



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa
Office for North Africa

Thirtieth Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts

**Review of the Activities of the
Economic Commission for Africa in North Africa
(March 2014 – February 2015)**

3-6 March 2015, Rabat, Morocco



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Office for North Africa**

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I. Introduction

1. At the end of the 2012–2013 biennium, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) launched its strategic realignment programme, which is expected to facilitate the implementation of activities geared towards the structural transformation of Africa, thereby making the continent an important global growth centre. Accordingly, the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa has been mandated by the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts to direct its programmes and actions towards achieving the following two outcomes: (a) enhanced capacity of member States to produce and disseminate quality and timely statistics and policy analyses in support of national and subregional priorities and (b) enhanced capacity of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and of other subregional players towards speeding up the design and implementation of subregional initiatives.
2. The period covered by the present report corresponds to the first year of implementation of the 2014–2015 programme. The report provides an update on the activities carried out in North Africa by ECA during the period March 2014 to March 2015.
3. The activities carried out in 2014 and the actions ensuing there from were undertaken in close cooperation and collaboration with the member States, the substantive divisions of ECA, the other subregional offices and the regional economic communities, including AMU, specialized agencies of the United Nations system and other partners.

II. Key achievements of the work programme during the period under review

4. The activities set out in the programme of work of the Office were carried out with the aim of delivering results in the high priority areas defined by the strategic framework 2014–2015. The recommendations resulting from the previous meetings of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts, as well as the contributions of member States, AMU and other partners, have also contributed to map out the framework of intervention of the Office throughout the period under review.
5. Those activities were carried out in line with the new strategic guidelines and programmatic directions of ECA, as approved by the Conference of Ministers in March 2013.

A. Major outcome 1: Capacity-building of member States for the timely production and dissemination of statistics and high-quality policy analyses in support of the national and subregional development priorities

6. Through its activities, the Office contributed to enhancing the capacities of member States in areas related to the countries' participation in global and regional value chains and the development of innovative and integrated policies for green and sustainable growth. The mechanism used in the preparation of country profiles, key documents building on the new direction adopted by the ECA, was fine-tuned during the period under review and five country profiles have been completed.

1. Better understanding of the mechanisms of participation of North African countries in global and regional value chains

7. Four major activities made it possible to achieve this outcome: an expert panel discussion was held at the twenty-ninth meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts; a technical study was conducted on regional value chains; an expert meeting on the theme “Trade, location of FDI [foreign direct investment] and participation of the Mediterranean countries in value chains: What are the development spinoffs?” was held; and a follow-up symposium to the expert meeting was held. Those activities are part of a wider programme initiated two years ago by ECA to address the issue of the structural transformation of North Africa.

8. The expert panel discussion, held by the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa in Rabat on 4 March 2014, provided a framework for the sharing of experiences relating to the development of regional value chains in North Africa, in order to assist in (a) accelerating the diversification and sophistication of production systems and (b) improving their integration in global value chains. The discussion also contributed to establishing the following assessment:

- (a) Industrialization is pivotal for achieving the structural transformation of North African economies;
- (b) The contribution of the countries of the region represents only a small fraction of world trade; they suffer increasing structural deficit, mainly owing to the inadequate diversification of their productive base;
- (c) The participation of those countries in world trade takes place increasingly through their contribution to the global value chains; access to global value chains requires the satisfaction of a number of key prerequisites, particularly in terms of logistics and institutional and legal environment, which require substantial investment, both human and financial, and the adoption of relevant active public policies;
- (d) Regional trade accounts for only 4.8 per cent of North Africa’s foreign trade, and the proportion of manufactured products in those exchanges has been declining;
- (e) The development of regional value chains and the increase in intraregional exchanges can become a principal development lever by (i) speeding up the diversification and sophistication of economies; (ii) fostering the creation of new dynamic comparative advantages; and (iii) facilitating participation in higher added-value segments of global value chains.

