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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

**EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON ADOPTING THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS
APPROACH FOR PROMOTING RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE ESCWA REGION
BEIRUT, 21-22 DECEMBER 2009**

Summary

The Expert Group Meeting on Adopting the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach for Promoting Rural Development in the ESCWA Region was held at the United Nations House in Beirut from 21 to 22 December 2009. The main objective of the meeting was to provide participants with an opportunity to discuss livelihood approaches to rural development, their comparative advantages relative to other approaches as well as obstacles to their adoption and implementation by relevant institutions. The meeting also served as a forum for exchanging experiences on viable options for promoting the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) and to propose action-oriented recommendations in support of adopting this approach for sustainable rural development in the region.

The meeting was attended by 32 national, regional and international experts, 15 of whom were women. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) prepared and presented one major manuscript on SLA in the ESCWA Region along with eight substantive presentations all complemented by papers and presentations from attending experts. The discussions touched upon several issues, among which were the need to share information and document experiences, the real need for SLA as a development approach and the ability of ESCWA member countries to adapt their practices, policies and processes to embrace SLA as a holistic approach to development.

The experts came up with a set of conclusions to member countries. Recommendations addressed to ESCWA, in order to build capacities in the region, stressed on the need to focus on capacity-building, come up with a training programme proposed by ESCWA and produce a guide on SLA to educate stakeholders in the region.

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Introduction

1. The concept and framework of the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) adopted by the Department for International Development (DFID) in the late 1990s is a way of thinking about the objectives, scope and priorities for development. It places people and their priorities at the centre of development. It focuses poverty reduction interventions on empowering the poor to build on their own opportunities, supporting their access to assets, and developing an enabling policy and institutional environment. Livelihood thinking can make a valuable contribution to help meet the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - particularly MDG 1 (Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger) and MDG 7 (Ensure environmental sustainability) - as well as the developmental and environmental objectives of Agenda 21.
2. The origins of livelihoods approaches are linked to the evolution of the natural resources management (NRM) thinking. Together with more participatory approaches in NRM, livelihoods approaches have changed the emphasis from focusing primarily on natural resource productivity to placing people at the centre of development. In the past, development initiatives in NRM focused on building natural capital. Livelihoods approaches highlight the importance of understanding how natural resources combine with other such assets as financial, physical, social and human capital to sustain and improve the livelihoods of poor people. Such approaches also address resource governance issues through advocating the need to understand natural resource use in the context of the complex policies, institutions and processes affecting the lives of poor people.
3. In support of sustainable rural development in the region, the Productive Sectors Section (PSS) under the Sustainable Development and Productivity Division (SDPD) at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) promoted SLA approaches through an Expert Group Meeting on Adopting the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach for Promoting Rural Development in the ESCWA Region. The meeting assembled experts from within and outside the region to provide participants with an opportunity to discuss livelihoods approaches to rural development, their comparative advantages relative to other approaches as well as obstacles to their adoption and implementation by relevant institutions.

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. CONCLUSIONS

4. The 32 experts from ESCWA member countries, regional and international institutions and organizations reached a number of conclusions which can be grouped under the following five major headings.
5. Building assets in ESCWA member countries:
 - (a) Human asset development should be approached through technical, vocational and organizational capacity-building provided to individuals, producer groups, and civil society institutions;
 - (b) Social assets should be built through the facilitation of formal and informal network formation. Social capital in the ESCWA countries often takes the form of belonging to tribes or extended families;
 - (c) Financial assets should be enhanced for the poorer sections of the community through income generation activities as well as access to official development assistance, microfinance and other credit schemes, which are expected to expand existing livelihoods strategies, and help diversify household income sources and increase household income levels;
 - (d) Physical assets should be developed through infrastructural support related to sanitation, water supply, roads, communication, shelter and storage facilities, and the provision of farming tools and other equipment that are suitable to the local environment;

(e) Natural assets, mainly water and fertile land, are increasingly limited in ESCWA member countries and are further threatened by inappropriate and unsustainable agricultural systems. In order to render existing livelihoods strategies more sustainable, natural resource recovery measures should be coupled with training in improved agricultural practices. Promoting improved farming, land use and irrigation practices, providing access to and the reclamation of land for agricultural production, and encouraging sustainable land management practices are examples for building land and water assets.

