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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Expert Group Meeting on “Promoting Best Practices On Sustainable
Rural Livelihoods in the ESCWA Region”
Beirut, 24-25 November 2010

INFORMATION NOTE**A. INTRODUCTION**

The livelihood approach is a framework that helps to understand the status of people along the poverty line and as such allows the derivation of meaningful development strategies. Livelihood approaches are responsive and participatory and favor multidisciplinary and multilevel development interactions. They generate a deeper understanding of the wide range of livelihood strategies being pursued by people who are at the centre of a web of inter-related influences that affect how they obtain a livelihood. Thus, SLA is an important tool that can be used at various levels, both geographical and/or sectoral, for research, planning, monitoring and evaluation, and most importantly for policy and strategy development and implementation in support of rural development.

Despite its potential benefits SLA is not widely used or applied as development tool especially in the West Asia region. The reason is that there are quite a number of misconceptions and potential difficulties linked with SLA notably when trying to apply it for development purposes. Most of these stem from a lack of a comprehensive discussion on what should be exactly understood by SLA, what is its overall scope and that of its core elements, what are the core elements most relevant for our region and others. As such there is a need to improve our understanding and clarify regional perspectives on what should be the core SLA. From there, there would be a need to raise awareness and understanding on SLA and to foster dialogue on the ways that SLA should be understood and applied in the region. It should be emphasized that SLA has been well defined by several institutions (among which DFID). However, SLA is not supposed to be a rigid set of check boxes and as such flexibility is entirely allowed and acceptable due to the prevailing situation or context at regional and even local levels.

In December 2009, ESCWA organized an Expert Group Meeting on Adopting the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach for Promoting Rural Development in the ESCWA Region. The meeting, which was attended by 32 experts from various countries of the region, aimed to allow participants to better understand the importance of livelihood approaches to rural development, to assess its comparative advantage with regard to other approaches as well as to assess obstacles to its adoption and implementation. During the meeting, participants were able to exchange experiences on viable options for promoting SLA and to propose recommendations in support of adopting this approach for sustainable rural development in the region. Among the recommendations made was the need to maintain the communication flow, to validate SLA guidelines that focus on practical aspects and to produce an informative guide that would highlight practical applications of SLA to promote rural development in the ESCWA region.

Thus, in order to further knowledge sharing, ESCWA is organizing this Expert Group Meeting (EGM) entitled “Promoting Best Practices on Sustainable rural Livelihoods in the ESCWA Region,” from 24-25 November 2010 at the UN House, Beirut, Lebanon. The aim of the EGM will be to further the understanding

and clarification of a regional perspective on SLA and to discuss a guide that ESCWA is preparing in order to enrich it with the views of experts together with examples, case-studies and projects from the region. During the meeting, most of the debates should revolve around the modalities of how to use SLA for programme planning and implementation based on specific case-studies, examples or projects where SLA was applied willingly or not so as to highlight the difficulties involved with SLA and come up with a common and critical regional view and/or perspective on how to use SLA in development. The intention will be to tell a story of how SLA could be put into practice in the region based on differing views and different experiences.

B. OBJECTIVE OF THE MEETING

The objective of the Expert Group Meeting is to provide a forum to improve the regional understanding and clarification of the SLA concept and to discuss a guide on how best to use SLA for development purpose based on the views and experiences of attending experts and the case studies available.

C. MAJOR THEMES OF THE MEETING

The Expert Group Meeting will review and debate the issue of SLA in order to improve and clarify regional understanding of how best to use SLA for development purposes. The review will be conducted along the following three main themes: (a) sustainable agriculture, food security and rural development, (b) degradation and depletion of natural resources (land, water and biodiversity), and (c) emerging issues including climate change and green economy. Details on some of the key issues to be addressed are as follows:

