

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/PPTCD/2009/1
25 April 2009
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT**ON THE SECOND MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL COOPERATION
KNOWLEDGE-SHARING NETWORK
BEIRUT, 16-18 FEBRUARY 2009****Summary**

A meeting for members of the Technical Cooperation Knowledge-sharing Network (TC Network) was organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) at the United Nations House in Beirut from 16 to 18 February 2009. A number of communications officials and experts concerned with technical cooperation programmes in ESCWA member countries participated in the meeting.

The purpose of the meeting was to follow up on the implementation of recommendations made at the preparatory meeting held in Cairo on 28-30 October 2007, and to enhance coordination and cooperation among TC Network members. During the meeting, TC Network website was launched. It is expected to facilitate communication between members, thereby making it easier to take tangible and serious steps to implement technical cooperation activities and programmes. The meeting dealt with the advisory services offered by regional advisors, the activities undertaken by ESCWA in the framework of its programme of work for the biennium 2008-2009 and the main priorities and programmes proposed for the biennium 2010-2011.

In parallel with the meeting, ESCWA organized a workshop for TC Network members on the preparation of programmes and projects for sustainable development. The workshop aimed to enhance capabilities in preparing programmes and projects for sustainable development, identifying country priorities and needs with regard to planning for sustainable development and promoting the streamlining of sustainable development in project and programme planning.

Division Chiefs gave visual presentations on ESCWA priorities and programme of work, while ESCWA regional advisors made presentations on their work. The working groups, made up of participants, which discussed the aims of TC Network and its annual action plan, presented the conclusions of their discussions.

This report contains a review of the key discussions that occurred at the meeting and the recommendations that were reached.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized the second meeting of the Technical Cooperation Knowledge-sharing Network (TC Network) about 15 months after the convening of the first preparatory meeting in Cairo at which the establishment of TC Network was announced. At that earlier meeting, a number of objectives had been identified, most importantly building an effective partnership between ESCWA and member countries in order to strengthen coordination, communication and the exchange of knowledge. The aim was to enhance the benefit of the technical cooperation activities offered by ESCWA, especially advisory services and training and capacity-building programmes, and to design and implement practical projects that could meet the needs and priorities of member countries.
2. The TC Network is a platform for achieving the following goals:
 - (a) Enhancing dialogue and fostering the exchange of knowledge and expertise between ESCWA and member country focal points, on the one hand, and between member countries, on the other;
 - (b) Improving communication between the secretariat and member countries and facilitating understanding about the requirements of countries in areas related to technical cooperation.
3. In order to identify and meet the needs of member countries, in coordination with ESCWA, TC Network largely relies on the focal points appointed by the countries, who play an important role in identifying these needs.
4. The meeting focused on the implementation of the recommendations of the first meeting and on devising a strategy and programme for promoting and developing the work of the TC Network.
5. In parallel with the meeting, a workshop was held for TC Network members on the preparation of programmes and projects for sustainable development, including the methodologies used in designing programmes and aligning them with their Government directions and priorities and preparing annual action plans for the TC Network. This workshop is part of a series of capacity-building courses that will be organized for TC Network members on several aspects of technical cooperation, such as strategic planning, preparing programmes and projects for sustainable development and complying with international agreements.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

6. At the conclusion of the presentations and discussions, participants issued a set of recommendations addressed to TC Network members and ESCWA member countries, and to the secretariat.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO TC NETWORK MEMBERS AND ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

7. Participants addressed the following recommendations to TC Network members and ESCWA member countries:
 - (a) Have the focal points prepare a report on practical steps taken and send it to ESCWA, which prepares in turn a comprehensive report on action taken by ESCWA and the focal points. The updated report would then be sent to the focal points one month before the convening of the TC Network annual meeting, for an effective review and comment by TC Network members;
 - (b) Help local government bodies to propose projects and apply for the different services provided by the regional advisors;

(c) Promote the TC Network Web portal and contribute to enriching its content with scientific and training materials on various technical cooperation topics;

