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NOTES BY THE EXPERTS

AN APPROACH TO RESTRUCTURING ESCWA'S PROGRAMMES WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

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Human Resources Issues Related to the Countries of the ESCWA Region

Introduction

The post-cold war and post-gulf war era, coupled with the winds of peace blowing on the Arab-Israeli relations, make the process of restructuring of ESCWA's programmes a very timely opportunity for rethinking of the desirable approach to social and economic development. It must be noted at this juncture that many countries of the ESCWA region are planning or on their way to implementing socio-economic reforms and structural adjustment programmes either in collaboration with and through funding from international agencies and/or developed donor countries or depending primarily on their own resources coupled with technical assistance from United Nations organization.

In most of the on-going reforms in the region, general development challenges seem to dominate the scene. These can be briefly mentioned below:-

* Human resources management and development pose itself as one of the very serious issues which are aggravated by the problems of population growth and economic stagnation prevailing in the region. Innovative policies and regional cooperation projects are very much needed in order to deal with these issues, and also in order to turn the large pool of skilled and relatively inexpensive humanpower into a dynamic entrepreunial and trading class.

* Unemployment is a direct consequence of the insufficient growth in economic activity relative to population. The combination of high population growth and economic stagnation makes the unemployment problem particularly difficult and potentially explosive.

The prevailing situation in the ESCWA region and the world is presently characterized by a prevailing strategy which accords a primary role to the private sector in economic activities, with the public sector playing a lesser but more efficient and supportive role concentrating on the provision of infrastructure and social services.

An essential component and inherent part of such a strategy is (and should be) a heavy emphasis on human development to enable the people of the region to realize their full potential. Population policies and safeguards, the development of women and the role of non-governmental organizations in socio-economic development complete the package for a strategic initiative for restructuring ESCWA's programmes.

An Approach to Restructuring ESCWA's Programmes with emphasis on Human Resources Development

The improvement of economic management in the region inclusive of the recent

trend for the liberalization and enhancement of public sector management cannot be sustainable in the long term without a strong emphasis on human resources development focussing on education, training and health as well as actions to reduce population growth.

Developing human resources is an important social objective and a necessary pre-requisite for long-term growth. Without complementary progress in human development and without efforts to reduce population growth, policy and institutional reforms to improve economic efficiency will not yield sustainable results. Priority should be given to:

* entrepreneurship development programmes to support privatization and public sector reform initiatives and to establish entrepreneurship culture;

* reform training and humanpower development programmes with particular reference to small and medium scale industries and marketing skills;

* education, training and health and employment of women;

* increasing the role of the private sector and voluntary organizations in the delivery of services; and

* effective policies for employment and social assistance including well-targeted social safety nets.

A suggested Regional Human Resource Development Initiative:

A specific human resource development initiative is presented in this section within the main objective of supporting the sustainability of an integrated Human Development Strategy which, in turn, is the corner stone of a global socio-economic strategy encompassing the following challenges, namely:

- population growth
- unemployment
- economic management; and
- environment

Education and training is provided through a number of sources in every society. Technical, professional and career education begins in the school system and continues through college and university. Less than two decades ago, this pre-career education was considered adequate to meet the majority of the graduates' skill needs throughout their lifetime. However, the rate of change of technology and knowledge has increased so dramatically that, now, pre-career education may only be durable for between five and ten years, and even shorter periods in the future. Thus, continuing education as a mode of life was born.

Graduates today face the need to retrain or renew their skills as often as eight times in a normal career. Businesses and industries are forced to help with and encourage this process if they are to remain profitable and competitive.

Retraining and skills upgrading are generally achieved through one of two processes:

- Industry-sponsored training in the form of seminars, in-house education and on the job training;

- Externally sponsored (usually government funded) programmes of continuing or non-traditional education, most often based in training or educational institutions.

Every country, developed or not, strives to maintain a competent and technologically up-to-date workforce. The current common mechanisms for training and skills upgrading tend to be uncoordinated, inefficient and constraintive to this process. The constraints of the existing systems are often exacerbated, in a developing region, because of limited resources, both from government and businesses, and by a limited amount of the indigenous expertise required to support the training and skill redevelopment required. Secondly, regional development is often further constrained by artificial boundaries that impede communications and cooperation and cooperations within the larger business community.

The challenges of an up-to-date and competent workforce throughout the countries of of the region are the same challenges faced around the world. That the challenges are recognized is evidenced by the strategic changes in government policies in most of the countries of the region which have placed increasing emphasis and resources on the development of their human resources. However, if these resources are not applied effectively and efficiently, they may not be adequate to keep up with technological change and, therefore, continue the process of economic development.

There are several common features of human resource development in the ESCWA region which represent potential limitations to an effective and efficient training and skills development process.

* There is little coordination, communication, and cooperation among government (institutional) programmes to meet this need.

* Regional and sectoral cooperation is limited, which, in turn, hampers the efficiency and effectiveness of HRD programmes.

* Much of the training systems and expertise offered are imported form outside the countries of the region; they are also expensive and represent an inherent cultural constraint.

* There is no coordinating mechanism that allows imported expertise to be shard or retained and updated for use throughout the region.

It is the objective of this note to emphasize that an independent regional human resources initiative is needed so as to contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of training and skills development on an international and regional basis, so that:

* the quality and delivery of pre-career education is enhanced resulting in career skills that are more portable and durable, reducing the intensity and frequency and support a concept of life-long learning.

* Human resources development and training programmes are centered on a model designed to facilitate and support a concept of life-long learning.

* The quality and efficiency of continuing education and training mechanisms are enhanced through sourcing expertise, training for trainers and access to quality methodologies and facilities to plan and deliver training.

* The quality, effectiveness and suitability of education and training are enhanced by the planned development of learning resources and training systems which the language and cultural requirements of the countries of Western Asia region.

* Communication among systems of management and entrepreneurship will enhance the development of new business and strengthen existing business throughout the region.

Concept:

The objective of a Human Resources Development initiative are suggested to:

- Support and coordinate access to indigenous expertise through the development of a sourcing system for sharing and supplying expertise across the West Asian region to meet specific development and training needs.

- Increase the effectiveness of specialized short-term and seminar-based industry and institutional training through the provision of planning, resource development and facilities including communications technology that support distance education (i.e. video, tele-conferencing, computer conferencing and satellite distribution).

- Increase the effectiveness of existing expertise and institutions by developing and convening training for trainers programmes that employ state-of-the-art methods, technology and systems for training.

- Increase the effectiveness of the existing systems of training and human resources development by providing high quality consultative services and by developing and modelling.