- **Livelihood approaches and sustainable agriculture, food security and rural development:** this would include assessing SLA strategies and practices for agricultural development and poverty reduction; designing a conducive policy environment based on the acquired knowledge of the livelihood strategies of rural households and taking into consideration the need to protect and promote them; understanding poor people's access to key productive assets and services such as land, labor, financial services, markets, water, rural infrastructure, technology, and other inputs; understanding how livelihoods approaches can help to better understand food security issues; and supporting the rural poor in order to allow them to pursue their livelihood strategies;
- **Using SLA to alleviate the degradation and depletion of natural resources (land, water and the environment):** debates would revolve around how to balance rural livelihoods and production and consumption; how natural resources combined with other assets, such as financial, physical, social and human capital can help sustain and improve poor people's livelihoods; how livelihood approaches can help address resource governance issues; how SLA could help understand natural resource use in the context of complex or inadequate policies, institutions and processes affecting poor people's lives; how to improve livelihoods while sustaining the environment; how to assess the role of water within different livelihood strategies; and how SLA could assist in designing relevant programmes and policies; and
- **Addressing emerging issues including climate change and green economy:** these would include using livelihood approaches to analyze the impact, vulnerability and adaptation; assessing how climate change combined with increasing population density are depleting the natural resource base that rural livelihoods depend upon; understanding how assets and vulnerabilities can help promote the issue of green economy as an adaptation measure; and understanding how the available people's range of assets can be used to promote the issue of green economy.

The Meeting will serve as a platform to exchange experiences and discuss practices and allow experts to interact in order to better understand and clarify the challenges and obstacles faced by countries of the region and the impact of SLA notably on development. Experts will debate on the above issues while taking

into consideration prevailing regional perspectives and specificities in order to outline overall guiding principles and recommendations on how to further the issue of SLA in support of sustainable development.

D. PARTICIPANTS

The EGM is expected to bring together a few high caliber experts with a known expertise on the issue of SLA or sustainable development. Experts will originate from ESCWA member countries and regional organizations and a selected few from outside the ESCWA region in order to reflect on a wide and diverse array of views, practices and experiences. All experts will be expected to attend in their own capacity and not as representatives of their respective countries or institutions.

Efforts will be made to provide all background documents well ahead of time and as such attending experts will be expected to prepare a few written pages reflecting their comments and other views on the drafts of the background papers and to link these to their country experiences and practices in order to allow for a thorough discussion of the issue at hand.

E. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

The Productive Sectors Section (PSS) of the Sustainable Development and Productivity Division (SDPD) at UN-ESCWA will be convening the Expert Group Meeting. However, other regional and international organizations interested will be welcome to co-sponsor the meeting. Those interested are kindly requested to inquire about the modalities of their co-sponsorship using the addresses, including e-mails, provided below.

Since the meeting is expected to bring together national, regional and international experts, the official language of the meeting will be English. However, contributions could be made in both Arabic and English and simultaneous interpretation from and to both languages will be provided.

F. ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Date and venue: The two-day meeting will be held at the United Nations House located in Downtown Beirut, Lebanon, from 24-25 November 2010 in MZ Hall. Registration will start at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 24 November 2010, while the inaugural session will begin at 9:30 a.m. on the same day. The meeting will conclude in the afternoon of the second day that is Thursday, 25 November 2010.

Accommodation and transportation: Special arrangements will be made with a number of hotels in Beirut for accommodation packages that include a reduced room rate, transport from and to the airport, and daily transfers to United Nations House. Hotel details and daily rates will be communicated at a later date.

Visas: Participants may obtain an entry visa from the Lebanese embassy in their respective country of residence. In case issues may arise in obtaining a visa, those concerned are kindly advised to inform ESCWA at least three weeks prior to travel so that assistance could be provided. In this case, please, provide ESCWA with a copy of your passport and other relevant information and documents by 8 October 2010.

G. DOCUMENTATION

The official documentation of the meeting will include ESCWA background papers, papers from selected experts co-sponsored by ESCWA or not and papers and/or written reviews prepared by attending experts that would emphasize among others on their own or country experience in relation to SLA.

For those experts submitting major papers, these should be received by ESCWA no later than 15 October 2010, along with an abstract of about 250 words, to ensure the inclusion of the papers in the work programme of the meeting and their distribution well ahead of time. Papers should be transmitted by e-mail to one of the addresses provided below.

H. CORRESPONDENCE

All correspondence should be directed to one of the following addresses:

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ANNEX

Suggested outline for Case Studies

All case studies should be about 3-5 pages maximum in English or Arabic and should be in word format. The case studies should be related to one of the themes outlined above. Experts are welcome to submit one or more case studies but these should reflect their own (personal) experiences or that of their countries.

Outline:

(i) Introduction

(ii) SLA application

- Principles followed to apply SLA;
- Key issues, challenges and priority areas;
- Key players and stakeholders and their roles
- Practical steps followed in applying SLA or implementing the project;
- Results achieved.

(iii) Lessons Learned, Policy recommendations and Conclusions.