(d) Strengthen cooperation and follow-up with national bodies and ESCWA with a view to promoting and implementing the technical cooperation programmes, including advisory services, training and projects provided by ESCWA;

(e) Identify national needs and priorities with regard to technical cooperation and capacity-building;

(f) Support the activities of ESCWA by contributing to the development of a database of national, regional and international experts, so that ESCWA can take advantage of their expertise in implementing its programmes;

(g) Exchange expertise and successful experiences between member countries by means of TC Network;

(h) Apprise ministries and relevant bodies of the mission of TC Network and the names of the focal points, and send out official letters to this effect;

(i) Organize national workshops aimed at promoting the concept and extent of technical cooperation and the possibilities for strengthening partnership between ESCWA and donor parties.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARIAT

8. Participants addressed the following recommendations to the secretariat:

(a) Send ESCWA member countries a letter that would serve as an official endorsement of the designation of TC Network focal points;

(b) Notify focal points directly and on a regular basis of projects that have been agreed upon;

(c) Train focal points on the use of the TC Network Web portal within a period not to exceed three months and in updating its content and data on a regular basis;

(d) Improve communication between ESCWA and member countries through the focal points;

(e) Organize regular visits by the focal points to the Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Division (PPTCD) at ESCWA for briefings on the latest developments in order to improve the knowledge of TC Network members in this area;

(f) Increase the number of regional advisors working on ESCWA Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation whose specializations have priority for member countries, and increase the practice of contracting with advisors for short periods.

II. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

9. Presentations were made by ESCWA Division Chiefs and regional advisors on the action taken by ESCWA and TC Network members pursuant to the recommendations of the preparatory meeting. Participants discussed these presentations and made observations and proposals that were subsequently taken up in the drafting of the recommendations.

10. Following is a summary of the discussions:

A. ACTION TAKEN BY ESCWA AND TC NETWORK MEMBERS PURSUANT TO
THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PREPARATORY MEETING

1. *Action taken by ESCWA*

- (a) Action towards completing and launching the TC Network Web portal in parallel with the convening of the second meeting of the Network (<http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/pptcd/TCNetwork>);
- (b) Issuance of a booklet about proposed projects to be presented to donor agencies and implement a number of them in member countries;
- (c) Promotion of advisory services for member countries and final contracting with regional advisors in such areas as social development, information technology, gender issues, water resources and environment, and statistics for national accounts;
- (d) Preparation of a booklet containing curricula vitae of the regional advisors.

2. *Action taken by TC Network members*

- (a) Receipt of requests, coordination and follow-up between ESCWA and the parties concerned;
- (b) Organization of national workshops to educate people about ESCWA and the technical cooperation programme and disseminate booklets, publications and studies published by ESCWA;
- (c) Contribution to the development of a database of national, regional and international experts;
- (d) Sharing of successful experiences between ESCWA member countries through TC Network;
- (e) Allocating the resources needed to maintain communications between the parties concerned;
- (f) Development of the work of TC Network at the national level.

B. LAUNCHING THE TC NETWORK WEB PORTAL

11. In the course of the meeting, the TC Network Web portal, which had been set up according to procedures specified during the preparatory meeting, was launched. The secretariat presented the Web portal by navigating its various pages and explaining their contents. The secretariat stated that it would take on the task of updating the portal contents for the time being, and that the focal points would be granted suitable privileges, after receiving the necessary training, to make the amendments they deem appropriate. Registering on the site requires filling out a form on the registration page. The Web portal will be improved and updated according to the recommendations of TC Network members.

C. PRESENTATIONS

12. Mr. Alope Kar, Regional Advisor on National Accounts and Economic Statistics, made a presentation about member country needs in the area of economic statistics and the role of ESCWA in this regard, stressing the need to rely on the National Statistics Offices (NSOs) as key partners for formulating strategies.

13. Ms. Huda Rizq, Regional Advisor on Gender, spoke about mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies, programmes and plans, and integrating gender concepts in development with a view to reducing poverty rates and raising production rates. Ms. Rizq stressed the need to provide a statistical database in order to bring about policy changes.