6. Democratic governance in ESCWA member countries:

(a) Pursue a Government decentralization process and implement it properly to speed up Government response to local needs, decrease corruption, increase accountability and transparency, improve delivery of basic services and motivate local stakeholders by increasing their opportunities for political representation;

(b) Enhance information flows when data and information are shared by public sector bodies and public capacity to analyse and demand change is improved. For example, information about Government service delivery and expenditure enables citizens to generate pressure for public reform and promotes a more accountable and effective public sector;

(c) Enhance community representation and build the service provision capacity, the responsiveness of the local Government to local priorities and the capacity for participatory, multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches at the local Government level;

(d) Achieve reform through the effective mobilization of organized civil societies who can pressurize the public sector in favour of change. Such grass roots coalitions as community development councils ensure that successful development is achieved for the poor and by the poor. As such, participation of the community which is the primary stakeholder not only generates local ownership but also ensures that proposed changes effectively address the priorities of the most vulnerable.

7. Community empowerment in ESCWA member countries:

(a) Develop strong and constant local community leadership and improve the development of local capacity to deliver the changes predicted by policy and legislative amendments. Local leadership is crucial since it provides vision, can lead to change and manage opposition. Such leadership qualities can be found in special task forces, coordinating committees and steering groups that must be empowered to play an effective role;

(b) Empower and build the capacities of vulnerable socio-economic groups within the community, including the poorest and other marginalized and disadvantaged groups, to enable them to initiate and be proactive in development planning and decision-making;

(c) Develop traditional livelihood strategies (for example embroidery, household poultry raising, sheep rearing, tailoring, and fruit and vegetable production) to economically empower women. This will improve the position of women within the household, and give them access to, and shared control of, household income. In addition, rural women will have a remarkable role as community mobilizers, especially among the young. Achieving economic empowerment of women usually translates into personal and political empowerment, which exhibits itself in a higher degree of influence over decisions that affect their lives.

8. Participatory approaches in ESCWA member countries:

(a) Encourage participation of the poor themselves in research and policymaking to help in the identification of priority issues and the elaboration of measures for addressing these priorities. When the

right issues are addressed, chances of developing legitimate strategies, policies and programmes to address them are much higher, and so is the level of stakeholder ownership and support;

(b) Adopt a participatory approach through allowing the voices of small-scale farmers to be heard in policy debates, bringing together the local Government and community-based organizations during problem identification and various project phases, including design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation/diagnosis;

(c) Create community development associations taking into account traditional power structures by including local tribe leaders, while at the same time ensuring the participation of the poorest, marginalized community groups and women. These associations should be supported through appropriate training. In addition, the local Government should be trained in participatory and gender responsive methodologies to enable them to carry out participatory assessments and gender action planning in rural areas.

9. Partnerships and macro-micro linkages for ESCWA member countries:

(a) Ensure that policies, institutions and processes operating at various levels (global, national, regional and local) are informed by, and directly linked to, the complex reality of the lives of poor people;

(b) Establish strong cross-sectoral partnerships to ensure widespread participation and geographical coverage in the adoption of project strategies that are self-help-based and demand-driven and thus build macro-micro linkages. This will contribute to longer-term sustainability of project achievements. For example, a national farmers platform can be established to which local farmer associations are linked, so as to facilitate the representation of local needs at the national level and help communicate a wide-ranging set of views and interests. Communication channels from the grassroots to the centre are established to enable policymakers to stay informed of and influenced by local realities. As another example, the capacity of Government extension staff is built and their way of working with rural communities is transformed through training in participatory approaches.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

10. The meeting came up with three major action-oriented recommendations to build the capacities of the ESCWA region:

(a) *Organize follow-up meetings on SLA*: Given the impetus SLA has gained, ESCWA will address the issue of SLA in its future work programmes by organizing follow-up meetings to maintain ongoing communication flow, to validate SLA guidelines and to focus on practical aspects. The meetings will constitute an opportunity to work through real SLA case study examples, share success stories and build on lessons learned and initiatives that are found appropriate for the region. The follow-up meetings might include smaller group discussions for information sharing on finance mechanisms as well as access to official development assistance (how to microfinance and sustain projects), better understand legal issues related to cooperatives, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), constitutions, subsidies, legal dispute resolutions, norms and technical barriers to trade (TBT), geographical indications and the practical applicability of such concepts as “terroir” and the “appellation d’origine contrôlée(AOC)” to the ESCWA context, market access and linking local and regional markets to international markets, as well as the application of the Arab sustainable development indicators for needs assessment, analysis, monitoring and evaluation and legal issues;

