Expert Group Meeting on Measuring Multi Dimensional Poverty in the Arab Region
Beirut, 7-8 August 2014

Information Note

1. Background

It is widely recognized that poverty is not just about household income or (the lack of) consumption of market goods and that other dimensions of welfare should be considered in any measure of poverty. Poverty and deprivations are clearly multi-dimensional. However, there is currently no consensus on how best to measure multi-dimensional poverty, which non-market goods and services to include in such a measure, how to weight the various dimensions of welfare when an overall index is used, and whether the various dimensions of poverty and/or deprivation should be collapsed into a single, multi-dimensional index. Recently, there were several efforts to capture and examine multi-dimensional poverty through aggregated uni-dimensional indexes, some of which include both monetary and non-monetary aspects. Such efforts consider poor people as not only deprived of income or resources but also of other basic needs such as health, education and housing. The set of basic needs is usually converted into a composite poverty index used for poverty monitoring purposes. One example is the United Nations’ Human Development Index (HDI) launched in 1990 which combines three dimensions of human development: health, education and living standard into one index. While the HDI focuses on human development, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) launched in 2010 by UNDP and Oxford Human Development Initiative focuses on estimating multi-dimensional poverty using micro data from household surveys from countries around the globe. However, the MPI has been criticized as inadequate to capture the extent of poverty in the Arab region. For example, the MPI shows fairly similar (and very low) rates of poverty in the UAE and Palestine.

A technical meeting on Multidimensional Poverty in the Arab Region was held by ESCWA in January 2014. The experts were diverse coming from the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative; League of Arab States; Cairo University; Qatar Foundation; UNICEF Office of Research and ESCWA. They agreed that the methodology to calculate MPI should follow a global standard with an eye on the specificities of the region/sub-region. Suggestions included adding dimensions and relevant indicators to those found in the MPI. There was a consensus for the need to rethink the measurement of multi-dimensional poverty by taking into account the diversity of the Arab region and also different age-group of population. Further to this meeting, ESCWA is preparing a methodological paper on multidimensional poverty. The latter will be presented in this planned meeting for review and feedback. The final paper will be used as a background paper for the forthcoming Arab poverty report to be released in 2016.

2. Objectives

The meeting is aimed at reviewing the methodology presented in the paper developed by ESCWA on multidimensional poverty. By doing so, it will also:

- Discuss some existing methodologies for measuring multi dimensional poverty, including MPI;
- Discuss data comparability issues and access to micro data;
- Provide a forum for the exchange of experiences in measuring multi-dimensional poverty in the region and beyond.
3. Topics

Within the broader scope of the multi dimensional poverty, this meeting in addition to reviewing the methodology paper on MPI, will examine a selection of specific topics. Potential topics for discussion in the meeting include,

- Methodological issues in measuring multi-dimensional poverty;
- Links between multi-dimensional poverty and income poverty.
- Availability and quality of recent micro data sets suitable for measuring multi-dimensional poverty. Appropriate unit of analysis
- Adjustment of poverty threshold by household size and composition among other dimensions
- Relevance of conventional indicators to capture multi-dimensional poverty in middle and high income countries.

4. Outcomes

The meeting is expected to serve as a forum of discussion for methodological issues in poverty measurement with a special focus on the methodology paper on MPI prepared by ESCWA. The comments of the experts are expected to strengthen the paper which will feed into the ESCWA Arab Poverty Report planned to be released in 2016.

5. Participation and Registration

Participants in the meeting will include experts from international and regional organizations, government institutions, and academia.

6. Organization, venue and dates

The meeting is jointly organized by the Statistics division and the Economic Development and Globalization Division at ESCWA. It will be held during 7-8 August 2014 at the United Nations headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon.

7. Working language

Arabic and English are the working languages of the Meeting. Simultaneous interpretation between both languages will be provided.