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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

**REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON TRADE AND ENVIRONMENT: DEVELOPING THE
ENVIRONMENTAL GOODS AND SERVICES SECTOR IN THE ARAB REGION
FOR TRANSFORMATION INTO A GREEN ECONOMY
BEIRUT, 15-16 DECEMBER 2010**

Summary

The Regional Workshop on Trade and Environment: Developing the Environmental Goods and Services Sector in the Arab Region for Transformation into a Green Economy (Beirut, 15-16 December 2010) assembled representatives of Arab countries to discuss trade and environment principles and linkages, with a specific focus on environmental goods and services as an important tool for developing a green economy.

The workshop aimed at developing concepts of green economy, building consensus regarding its component in the Arab region and the policy mix capable of developing such an economy in the region. It also strived to build the capacity of participants in the development of a national environmental goods and services sector as a means of transformation into a green economy, and provided a regional platform for members of national trade and environment committees to share experiences, knowledge and lessons learned amongst themselves, as well as with representatives of member countries seeking to establish such a committee.

Participants discussed the basic concepts of a green economy and the contribution that environmental goods and services can offer the achievement of such an economy. Through working groups, they contributed to the identification of regional priorities and a set of criteria for defining key environmental goods and services sub-sectors, which would aid transformation towards a green economy in the Arab region. Next steps were identified and agreed upon concerning the operationalization of the Arab Group on Trade and Environment.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) convened a Regional Workshop on Trade and Environment under the theme “Developing the Environmental Goods and Services Sector in the Arab Region for Transformation into a Green Economy” from 15 to 16 December 2010 at the United Nations House in Beirut. The workshop was organized by ESCWA in partnership with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environment Programme/Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA).
2. The workshop falls under the Regional Programme on Trade and Environment Capacity-Building in the Arab Region, which was adopted by a resolution of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) of the League of Arab States in 2003, providing an umbrella for a number of regional meetings as well as country-level activities in support of national trade and environment committees.
3. The regional programme is an ongoing mandate, backed by recent CAMRE resolutions which have reiterated the Arab commitment to this programme and the trade and environment agenda. In 2009, a CAMRE resolution called for holding the first meeting of the Arab Group on Trade and Environment (AGTE). While in 2008, one resolution called specifically for continued ESCWA support to the Arab countries in the establishment and promotion of national trade and environmental committees.
4. The workshop responds to the above resolutions and fulfills the objectives of the Programme. Its theme has been identified in view of growing regional and global interest in developing the environmental goods and services (EGS) sector as a means of transformation into a green economy. By discussing the subject of green economy, the workshop constitutes one of several milestones of the regional consultative process leading to the conference of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) to be held in 2012, also known as Rio+20.
5. The objective of the regional workshop is three-fold:
 - (a) Build the capacity of participants in the development of a national EGS sector as a means of transformation into a green economy;
 - (b) Develop concepts of green economy, build consensus regarding its components in the Arab region and identify the policy mix capable of developing such an economy in the region;
 - (c) Provide a regional platform for members of national trade and environment committees to share experiences, knowledge and lessons learned among themselves as well as with representatives of member countries seeking to establish such a committee.
6. The workshop was held over four sessions, each devoted to a specific topic for discussion. Chapter I of this report highlights the main conclusions and recommendations of the workshop, while chapter II provides a summary of the discussions within each session.

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. CONCLUSIONS

7. Regarding green economy, participants advocated for a clearer definition and better understanding of the goals of the green economy to be achieved at the regional level. Indeed, during the relevant panel discussion, some participants voiced concerns regarding the emergence of a dual approach, both sustainable development and green economy, and the possibility of the green economy approach taking precedence over sustainable development. Therefore any region should specifically ensure that the green economy will strengthen sustainable development and not replace it. In addition, it was debated whether green economy

concepts are to be applied at the macro or the micro levels, as each level involves different policy implications. Finally, while a common Arab position in global forums was found to be of importance, concerns were raised regarding the adoption of an Arab initiative on green economy, which may be problematic given the disparities between Arab countries in terms of key economic sectors.

8. Regarding EGS, concerns were also raised regarding the access of Arab countries to the technology needed to produce EGS and to make the transformation into a green economy possible, highlighting the need to orient investments to selected, economically feasible initiatives and local success stories.

9. During the panel discussion devoted to the AGTE, which is established under the auspices of the League of Arab States, a number of issues were addressed. Regarding the scope of work, it was proposed that the AGTE could serve as a mechanism for developing regional consensus to serve global negotiations. However participants needed more clarity regarding its membership and terms of reference, which could include the following:

(a) Collect data and prepare studies in support of decision making, such as on the impact of trade liberalization on Arab economies and means of avoiding/responding to negative impacts;

(b) Review and update the list of EGS for the purpose of trade liberalization and recommend trade initiatives regarding EGS;

(c) Coordinate trade and environment policies;

(d) Address World Trade Organization (WTO) issues;

(e) Report on country-level trade and environment activities, for the purpose of localizing success stories and experience sharing.