(b) *Produce a guide on SLA that is specific for the region*: The guide should be informative and adapted to the particular needs identified during the meeting, with the aim of ensuring the practical application of SLAs for promoting rural development in the ESCWA region. It will cover, inter-alia, how - to microfinance rural projects as well as currently available schemes, link local and regional markets to

international markets, set specific indicators, match with legal strategies and international agreements, and finally sketch the way forward and propose recommendations for the ESCWA region;

(c) *Promote a training programme for stakeholders*: The training will be based on the aforementioned guide to push the SLA message into the field and operationally facilitate the implementation of SLA. The content will be designed to particularly develop, among others, the “how-to” finance and sustain SLA projects, set specific and well-defined indicators for needs assessment, analysis, monitoring and evaluation, facilitate access to regional and international markets, understand and abide by related international agreements and legal issues, and identify possible entry points in the development programme in the ESCWA region, among others.

II. MAIN TOPICS OF PAPERS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

11. Session 1 provided a regional perspective on SLAs and discussed the issues of framework, lessons learned from various experiences in the region, best practices, challenges and constraints, and some policy recommendations.

12. A presentation by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) introduced two key concepts on SLA. The first explained that SLA places people at the heart of development in comparison to the second that places people within a vulnerability context. Therefore, livelihood is represented within an asset pentagon. A case study on the Arsaal paradox was presented to illustrate the validity of SLA.

13. The UNDP paper updated participants on SLA to rural development. It started with an introduction on SLA and the associated conceptual framework for analysis drawing on the training material developed by the DFID. It then explored the linkages of livelihoods approaches to other development ideologies; the analysis was followed by a section on lessons learned from practice and implications for a policy supportive of SLA.

14. The first substantive ESCWA presentation explained the international and regional experience with the implementation of SLA. In addition, it introduced a new concept on adopting SLA in an urban context.

15. An ESCWA paper on SLA in the ESCWA Region, produced by PSS, exposed the history of SLA, its implementation, globally and in the region, facing power relations that can influence the distribution of resources and thus affect livelihood opportunities, challenges faced ranging from politics over bureaucracy to finance, how these can be overcome through lessons learned and thus benefiting from the experience gained, and finally, capacity-building and potential recommendations were proposed for the ESCWA region.

16. In the ensuing discussions, inquiries were raised around the issue of asset ownership and access, which led to an inquiry about who (Government, public sector, private sector or donors) is the provider, when to intervene, what is the cost for such approach and intervention and whether SLA asset accumulation is a strategy for poverty alleviation or viewed as a strategy for local economy growth. The discussions evolved and interference was made about who pays for those programmes, if they are loans or grants and how they are sustained in the long run. An intervention was directed towards the UNDP case study and came as a remark concerning the activity implemented to enhance the livelihood of a community and at the same time cause damage to another group in the same community. Here, equilibrium between the two groups was suggested as a solution. One comment stressed on the need for practical strategies for both genders and censured that the SLA does not guarantee women empowerment as an outcome. Responses to those interventions suggested that one should keep the difference between the framework as a concept and operational implementation of SLA: When implementing, there is a lack of coordination between stakeholders and donors and inadequate training for the poor. The cost of the approach is similar to that of conventional projects and could be even more cost-effective if properly implemented. As for the gender

issue, it is very much present but is lagging behind in practice. Another remark was made about the failure of Governments in replicating projects initiated by United Nations programmes due to lack of capacity.

17. A second ESCWA presentation dilated upon the urgency of developing indicators to monitor status, gaps, trends of rural development and agriculture household income, and their importance to the region, in addition to the method of data collection which should be enhanced through census questions, surveys, administrative records and others.

18. The third substantive ESCWA presentation pointed out the challenges facing SLA, how to overcome those constraints and the best practices used in the implementation of SLA.

19. Part Two of Session 1 ended by a discussion gyrating around the weakness of data collection, especially agricultural rural statistics, in some member countries. A recommendation was made to entail the improvement of data collection, define uncorrelated parameters and indices, and identify the need for specific targets defining how things are being done. It was also stressed that SLA is an analytical approach used to understand concerns, applicable at all levels and links to other approaches.

B. POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES IN SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS IMPLEMENTATION

20. The American University of Beirut (AUB) presentation shared the bitter (increase costs of development activities, no assurance of sustainability and under-emphasis of power relations) and sweet (highlighting diversification as a livelihood strategy) experiences of SLA implementation in the dry lands of the Middle East and North Africa.

21. A presentation by the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA) discussed the experiences of the Centre in improving the livelihoods of the resource poor in dry areas and promoting policies for alternative livelihood programmes. Main points discussed revolved around an example of how to analytically operationalize sustainable livelihood frameworks, findings of livelihood studies and major constraints, policies and programmes and the efforts of ICARDA to expand more systematic learning of programme impacts and ways of out-scaling.

22. The discussions engaged in the issue of power relations, in particular who needs to be accorded more attention, and how to avoid the usage of the framework as a blueprint. Instead, critical thinking should be maintained and sound entry points should be kept at all levels. The key is to apply decentralization to bring people into the equation and ensure participation of the poor.

23. Another ESCWA presentation introduced the ESCWA pilot project in the village of Kaawa in Yemen. The project aimed at improving rural livelihood by the introduction of solar photovoltaic (PV) electrification in order to improve the quality of life, the health of the locals and the reduction of electricity bills.

24. The presentation of an ESCWA study by the Lebanese American University (LAU), entitled Biofuels: Challenges and Opportunities for Promoting Sustainable Livelihoods in the Arab Region, discussed the use of second-generation biofuels from agricultural waste, various sources of biological waste products, conversion technologies, applications and three case studies, namely: olive press waste, sugar industry by-products and dairy industry by-products.

25. Most of the audience agreed that rural development is lagging behind and cannot be left to the market alone. A recommendation was given to facilitate non-farm income and employment opportunities since the strategy is being adopted in the Syrian Arab Republic and has proved to be successful. As for biofuels, they face constraints due to lack of equipment, which prevents capacity-building, as well as subsidized electricity costs, which are a barrier to investments in this technology.

C. PRIVATE SECTOR APPROACHES

26. The Chamber of Commerce of Zahle and Bekaa in Lebanon presented the Cooperative Coteaux Heliopolis: A Successful Story of Development. This presentation focused on the coordination between cooperatives that stood together and were subject to the ups and downs of the market. Their cooperative showed positive outcomes ranging from increase in the income of farmers through the cultivation of high quality grapes for wine production to replace illegal crops, prevention of desertification and conservation of natural resources, especially water, through the cultivation of non-irrigated crops.
27. A presentation by Arc en Ciel, a non-profit NGO, spotlighted a complete economic value chain for local markets through the implementation of the Wataneh programme.
28. Another presentation by the cooperative of Deir Kanoun highlighted its role in women empowerment, offering means of work for rural women while the men are gone to the cities to look for jobs. Deir Kanoun was helped in large measure by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) NGO and to some extent by the Council of South Lebanon.
29. Participants stressed on differentiating between NGOs and cooperatives. Wataneh was identified as a civil society that helps Arc en Ciel through recycling all profits back into it. Furthermore, finance is not a problem for Wataneh as long as it possesses and maintains a clear objective and transparency.
30. A presentation by Jihad al Binaa introduced the Ardee Programme, a yearly exhibition, and emphasized on access to the market.
31. The Jordan Enterprise Development Corporation (JEDCO), a public organization, presented the strategies used to access international markets in order to help small farmers.
32. During the last discussion of Session 3, it was noted that the time delay between producers and consumers was considered an issue. Commercial disputes are different than rural or agricultural-related conflicts. Therefore, the need for an arbitrage mechanism and a fast decision time was deemed compulsory. Finally, it was underscored that problems faced are of economic and management nature rather than technical and that there are great possibilities to export to Europe and once member countries follow the market niche, they will be able to diversify their exports.

D. SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD IN ESCWA COUNTRIES

33. Session 4 introduced the experiences of international and regional organizations.
34. A fifth ESCWA presentation portrayed a case study in Northern Iraq concerning the promotion of rural development through sustainable agricultural development projects. A potential for poverty alleviation exerted through enhancing human capacity, infrastructure and technology using SLA was observed.
35. One more substantive ESCWA presentation depicted lessons learned from pilot projects for implementing SLA in South Lebanon. Lessons learned were namely that: (i) successful SLA interventions require time, commitment and financial resources; (ii) human capital development is a central component, but must be pursued through hands-on, personalized learning opportunities and technical assistance; (iii) vulnerability can be overcome and resilience achieved through diversification of income sources, generating employment opportunities to reduce rural-to-urban migration patterns; (iv) natural resources need to be used in a more sustainable manner; and (v) appropriate and innovative technologies should be promoted.
36. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation in Yemen shared the existence of a specific law for local development and the unique experience with the Social Fund for Development, which brings

ministries of agriculture and social affairs to collaborate. In addition, it showed that the ways used to improve the rural livelihood are development planning, spending the local monetarily resources on rural development and the contribution of local and foreign development organizations.

37. The arising discussion demonstrated that tobacco in Lebanon and Qat in Yemen share the problem of resiliency and monoculture while Zaatar is sustainable and long-standing. Therefore, the ESCWA project in South Lebanon chose a commercial Zaatar production that would be sold in bulk to a wholeseller instead of cultivating tobacco. In addition, the importance of reservoirs in the South was acknowledged and the need for resources for capacity was expressed. As for the project in Northern Iraq, it was funded by the French Agency for Development. However, the project needs to focus on the directions of the implemented projects to enhance the area in question. It was noted that the rural people who grow Qat in Yemen are more financially developed than those who grow other crops. In addition, a revelation was shared around the national programme established for villages in order to assess their needs and responsibilities.

38. The presentation of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) demonstrated the use of SLA in rural development and recommended the way in which its principles should be applied to determine success instead of simply applying a wide number of principles. Sustainable livelihood principles are required to create sustainable impact and a necessity for Government and United Nations agencies to appropriate SLA.

39. An ESCWA presentation described knowledge networks through information and communications technology (ICT) access points in disadvantaged areas. It stressed on empowering poor and disadvantaged communities, women in particular, through transforming selected existing ICT access points into knowledge hubs of global knowledge networks, providing, developing, organizing, sharing and disseminating knowledge pertinent to these communities.

E. SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD: ESCWA COUNTRIES PERSPECTIVE

40. Session 5 was devoted to a review of experiences in applying SLA at the member country level. Experts from Egypt, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, the Sudan and Yemen presented papers.

41. The presentation of the Ministry of Local Development in Egypt gave an overview of its activities towards achieving the MDG on rural development. Approaches included the diversification of the rural income sources, the Ten Thousand Villages programme targeting geographical poverty, a national trial programme on rural development as well as limiting surplus and reducing loss of agricultural productivity.

42. The participants were interested in knowing that the development of the Sahara port in Upper Egypt is one of the biggest projects that will provide connection to the Red Sea and will thus give the opportunity to export crops. The project is funded by the Government on the basis of a long-term grant. Additionally, the ministry has set up training programmes and provides financial support and access to local and external markets to the rural poor of Upper Egypt.

43. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation of Jordan overviewed the components of a programme set to enhance the economic and social productivity of the Jordanian community. Those components are small-scale funding programmes, direct intervention programmes, an integrated and institutional capacity-building programme for local organizations and investments supporting infrastructure programmes.

44. The Ministry of Agriculture in Lebanon shared its strategic goals, which include the development of both public and private institutions; efficient irrigation techniques; good land use; adoption of effective techniques; activation of production chains and agriculture marketing and exports; promotion of local development; and adoption of a participative approach to rural development.

45. The Ministry of Agriculture of Oman presented its future vision to increase the financial revenue of the agricultural sector through: (i) enhancing irrigation systems; (ii) reviewing crop structure; (iii) developing agroproduction techniques; and (iv) increasing agriculture finance.

46. The Ministry of Agriculture of Palestine exhibited its targets, which are to: (i) set a strategy for gender equality in rural societies; (ii) enhance the living standard of rural Palestinian families; (iii) ameliorate and develop the capacity of the rural society, in particular the rural women; (iv) spread awareness on the importance of collective work and encourage the establishment of organizations for women in rural areas; (v) create work opportunities for rural women; and (vi) empower women in the agriculture sector and enable them to access training and guidance services.

47. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of the Sudan provided an overview of the rural development projects implemented by international and regional organizations and the challenges facing these projects. Constraints are the discontinuation of the project after the fund ends, weakness of the present funding mechanism in ensuring the needs of rural communities, binding laws to the freedom of land property and inadequacy of certain techniques for the targeted categories.

