, and launched the Arab Green Economy Initiative which quantifies the costs of a transition to the Green Economy, offering a number of case studies. The need to consider Arab demographic trends when considering green economy in the region, especially the youth population, was also highlighted.

50. Mr. Sergio Margulis, Program Manager at the World Bank, noted that UNFCCC and GEF International Financing Schemes provide opportunities for financing a green economy. He gave the example of Moldova, which has an 85 per cent recovery on user charges to support water supply and sanitation. In comparison, an Arab country example only recovers water supply and sanitation charges at a 10 per cent level. There remains a need to counter the argument that free or subsidized water is a policy favourable to the poor. Such subsidies result in a lack of cost recovery, which limits financial resources available for investment and the extension of services, and thus ultimately reduces access to services for the poor. In addition, subsidies encourage waste of resources, resulting in inefficiency. He suggested that if fossil fuel subsidies could be eliminated, emissions could be reduced.

51. In an intervention on the international framework for financing, Mr. Clive George pointed to a conflict of interest regarding how the World Bank is managing the green climate change funds, suggesting that the United Nations would be in a better position to manage such funds. Debate is ongoing as to how funds should be managed. Furthermore, he stressed that there are huge opportunities for the green economy but there is a need for caution concerning the international funds that might be offered and what conditionalities may be attached to their disbursement.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

52. The Regional Workshop on Economic Policies Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy was held at the UN House in Beirut during 20 and 21 July 2011.

B. OPENING

53. The Workshop was formally opened by Mr. Fareed Bushehri, Regional Officer, Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (DTIE), UNEP Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA), Ms. Lamia Moubayed, Head, Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan, Mr. Djamel Eddine Djaballah, Director, Department of Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development, League of Arab States, Ms. Anhar Hegazi, Deputy Executive Secretary, a.i., ESCWA and Mr. Alain Bifani, Director General of Finance, on behalf of H.E. Mr. Mohammad A. Safadi, Minister of Finance, Lebanon.

C. PARTICIPANTS

54. The workshop was attended by 53 participants, including 28 government representatives from the Ministries of Finance, Economy, Planning and Environment, and Sustainable Development Departments in Arab countries, in addition to experts from the World Bank, the IFC, OAPEC, AFED, McMaster University, the University of Manchester, the Lebanese American University, the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, and the Central Bank of Lebanon, as well as activists in the field of economic development policies. The list of participants is contained in the annex to this report.

D. AGENDA

55. Presentations and discussions were made over the following eight sessions:

- (a) Introductory session;
- (b) Institutional framework for sustainable development;
- (c) Environmental economics and finance;
- (d) Environmental taxation;
- (e) National experiences on green economy;
- (f) Green investment incentives;
- (g) Sustainable public procurement;
- (h) Regional and global cooperation.

E. EVALUATION

56. An evaluation questionnaire was distributed in order to assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the workshop. Twenty-eight participants responded to the questionnaire. In general, the majority (93 per cent) indicated that the overall quality of the workshop was rated as good to excellent. Fifty-three per cent of respondents noted that the workshop had achieved its intended objectives and met their expectations. Participants were unanimous regarding a need for follow-up activities. Proposed activities included the following: meetings aimed at addressing obstacles to sustainable development and building a

unified Arab position on Rio+20 Conference issues; forum for green economy information exchange (including success stories) between participants; awareness raising activities on green economy implicating also the private sector; capacity-building activities for government personnel on green economy issues; and specialized activities on sustainable public procurement and environmental taxes.

F. DOCUMENTS

57. The list of documents submitted to the workshop is available on the ESCWA website at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1610E>.

Annex*

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