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Ad-hoc Experts Group Meeting  
Growth and Employment in North Africa

16 – 17 March 2010, Rabat (Morocco)

*Aide - memoire*

**Introduction**

1. In the framework of the implementation of the 2010-2011 Work Programme, the North Africa Office of the Economic Commission for Africa (United Nations) is organizing an ad-hoc experts group meeting on the issue of "Strengthening the social dimension of development policies: growth and employment in North Africa". The meeting will take place in Rabat (Morocco) on 16 and 17 March 2010. The outcome of the debates will be presented for adoption to the North Africa Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE) that will be held in Rabat (Morocco) on 18 and 19 March 2010.

2. Creating more and better jobs represents one of the major development challenges of North African countries. Indeed, although North Africa countries have improved their human development levels, the prospects for achieving the Millennium Development Goals are high, and despite some improvements, their unemployment rates are still the highest in the world.

3. Some groups are particularly affected. According to country data, first-time job-seekers, mainly those who live in urban areas, graduates and women continue to record two-digit unemployment rates and show longer periods in finding a job as compared to other groups, such as illiterates or people living in rural areas. Despite employment promotion policies, these 3 groups show a particular "resistance" to be integrated into the labour market.

4. Growth is a necessary condition to meet the challenge of creating more and better jobs. Following deep reforms and major investments, within a positive external context, growth performance in the sub-region has indeed improved these recent years, with rates above 5% during the 2001-2007 period. However, growth is still very much dependent on exogenous thus volatile factors, as demonstrated by the recent 2008 and 2009 crisis. Moreover, growth rates remain all below the expectations and needs in terms of job creation and unemployment reduction. North African economies must therefore reach higher growth rates to face the pressure of unemployed and first-entrants on the labour market. This is the main challenge they have to take up. All predictions on post-crisis economic prospects stress that the recovery of the world economy may be fragile and volatile in the short and mid term. In a global context that is still dull, one must wonder as well about the real chances of achieving the growth rates recorded before the crisis, and above all, of exceeding them.

5. Therefore, to create more job opportunities, mainly for the young, the graduates and women, North African economies must reach new levels of growth. It is important to highlight that all countries of the sub-region are going through a stage in their development that gives them real possibilities to multiply and diversify their sources of growth. Indeed, these countries are experiencing several structural changes linked, among others, to the demographic transition, women's access to the labour market, the adaptation to climate change and the search for new energies, as well as the increased use of knowledge and technology in today's societies and economies. These changes bring about new needs in goods, services and qualifications for which there are often not enough or not at all supply capable of meeting them. However, this potential can only turn into a real opportunity of growth and employment if appropriate public policies are implemented. Indeed, the potential represented by these sectors is not enough known; they are not enough or not at all integrated in the development strategies or the public policies; and they suffer from strong deficits in human capital, financing and infrastructures, among other things.

6. Economic growth is a necessary condition to create job opportunities. However, it is not sufficient. Recent experience has shown the gaps that may exist between economic performance and employment performance. Certain macroeconomic and sectoral policies, focused on only one goal, growth, may indeed have unexpected effects on employment, both in the short and long term. Some economic policies may actually reduce the political space necessary to achieve employment goals, because they can limit public expenditures, facilitate capital-intensive activities, curtail access to financing, and increase the cost of services ... It is within this context that employment promotion policies have been launched in order to overcome the problem of unemployment and promote employment creation. However, their impact and their sustainability have often been limited because, in most cases, they provided a social treatment to an economic issue, and they have not focused on the economic factors underlying the issue of employment and unemployment. The priority to be given to employment in the development agenda is thus urgent as well as of the consistency between economic policies and employment promotion policies.

## Goals

7. The main goal of the meeting of experts is to formulate recommendations on public strategies and policies to strengthen the links between growth and employment in North Africa. More specifically, the meeting will try to answer the following questions:

### **- Which public policies must be adopted to strengthen and support the new sources of growth and employment?**

While bringing out the new opportunities in terms of growth and employment, experts will have to identify the factors that restrain or facilitate a better exploitation of this potential and recommend the measures to be carried out by the public authorities in order to create a framework in favour of the emergence and expansion of these new activities and sectors. Recommendations should cover a wide range of measures and policies (macro-economic, sectoral, training, infrastructure, financing, legislation, partnership....) as well as the conditions for them to be successful. Particular emphasis needs to be put on SMEs.

### **- How to reconcile the goals of the economic policies with those of employment promotion?**

While highlighting the importance of this issue for the sub-region, experts will have to identify the constraints that have limited to date a greater consistency between economic goals and employment goals; recommend the measures to be undertaken to remove these constraints and bring out the possible dilemmas and means to solve them. Particular emphasis shall be placed on macro-economic, trading, investment (including FDI) and industrial policies.

8. Cooperation and collaboration among North African countries represent essential means to strengthen the impact of national policies because they actually lead to economies of scale, intensive learning, effective bargaining power... Therefore, the task of experts is to identify the areas of collaboration and cooperation as well as the measures and mechanisms for their implementation. In this context, the role of sub-regional organisations such as AMU and ECA shall be emphasized.

9. The Conference of ECA Ministers that will take place from the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2010 will tackle as well the issue of reinforcing the links between growth and employment in Africa. Therefore, it is important for North Africa member States to include during the debate and in the outcome document the needs and expectations that are common to the sub-region.

## Participants

10. The Office will invite national experts from the 7 countries of North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Sudan and Tunisia) as well as decision-makers and representatives of national and sub-regional organisations, including the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and CEN-SAD, private sector, financial sector, workers, civil society, the United Nations system, and bilateral and multilateral organisations.

## Method of work

11. The meeting of experts will be organised in plenary sessions and working groups. These will have to result in recommendations intended mainly to Member States, sub-regional organisations, bilateral and multilateral donors, financial institutions, as well as non-governmental and professional organisations.

## Expected results

12. Two main results will be produced:

- a. A report presenting the main conclusions and recommendations shall be prepared to the attention of the North Africa Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE);
- b. A publication presenting the different contributions, including the papers of experts and the summaries of debates, for a wide dissemination of the meeting's results.

## Working languages

13. The meeting of experts will take place in Arabic, French and English.

## Date and place of the meeting

March 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010 in Rabat (Morocco)

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