48. In its presentation, the State Planning Commission of the Syrian Arab Republic pointed out that the Syrian Government had set a plan for the period 2006-2010 which involved the creation of a balance between producer and consumer in order to achieve economic development, social justice and sustainable management of natural resources.

49. The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation of Yemen presented a pilot project adopting a participatory approach for improving the income of farmers, their living conditions and food security through enhanced livestock productivity and agricultural practices.

50. At this stage of the discussion, the Badia Rangelands Development Project in the Syrian Arab Republic was introduced to point out the importance of livestock and rangelands activities as a revenue for the rural population of the ESCWA region. Advice was given on the importance of a trademark for marketing the products. In addition, participants discussed the need to consider replication of successful projects, transfer of experiences in the region, introduction of such new technologies as solar energy for higher efficiency and bill reduction, the incorporation of such diversified practices as honey making, water harvesting, and silk production, and the need to find regionally specific indicators for sustainable development. In addition, it was agreed that the participation of varied ministries and NGOs in this meeting is a success factor.

F. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

51. Session 6 was dedicated to conclusions and capacity-building and policy recommendations.

52. The eighth and last substantive ESCWA presentation by the PSS assembled and summarized conclusions of presentations and papers and offered a preliminary capacity-building for the region.

53. The meeting was concluded by the agreement that SLA is not a new development approach but an attempt to put the pieces of the puzzle together. Therefore, coordination should be at all levels in order for development practitioners to adapt their practices, processes and institutions to be able to embrace the holistic SLA. It was suggested to initiate a degree programme at the masters level for the coming five years in order to provide capacity to Arab ministries. Another intervention discussed the empowerment of the poor providing them with access to resources and fertile lands; and collaboration with syndicates in order to train the poor by giving them courses and a license to be able to practice their agriculture activity. It was observed that no recommendations were given to ESCWA by member countries but rather a set of conclusions. Therefore, every country was requested to provide five to seven clear and concise recommendations to be included in the ESCWA programme for the biennium 2010-2011.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. ATTENDANCE

54. The meeting was attended by 32 experts from nine ESCWA member countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, the Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, and Yemen), two United Nations organizations (the Regional Office of the FAO for the Near East and UNDP), international and regional organizations (ICARDA and the World Bank), and various Lebanese institutions, organizations and individual experts (Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Zahle and Bekaa, AUB, LAU, Arc en Ciel, the Jihad al Binaa Development Association, the Safadi Foundation, Mawasem Aldaya'a, the Golden Fingers Association and Engineering Consultants) in addition to experts from ESCWA (refer to annex). Most participants had a background in livelihoods, drylands, agriculture and/or rural development.

B. OPENING

55. The meeting was held from 21 to 22 December 2009 at the United Nations House in Beirut and was formally opened by the former Minister of Agriculture of Lebanon, Mr. Adel Cortas, and the Chief of SDPD, Ms. Anhar Hegazi, representing the Executive Secretary of ESCWA. In her introductory remarks, Ms. Hegazi stressed on the need to assemble experiences of SLA application from the region, share lessons learned and successful stories, adopt the approach to meet the MDGs and propose action-oriented recommendations. In his opening statement, Mr. Cortas noted that SLA has three benefits, namely, it highlights the problems facing the rural communities in the region along with putting people at the centre of their environment; it is a grass root approach in decision-making; and, most importantly, it attracts policymakers towards food security and agricultural and rural development.