10. Concerning the AGTE membership, participants discussed whether membership should include high-level representation and policymakers, therefore providing necessary political backing, or whether expert-level participation would be better suited to discuss the technical issues at stake and prevent delays associated with the busy schedule of high-level representatives. Participants also voiced that the relationship and complementarity between AGTE and national sustainable development committees should be clarified.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

11. The following recommendations were put forward by the participants of the workshop:

(a) Request the League of Arab States to disseminate background information leading to the adoption of CAMRE resolution in order to establish the AGTE, and send official letters to the Arab countries requesting the nomination of two representatives, one for trade and one for environment, to become members of the AGTE;

(b) Form a small task force led by the League of Arab States to include members from ESCWA and UNEP and selected Arab countries, which would be responsible for developing a concept note on the AGTE. The concept note would propose a membership structure, terms of reference and bylaws for the AGTE, and would be circulated by e-mail to member country representatives for comments;

(c) Review the Arab reference list of EGS. The list was originally developed for the purpose of Arab free trade area negotiations and it should be reviewed and updated if it is to be used for other purposes, including within the context of the development of a green economy;

(d) Conduct further follow-up capacity-building activities on trade and environment issues, including workshops on methodologies and indicators for developing a green economy.

II. MAIN TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

A. INTRODUCTION TO CONCEPTS OF GREEN ECONOMY AND ITS POLICY IMPLICATIONS

12. During this first session of the workshop, presentations were made by ESCWA, UNEP/ROWA and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)/Office for North Africa on the general concepts of green economy and EGS, followed by a panel discussion on green economy as a development tool for the Arab region.

13. The ESCWA presentation provided a conceptual framework for defining the green economy, highlighting its intrinsic linkages with trade and environment issues. It described the motivating factors for transforming into such an economy and the challenges and opportunities associated with such a transformation. Success stories from the region were provided in addition to an overview of the enabling conditions for the development of a green economy and the role to be played by the different stakeholders.

14. UNEP/ROWA highlighted global opportunities in the water, energy and agriculture sectors, notably in terms of green job creation. UNEP's global and regional efforts in support of green economy development were described, notably the Green Economy Initiative (GEI) and green economy advisory services. With regard to the latter, technical assistance in the Arab region has already been initiated in both Egypt and Jordan.

15. ECA/Office for North Africa gave an overview of challenges and opportunities of a green economy relevant to North African countries. Initiatives launched in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia were detailed showing the wide array of policy measures that could be adopted to move towards a green economy. The North African experience was of key interest for the ESCWA member countries as most of the policies and programmes undertaken could be replicated in the ESCWA region.

16. A second ESCWA presentation outlined EGS concepts and definitions, highlighting the policy tools (for example financing, investment and trade policy tools) that could help promote EGS production and consumption and the concerns that such policies raise for developing countries, including those in the Arab region (for example green protectionism and green washing). In addition, dynamic gains and losses for the Arab region from the liberalization of EGS trade were identified, based on a review of the region's exports and imports of a subset of environmental goods proposed by the League of Arab States according to a set of positive and negative criteria.

B. KEY EGS SUB-SECTORS FOR A GREEN ECONOMY IN THE ARAB REGION

17. This second session of the workshop focused on three selected EGS sub-sectors having special importance for the Arab region, namely renewable energy/energy efficiency, sustainable tourism and cleaner production.

18. The presentation on renewable energy/energy efficiency, provided by ESCWA, highlighted the breadth of business activities in the sector offering opportunities for enterprises – including small and medium-sized enterprises – in the region. Challenges to the development of this sub-sector were categorized into four main groups: administrative, financial, market-related and technical. To counter these challenges, different players including governments, donors and large corporations have different roles to play to build an enabling environment for this sub-sector to thrive.

19. Sustainable tourism was the focus of a presentation by the University of Bahrain, which revealed that the growing economic importance of tourism worldwide is unfortunately being accompanied by severe environmental drawbacks, including an increase in transportation, water and energy use, and pollution. Differences between the concepts of eco-tourism, sustainable tourism and responsible tourism were explained, stressing on the need to combine the benefits and strengths of each. Finally, examples of

eco-tourism projects in the Arab region (Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon) were provided to illustrate these concepts and how ecotourism can contribute to the creation of a green economy.