9. The recommendations and directives put forward by the experts of member States at the panel discussion facilitated the appropriate wording of the terms of reference for the study on regional value chains. The study, carried out between April 2014 and October 2014, made it possible to:

- (a) Identify the growth sectors in terms of regional value chains by mapping the various assets and comparative advantages of each country of the subregion and by identifying the steps to be taken and the constraints to overcome in order to establish an effective regional cooperation process;

- (b) Adopt a systematic approach that establishes clear priorities with regard to the different value chains, that identifies the different stakeholders and the linkages and interactions between them, that analyses technological capabilities and economic performance and that devises an upgrade strategy for the selected chains, while considering the regulatory and institutional aspects;
- (c) Develop partnerships between ECA and other international and regional organizations in order to improve the availability of statistical information and promote the coordination of the efforts made in respect of the creation and management of knowledge and the conceptualization of programmes and projects.

10. The findings of the study entitled “Developing regional value chains towards accelerating the diversification and the sophistication of North African economies” were validated by the ad hoc expert meeting held in Rabat on 19 and 20 November 2014. The expert meeting preceded the international Mediterranean colloquium¹ on the theme “Trade, location of FDI and participation of the Mediterranean countries to the value chains: What are the development spinoffs?”. The colloquium furthered the discussion of the regional value chains in an academic framework, thus giving approximately 60 researchers on both shores of the Mediterranean the opportunity to:

- (a) Compare the results of the theoretical and empirical studies on the advantages and risks of participation by developing countries in value chains;
- (b) Analyse the role of regional integration and of regional value chains in the process of transformation and diversification of economies;
- (c) Explore the potential of multilateral cooperation in matters of assistance for the process of transformation and diversification of Mediterranean economies.

11. The outcomes of the various studies resulted in the development of (a) a plan for the implementation and monitoring of the actions to be taken by the different stakeholders, in particular by the countries, (b) policy guidelines on the development of regional value chains to speed up the process of the diversification and sophistication of North African economies and (c) important technical documents and frameworks aimed at building the institutional capacity of regional value chains.

12. Short-term results include the implementation of a regional project on regional value chains that focuses on sectors characterized by a high potential for added value and the development of studies by sector and by value chain at the level of North Africa.

¹The colloquium is a joint initiative of ECA, the African Trade Policy Centre and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The 2014 session was the result of cooperation between those institutions, the WTO Chair of the Mohammed V University–Souissi in Rabat and the Laboratory of Applied Economics Development at the University of Toulon. Nearly 50 presentations by researchers and development practitioners were given during the colloquium. In addition, a day was devoted to a meeting between young researchers and more experienced players in the context of graduate studies. At previous sessions of the colloquium assistance had been provided in the editing of several books and special issues of journals and scientific publications, which serves as an example of cooperation between the Office and the academic world.

13. In terms of follow-up, a project is planned for the development of regional value chains in sectors with strong potential in the subregion and for the development of a strategic monitoring and evaluation framework.

2. Country profiles completed and other works being drafted

14. The justification for ECA country profiles can be found in the Commission's mission and new programme of work, in particular regarding the creation and enhancement of subregional data centres and the need to increase the consistency and harmonization of the data and information used in all flagship publications and reports of ECA, including the *Economic Report on Africa*. The principle underpinning country profiles and their methodological framework were presented at the seventh Joint Annual Meetings of the Economic Commission for Africa Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and the African Union Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance, held in Abuja in March 2014. In accordance with the new mission and direction of ECA, country profiles should focus mainly on:

- (a) Structural transformation of member States, in particular industrialization-oriented strategies, based on effective use of the continent's natural and agricultural resources;
- (b) Inclusive socioeconomic development of member States and the need to assess and monitor the progress in the various areas of macroeconomic and social policy, development planning, industrialization, regional integration and trade, economic governance, sustainable development, job creation, youth employment, governance of natural resources, farming and land management, food security, climate change and green economy;
- (c) Capacity-building of national statistics systems and the development of partnerships with them for the collection, analysis and dissemination of data, with a view to improving the planning and monitoring of development policies;
- (d) Collection, analysis and forecasting of the data that will be used by ECA, member States, regional economic communities and other development actors.