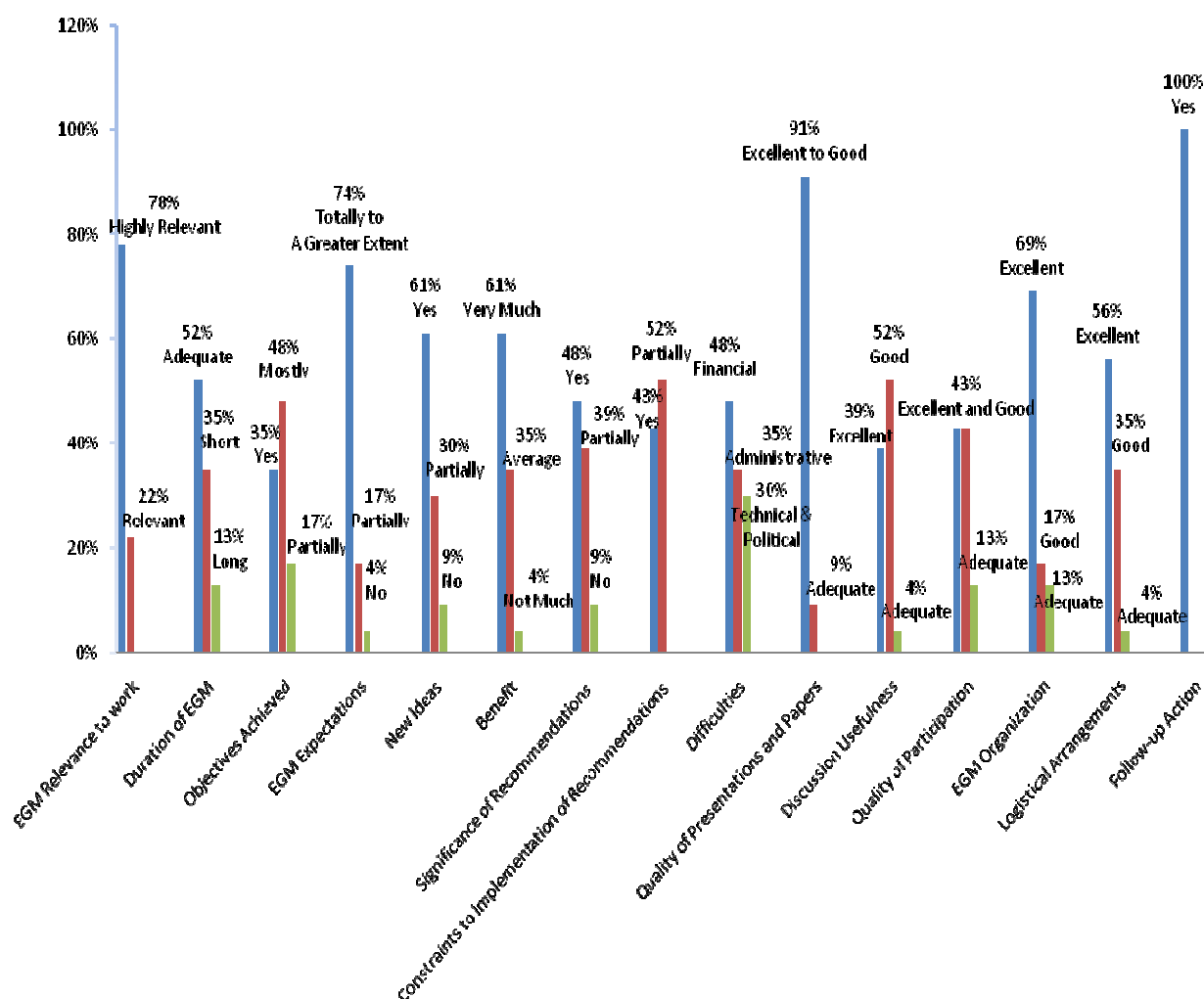
C. DOCUMENTS

56. The documents and presentations submitted during the meeting are available at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1125E>.

IV. MEETING EVALUATION

57. Twenty-three out of thirty-two participants responded to the evaluation questionnaire that was distributed in order to assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the meeting (see figure below). The feedback received was overall positive, as 78 per cent of the participants considered the topic of the meeting as highly relevant to their work, 91 per cent agreed that the quality of the presentations and papers was excellent to good, while 61 per cent appreciated that the meeting introduced new ideas from which they benefited. Forty-eight per cent of the representatives believed that mostly financial difficulties will be encountered during the application of the proposed capacity-building and action-oriented recommendations.

Response of participants



58. Participants shared their comments and requests revealing a unanimous desire for follow-up action, meetings, workshops and field work on SLA to maintain the exchange of experiences between member countries, NGOs and cooperatives of ESCWA; get more recommendations and monitor the progress of their application; and engage in further discussions. Some expressed their wishes regarding the collaboration of ESCWA, ICARDA and FAO to assist non-profit organizations where needed and implement capacity-building on impact assessment of SLA applications in the region. Others requested the empowerment of rural women and the initiation of cooperatives and a network that facilitates the exchange of SLA-related studies. Finally, some triggered the reconsideration of SLA to know at what level it is mostly needed and how it could and should be tailored to the region.

Annex*

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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