

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

**Synthesis of the Proceedings**

The Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Promoting Best Practices on Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (SLA) in the ESCWA Region was held 24-25 November 2010 in Beirut, Lebanon. The aim of the EGM was (i) to provide a forum to improve the understanding of and to clarify the concept of SLA; and (ii) to discuss a guide on how best to apply SLA for development purposes and to enrich it based on the views and experiences of attending experts and the case studies they had prepared. The meeting was a follow-up to another related EGM held in December 2009 and which had recommended among others to produce a guide that would highlight practical applications of how to use SLA to promote rural development in the ESCWA region. The deliberations of the meeting were clustered into three main themes: (a) SLA and sustainable agriculture, food security and rural development; (b) SLA and natural resources management with emphasis on the management of land, water and the environment; and (c) SLA and the management of emerging issues such as climate change and the green economy. The meeting was attended by experts from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

In order to set the stage for discussions on the above issues and others related to the application of SLA for rural development, the first day was devoted to presentations, which were comprised of discussion papers and case studies prepared by the Secretariat and invited experts. The first set of presentations provided a platform to review the history and the concept of SLA, to provide an overview of the successes and failures of rural development policies and programmes in the Arab region and to present the structure and key elements of a guide on the application of the SLA concept for rural development. The second set of presentations revolved around the analysis of the impact of SLA in supporting sustainable agriculture, achieving food security and promoting rural development through a case study from Lebanon and others from Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Sudan and Yemen. The third set of presentations overviewed how the concept of SLA could be used to enhance the management of the fast depleting and degrading natural resources of the region through cases from the Kurdistan Regional Governorate of Iraq and others from Oman, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. The fourth set of presentations explored the interlinkages between SLA and various emerging and/or challenging issues such as climate change, the green economy and desertification and land degradation and reviewed a case on loans in rural areas from Palestine.

On the second day of the EGM, in-depth discussions were held on (i) contextualizing SLA within the issue of sustainable development, (ii) revising the guide to apply SLA, and (iii) operationalizing SLA in the ESCWA region. The session on contextualizing SLA aimed at reviewing the importance of SLA as a tool for sustainable development and the value added it brings as a methodology to enhance improved livelihoods at the local level, particularly in rural contexts. The discussions highlighted that there is a need to design and adopt innovative local policies and to remove those which are not adapted or sustainable. It also advocated the promotion of auto-financing of projects – which would be an indicator of sustainability – while taking into account the cultural dimension. The role of donors and development assistance should be re-assessed so that it could complement

local initiatives especially in the design of small-scale and pilot project and when scaling them up. Finally, the session suggested highlighting successes and failures in order to learn from them and conducting impact assessments of projects. Such analytical tools would foster a better understanding of SLA and a more focused approach to addressing issues of sustainable livelihood, particularly at an operational level.

The session on revisiting the guide on applying SLA was geared towards reviewing the structure of the proposed guide in light of the discussions held. Appropriate changes and additions were to be proposed in order to enhance its quality so that it could be used as a resource material for analyzing, designing and implementing programmes for sustainable rural development. The discussions emphasized the need to promote growth with equity. It also stressed on the need to show that strategies vary depending on prevailing conditions particularly the political and governance structure and to discuss how successful projects at local level could be scaled up at regional level. Emphasis was also put on the need to plan well the next step in its use and to expand the number of case studies to include such issues as the need for more effective extension programmes and cooperatives and the importance of insurance against calamities.

The session on operationalizing SLA in the ESCWA region aimed to assess what could be the next step in adopting and applying SLA in policy formulation, programme design and implementation in the region with emphasis on the type of programmes needed, the target beneficiaries, the scope and means and resources required for operationalizing them. The discussions highlighted that during project cycles, efforts should be made to mainstream the need for sustainable livelihoods into plans and programmes in order to identify other areas and sectors that could allow income diversification. The importance of SLA in helping fight desertification and alleviate other problems should be stressed and the need to promote sustainable livelihoods should be mainstreamed into sustainable land management practices. It was also noted that emphasizing on the need to ensure sustainable livelihoods could help reverse the rural-urban migration by enhancing conditions in rural areas. However, there would be a need to put in place an enabling environment and to build capacity for implementing SLA and developing the appropriate capacity (increasing expertise in SLA).

From the above discussions the following recommendations emerged:

- Finalize the guide taking into account the various suggestions and incorporate the case studies and examples provided as appropriate. The revised version, should put less emphasis on discussions related to the SLA concept and methodology and more on its application and flexibility and its capacity to target people at the level of the locality, particularly poor people.
- Build national and regional capacity in the utilization of the guide and provide training to experts on its use, targeting technical staff who will be putting it into practice;
- Clarify the role of donors and international development agencies and show their complementarity in addressing the issue of SL and identifying areas for partnership building;
- Map case studies and conduct detailed analysis both on success stories and failed cases in order to learn from them;
- Follow-up with participants and other interested experts in the field, in order to establish a community of practitioners (network) and a repository of information on tools, success stories, applications and policy options for promoting SL with a regional and/or Arab specificity;
- Emphasize the importance of gender issues in improving livelihood in rural areas; and

- Liaise with regional and international organizations such as UNDP, ICARDA and others in order to identify areas of common interest in the operationalization of the integration of sustainable livelihoods into policy and programme planning and implementation particularly at national and local levels.