15. The purpose of country profiles is to (a) enable ECA to conduct and disseminate analyses by country and by region; (b) facilitate the formulation of recommendations for economic transformation through the promotion of sustainable growth and social development; (c) enhance regional integration, development planning and economic governance; (d) facilitate analysis of the potential risks and proposals for measures for their mitigation. The country profile development process entails constant compilation and harmonization of data and information on each country, aggregation of the indicators to be used by regional economic communities and other groups of countries, and analysis of trends, in order to help produce forecasts in a timely manner. The spin-off effects of the preparation of country profiles will include the strengthening of member States' capacities to generate and disseminate high-quality statistics and policy analyses and to facilitate the planning and development of policies based on relevant data, in support of the subregion's development priorities.

16. During the period March 2014–February 2015 country profiles on Morocco (1), Tunisia (2), Algeria (1) and Mauritania (1) were prepared.

17. The concept of green economy was addressed in four of the country profiles, in accordance with the country-specific challenges: Algeria (diversification and reduction of the dependence on hydrocarbons); Morocco (industrialization and new trades in Morocco), Mauritania (green economy and fishery sector governance); and Tunisia (2015, green jobs and regional development). The profiles contained analyses of the vision and strategy for, and the status of, green economy in countries and presented recommendations that took into account the specific features of the country concerned. Over the short term, the thematic reviews contributed to a better understanding of the vision and measures implemented by the countries. As such, they constitute a good tool for sharing experiences and establishing policy direction. The issue of subsidies and the issue of the fight against poverty and its costs were also the subjects of a thematic review as part of the 2014 country profile of Tunisia.

18. The issuance of the first country profiles of the other countries (Egypt, Libya and the Sudan) is expected in 2015.

B. Major outcome 2: Capacity-building of the Arab Maghreb Union and of other subregional players to speed up the creation or implementation of subregional initiatives

19. The partnership with AMU has improved markedly, along with the partnership between AMU and other regional institutions. Over the period under review, substantial achievements were made possible with the support of other partner institutions. Three major subregional initiatives were formally launched and many others were the subject of preliminary analyses in preparation for their future launch. The first set of initiatives includes the mobilization of subregional partners in support of the integration process, the development of a strategy for independent financing of AMU and the formulation of a regional action plan for the facilitation of transport and trade. The second set of initiatives includes those relating to combating desertification and to formulating a gender strategy for AMU.

1. Enhanced partnership in support of integration in North Africa

20. The partnership for integration has been strengthened at the main levels: bilaterally, through an enhanced relationship between AMU and the Office, and multilaterally, through the launch of the Subregional Cooperation Mechanism.

(a) Bilateral dimension

21. In 2014, the General Secretariat of AMU and the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa met to assess the results of their multi-year cooperation programme and identify the medium-term priorities of the subregional agenda in the dual context of the realignment of ECA action and the policy changes implemented in North Africa.

22. To that end, the initiatives and programmes in support of AMU and its member countries were assessed and adapted to the subregion's new socioeconomic environment.

23. For the period 2013–2015, the two institutions had agreed on a new cooperation programme that emphasized three main areas, namely: (a) capacity-building for the General Secretariat and the institutional framework of AMU, (b) acceleration of regional integration and (c) the mainstreaming of gender, youth and migration policies in the regional agenda.

24. High among the implementation mechanisms of the new cooperation agreement is the exploration of complementarities and possible types of partnership between AMU and all other regional stakeholders.

(b) The multilateral dimension: North Africa Subregional Coordination Mechanism

25. The facilitation work undertaken by the Office allowed for enhanced cooperation between AMU partner institutions, by building between them a framework for consultation, coordination and promotion of common or joint initiatives in support of regional programmes. The framework was formally adopted in June 2014 following several years of consultations between the different players, including, in particular, advisory meetings in 2012 and 2013.

26. To further strengthen and enhance the efficiency of partnerships towards greater integration in North Africa, a regional platform in support of AMU, serving as a medium-term programming tool for the coordination and promotion of synergies among assistance actions, was adopted.

27. The platform falls within the spirit and framework of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa. It is focused on seven areas of intervention, closely aligned with the medium-term objectives of the Maghreb agenda, and encompasses a matrix of projects and actions contemplated by AMU for the period 2014–2015, around which the partners' support will be structured.