20. The Lebanese Cleaner Production Center (LCPC) introduced the concept of clean production (CP) as a means for industry to achieve both economic and environmental gains. Sustainable consumption and production (SCP) was also introduced as a closely related concept which aims to maintain economic growth and improvement in the quality of life, while reducing the consumption of natural resources. The achievements of LCPC in this area were exemplified through two case studies from Lebanon, one in the food industry and another in the fiber industry, whereby the investments made by the two companies were quickly outbalanced by the consumption savings achieved through the implementation of a number of CP options.

C. DEVELOPING THE ENVIRONMENTAL GOODS AND SERVICES SECTOR IN THE ARAB REGION

21. Session three of the workshop was organized in a parallel working group format. Participants were divided into two groups to discuss regional priorities in terms of EGS and come up with an agreed set of criteria for identifying key EGS sub-sectors which could be prime contributors to a green economy in the Arab region.

22. Both groups focused their attention on goods and services associated with the water use management and water treatment sub-sector, given the importance of both conventional and non-conventional water resources for the region. In order to transform the sector to allow it to contribute to a green economy, participants stressed the importance of providing incentives and raising the awareness of stakeholders to encourage green investments in general and water reuse in particular. With regard to the latter, it is crucial to set water reuse standards in accordance with global health and environment protection regulations. The importance of regional and global cooperation in this regard was identified as an essential component.

23. One of the groups also identified the waste management sector as another important sector for the region. In this regard, the group stressed the need to develop a supporting strategy and an appropriate regulatory, technical and institutional setup to allow the appropriate functioning of the sector and provide an enabling environment for public-private partnerships in this sector.

D. REVIEW OF NATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN THE ARAB REGION

24. The last session of the workshop was dedicated to the sharing of national experiences in relation to committees on trade and environment and green economy. It was followed by a panel discussion on the establishment and scope of work of the AGTE.

25. As a prelude to this session, and given that some of the Arab countries attending the workshop did not have a national trade and environment committee, ESCWA briefed the audience on the purpose behind establishing such a committee, its typical membership and scope of work. Selected regional experiences were compared to developed country experiences and elements for ensuring successful operation of these committees were identified. Finally, the presentation raised the issue of the AGTE, inviting participants to voice their opinions on the potential role that such a group could play in advancing the trade and environment agenda in the Arab region.

26. Five Arab country representatives made formal interventions, four of them already having an established trade and environment committee, namely Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, and one country, Palestine, in the process of creating such a committee. Each of the national experiences demonstrated certain particularities: in Saudi Arabia, the national trade and environment committee had a strong connection to the national sustainable development committee. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the national committee focused on two vital sectors to the economy, notably the food industry (particularly the olive oil industry) and the textile industry, looking at ways of promoting the use of environmentally sound technologies among producers and achieving ISO certification for improved export competitiveness. In Palestine, one achievement relates to the adoption by the government of a list of green

procurement items, notably for information and communication technology equipment. In Egypt, the development of renewable energies is a major focus area, in addition to the development of “green cities” as is currently underway in Sharm El Sheikh and Luxor. Finally, the national committee of Yemen initially focused on issues related to accession to the WTO, then shifted its focus to other areas of interest including chemicals management and the development of a national eco-labeling scheme.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

27. The Regional Workshop on Trade and Environment: Developing the Environmental Goods and Services Sector in the Arab Region for Transformation into a Green Economy was held at the United Nations House in Beirut during 15 and 16 December 2010.

B. OPENING

28. The Workshop was formally opened by Ms. Roula Majdalani, Director, Sustainable Development and Productivity Division at ESCWA. Addresses were also delivered by Mr. Fareed I. Bushehri, Regional DTIE Officer, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)/Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA) and Mr. Mohamed Konna, of the Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development Directorate at the League of Arab States.

C. PARTICIPANTS

29. The Workshop was attended by 26 participants, including 18 Government representatives from 11 Arab countries from ministries of environment, trade and industry, national economy, planning, health and foreign affairs. In addition, experts and resource persons in the field of green economy and environmental goods and services were invited to make presentations and contribute to discussions. The full list of participants is contained in the annex of this report.

D. AGENDA

30. Presentations and discussions were made over the following four sessions:

1. Introduction to concepts of green economy and its policy implications.
2. Key EGS sub-sectors for a green economy in the Arab region.
3. Developing the environmental goods and services sector in the Arab region.
4. Review of national experiences in the Arab region.

E. EVALUATION

31. An evaluation questionnaire was distributed in order to assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the workshop. Eighteen participants responded to the questionnaire. In general, feedback was positive as all respondents indicated that the overall quality of the workshop was good to excellent. Most respondents noted that the workshop had achieved its objectives and met their expectations (76 per cent), while the rest indicated partial achievement of objectives. Participants were unanimous regarding the need for follow up activities, namely in-depth workshops on green economy, environmental goods and services and environmental auditing.

F. DOCUMENTS

32. The list of documents submitted to the workshop is available on the ESCWA website at <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1390E>.

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