14. Mr. Saleem Zoughbi, Regional Advisor on Information and Communications Technology, outlined the main challenges facing member countries in that regard, foremost among them the slow response to advances in communication technology, the paucity of specialized training and the lack of confidence in technology.

15. Mr. Zoughbi stressed the need to carry out advance planning for collaboration with Government agencies and to share knowledge in order to expand and interlink information. He put forward a vision of future action plans that would include enhancing the knowledge of potential partners in that regard, forming a temporary committee for information exchange, and organizing workshops offering intensive professional training, tailored to the needs of member countries.

16. Mr. Salaheddin Abosedra, Regional Advisor on Macroeconomic Policies, raised the subject of the global financial crisis and its impact on exports, financial transfers, migrant workers remittances, aid and tourism in ESCWA member countries. He also put forward proposals on the ways to reduce the negative impact of the current financial crisis by increasing Government expenditure on infrastructure, examining the banking sector in order to reduce those elements that caused the crisis and relying on the oil sector to help in emerging from it.

17. Ms. Maha Yahia, Regional Advisor on Social Policy, spoke about the main challenges facing ESCWA member countries in a number of social areas stemming from the absence of a comprehensive social vision and the failure to link social and economic policies. These challenges include high illiteracy rates, low skills, the absence of an incentive system, the dearth of extra-curricular activities, poor communication between schools and families, disparities in access to health care, high unemployment rates, poor participation of women in economic activities, and social marginalization. Ms. Yahia stressed the need to formulate a unified vision of social development and to promote the role of civil society in implementation and oversight.

18. During the workshop, representatives of ESCWA Divisions made presentations about the various activities taking place under the programme of work for the biennium 2008-2009 and the activities under the proposed programme of work for the biennium 2010-2011 in the fields of sustainable development and productivity, social development, economic development and globalization, information and communications technology, statistics, gender issues and emerging and conflict-related issues.

19. The presentations stressed the determination of ESCWA to address emerging issues such as climate change and the impact of the economic crisis, and its intention to prepare studies on various topics relating to ESCWA member countries.

D. WORKSHOP ON THE PREPARATION OF PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

20. In parallel with the meeting, ESCWA organized a workshop on the preparation of programmes and projects for sustainable development meant for TC Network members and communications officials involved with technical cooperation programmes in ESCWA member countries. This topic was chosen at the request of most TC Network members.

21. Following are the main results of the workshop:

(a) Informing participants of the latest trends in public administration and their link with the strategic planning process and with programme and project design;

(b) Highlighting the importance of linking programmes and projects to the national vision and priorities;

(c) Explaining techniques for designing and drafting programmes and projects through the use of the logical framework and methodologies adopted in a number of ESCWA member countries;

(d) Highlighting the importance of effective networking in the field of technical cooperation for knowledge-exchange, and identifying the mechanisms that could be used in that regard;

(e) Identifying the major difficulties and obstacles facing technical cooperation, and devising ways of overcoming them, by preparing an annual action plan.

22. The tasks entrusted to TC Network members were identified as mentioned in paragraph 7(a) under Chapter I, which contains the recommendations.

23. The workshop was led by Mr. John Dib Al-Hajj, ESCWA expert. Mr. Al-Hajj used interactive training techniques, drawing on the expertise, experience and expectations of participants. Participants were given training materials for programme and project design and were advised of the references available in that regard.

E. EVALUATION OF THE MEETING

24. The meeting was evaluated based on the information appearing in this report and on the results of the feedback forms distributed by ESCWA to participants following the meeting. The forms, which included questions on various organizational and technical aspects of the meeting, were returned to ESCWA by 23 out of the 29 participants.

25. Participants indicated their positive view of the meeting and its agenda items. 96.6 per cent of them said they had benefited from the information acquired during the meeting and started to apply it in their home institutions; 70 per cent agreed that the proposed items on the meeting agenda were relevant to their work and experience and gave them an opportunity to exchange expertise and information and make useful professional contacts; more than 50 per cent commended the clarity of the presentations and the high quality of the documents distributed to attendees.