28. A mechanism for the facilitation of the work of the platform and for the coordination and regular evaluation of its activities has also been adopted. It comprises an annual meeting of partner institutions; joint coordinators for each of the seven thematic groups; a network of focal points; and an ad hoc liaison unit that performs the secretariat functions.

29. The platform was officially established during the annual meeting of the Subregional Coordination Mechanism held in Rabat on 24 and 25 June 2014, at the initiative of the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa. The meeting took place in the framework of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa mandate, set up as part of the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 57/2, 57/7 and 61/296 in support of the New Partnership for Africa's Development programme, at the continental and subregional levels.

(c) A validated strategy for financial autonomy of the Arab Maghreb Union

30. With a view to speeding up the North Africa integration process, the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa and the General Secretariat of AMU had agreed in December 2012 to include in their multi-year cooperation programme a capacity-building project for AMU. One component is the completion of a feasibility study for an AMU autonomous funding mechanism. In the light of the experiences of the other regional economic communities and based on the specifics of the North Africa subregion, the study proposed a new scheme aimed at enabling optimal coverage of the current and future financial needs of AMU, for example, funding for General Secretariat operations; substantive studies and analyses; integration projects and programmes; regional contributions to partner-funded activities; and structural or adjustment funds of the regional market. More particularly, it defined:

- (a) The specific objectives to be achieved;
- (b) The guiding principles and performance criteria of an autonomous funding mechanism;
- (c) The possible options for AMU, in the light of the experiences of other regional economic communities;
- (d) The legal and tax-related parameters of an allocation assigned to AMU;
- (e) The modus operandi and management of the mechanism;
- (f) A methodology for the negotiation, adoption and implementation of the allocation.

31. The study was validated by AMU experts and member States at a meeting held in Rabat on 12 June 2014. They explicitly requested that AMU consider the initiative as a component of AMU institutional reform. The experts further agreed that a significant increase in the financial resources of AMU could be a major catalyst in enhancing the institution's capacities and its central role in conducting and managing the integration process, with a broader scope of action and powers. As in the other regional economic communities, the autonomous funding mechanism should permit, among other things, the establishment of structural funds and other equalization tools and compensatory measures, particularly for countries likely to face significant losses of potential earnings due to the intra-Maghreb trade liberalization. The sustainability and efficiency of the integration process will be directly conditional upon a fair distribution of the costs and profits of the regional market in the making.

2. Formulation of the regional action plan for the facilitation of transport and trade

32. An action plan aimed at easing and harmonizing customs formalities, facilitating inter-State transport transit and reducing direct and indirect costs of commercial transactions was validated by the experts of member States in the framework of an ad hoc meeting on the theme "International Transport and Trade Facilitation in North Africa" held in Rabat on 25 and 26 September 2014.

33. The plan is built around four components as follows:

- (a) Strengthening and optimizing the infrastructure and logistics used for transport-transit and trade;
- (b) Improving the regulatory and administrative frameworks;
- (c) Building national capacity (public services and private operators) relating to foreign trade and international transport;
- (d) Increasing cooperation between the administrations of member countries, in particular between the central services and cross-border services.

34. The plan comprises measures of regional, bilateral and national dimensions, and includes a timetable for short, medium and long-term actions. For each of the suggested activities, the relevant institutions and administrations responsible for their implementation have been identified.

35. The components on “improvement of regulatory frameworks”, “national capacity-building” and “strengthening cooperation between national administrations” include the actions required of States in respect to upgrading activities in accordance with the provisions of the Bali Package. The reforms recommended in this field are: (a) harmonization of formalities and the strengthening of customs cooperation; (b) increases in predictability for traders; (c) exchange of information and training; and (d) public-private cooperation. Activities to be undertaken include, in particular, the standardization of the required cross-border import and export documents, the systematic use of joint border posts and of one-stop shops, the concomitant systematic use of advance ruling procedures and processing of documents prior to the arrival of goods, the development of joint training programmes, and the exchange of electronic data on declarations and trade flows between customs authorities and between customs authorities and export or import businesses.