26. Participants made a number of observations about follow-up activities. There was agreement about the need to inform them on developments resulting from the implementation of the meeting recommendations, to organize technical cooperation training courses in order to polish the skills of TC Network members in that area and train those members on the use and promotion of the website. A number of participants pointed to the need to hold regular meetings of the focal points for the purpose of follow-up and exchange of expertise.

27. As regards the proposals put forward by ESCWA for the meeting, there was consensus on the need to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations made at the meeting. Some also stressed the need to forward the proposed programme of work for the biennium 2010-2011 to the relevant parties in ESCWA member countries.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

28. The second meeting of TC Knowledge-sharing Network was held at United Nations House in Beirut, from 16 to 18 February 2009.

B. OPENING OF THE MEETING

29. Mr. Mohamed Jamil Abdulrazzak, Chief of the Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Division at ESCWA, made the opening statement, welcoming the participants and conveying to them the greetings of Mr. Badr Omar AlDafa, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA. Mr. Abdulrazzak announced the establishment of TC Network, pointing out that its purpose was to build an effective partnership between ESCWA and member countries in order to strengthen coordination, communication and knowledge-sharing and to take optimum advantage of the technical cooperation services provided by ESCWA, including advisory services, training programmes, and the drafting and implementation of practical projects meeting the needs and priorities of member countries. He added that the translation of the recommendations of the preparatory meeting into action was the shared responsibility of ESCWA and TC Network members.

C. PARTICIPANTS

30. Representatives of ESCWA member countries participated in the meeting. ESCWA Regional advisors, reference experts and officers responsible for the ESCWA Programme of Technical Cooperation also attended the meeting. The list of participants is included in annex I of this report.

D. AGENDA

31. Following are the items included in the meeting agenda:

1. Opening.
2. Review of the implementation of the recommendations adopted at the first meeting of TC Network.
3. Launch of the TC Network Web portal.
4. Presentations by ESCWA regional advisors on the advisory services provided by ESCWA to member countries.
5. Workshop on the preparation of programmes and projects for sustainable development (Part 1), including:
 - (a) Introduction to strategic planning and programming;
 - (b) Methodologies for programme and project design.
6. Encounters with various ESCWA Divisions, including:
 - (a) Presentations made by representatives of ESCWA Divisions on current activities in the biennium 2008-2009 and those proposed for the biennium 2010-2011;
 - (b) Conclusion of presentations on the activities of ESCWA.
7. Workshop on the preparation of programmes and projects for sustainable development (Part 2), including:
 - (a) The concept and mechanisms of technical cooperation, most importantly networking;
 - (b) Enhancing and promoting technical cooperation services in ESCWA member countries.
8. Formulating a programme of work for technical cooperation at the national level, including:
 - (a) Formation of working groups to identify technical cooperation priorities at the national level;
 - (b) Review and discussion of the proposals presented by the working groups;
 - (c) Formulating a TC Network annual action plan for 2009.
9. Conclusions of the working groups.
10. Recommendations.

E. DOCUMENTS

32. The list of documents presented at the meeting is included in annex II of this report.

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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Title	Symbol
Statement from ESCWA (Arabic only)	No symbol
Provisional agenda	No symbol
Information note	No symbol
Names of focal points	No symbol
Report of the preparatory meeting on “Establishing a Technical Cooperation Network for the Exchange of Knowledge”, Cairo, 28-30 October 2007 (Arabic only)	E/ESCWA/PPTCD/2007/WG.1/3
Report of the Executive Secretary on the activities of the Commission: The technical cooperation programme and regional advisory services: Technical cooperation strategy	E/ESCWA/23/5(Part III)/Add.1
Report on the twenty-fifth session, 26-29 May 2008	E/ESCWA/25/10/Rev.1
Report on the action taken since the first meeting of the Technical Cooperation Network for the Exchange of Knowledge	No symbol
ESCWA Technical Cooperation Report 2006	E/ESCWA/PPTCD/2007/Technical Material.1
Network launch papers	No symbol
Proposed Guide to Technical Cooperation	No symbol
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