36. In order to implement the regional action plan effectively, the creation of a steering framework has been proposed. Referred to as the North African Trade Facilitation Council, the framework will involve the national trade facilitation committees that, in accordance with the Bali Package, must be maintained or created, and AMU.

37. The plan is the outcome of a process that was initiated with a study undertaken in 2014 on international transport and trade facilitation in North Africa. The study was validated at the ad hoc expert group meeting held in Rabat on 25 and 26 September 2014.

III. Soft assistance, special initiatives and interactions with Head Office divisions and other partners

A. Support for the Arab Maghreb Union and for member States towards the implementation of the Boosting Intra-African Trade/Continental Free Trade Area initiative

38. The Subregional Office for North Africa, rather than the African Trade Policy Centre, assisted the General Secretariat of AMU with the organization and presentation of the first regional workshop on raising awareness of the Boosting Intra-African Trade/Continental Free Trade Area (BIAT/CFTA) initiative among national actors, which was held in Rabat on 4 July 2014. In addition to the experts of the AMU General Secretariat, the workshop was also attended by officials from member country external trade services, parliamentarians and employers' organizations. The primary aims were to promote awareness about the project and reach agreement with participants on the terms of implementation within AMU countries. The support from the Office made it possible to define and adopt by consensus an efficient approach to the development of a subregional BIAT action plan.

39. The second regional workshop was held in Casablanca, Morocco on 28 and 29 October 2014, and was attended by representatives from the General Secretariat of AMU, foreign trade experts from member countries, the General Confederation of Moroccan Companies, a representative from the Maghreb Employers' Union, the African Trade Policy Centre and the Subregional Office for North Africa. Participants in the workshop adopted the subregional action plan. The participation of the Subregional Office was focused on ensuring that the activities envisioned within the framework of BIAT/AMU were consistent with the recommendations that came out of the expert group meeting on international transport and facilitation of trade in North Africa. Those recommendations were the backbone of the Trade Facilitation subprogramme of the BIAT/AMU action plan.

B. National workshop for the validation of the study on inclusive green economy policies and the structural transformation in Tunisia, held in Tunis, 20–22 October 2014

40. Building on its work on the green economy in North Africa, the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa has been active in cooperating with the Special Initiatives Division by bringing its expertise to bear in the review of the report prepared by the consultant, and the preparation and leadership of the workshop, on the validation of the study on inclusive green economy policies and the structural transformation in Tunisia.

41. That support involved the review of the programme of work and of the terms of reference for the group work, as well as contributions to the proceedings of the workshop. Participation in the workshop was also an opportunity to establish contact with the key players involved in sustainable development and green economy in Tunisia.

C. Launch of the project supporting the implementation of the Subregional Action Plan to Combat Desertification in the Maghreb

42. The principal aim of the project is to build the capacities of AMU, strengthen national ownership of the Subregional Action Plan to Combat Desertification and facilitate the mobilization of the funding necessary to speed up the implementation of the plan. The project document has been prepared and the extra budgetary resources secured. The project comprises two components: (a) advocacy and mobilization of policymakers and development partners in respect of the Subregional Action Plan and (b) support for the mobilization of internal financing resources for the Subregional Action Plan.

43. Component 1 of the project will be delivered through three activities: (a) a study of the economic, social and environmental profitability of long-term strategic investments in combating desertification/land degradation, (b) an analysis of climate change impacts with regard to desertification/land degradation and adaptation measures in the Maghreb and (c) an advocacy/mobilization meeting for policymakers and development partners.

44. Component 2 will be focused on support for the mobilization of internal resources to fund the Subregional Action Plan to Combat Desertification and a study of sustainable internal financing mechanisms for that plan.

45. The expected key outcomes of the project are listed below:

- (a) Awareness has been raised among the regional and national players, and their level of knowledge about the challenges and impacts of desertification, including food insecurity, dwindling water resources, loss of biodiversity, vulnerability to climate change and migration of populations, has been increased;
- (b) National sustainable funding mechanisms have been identified to serve as a catalyst for the mobilization of external resources;
- (c) Development partners are mobilized to provide assistance for the implementation of the Subregional Action Plan to Combat Desertification.

D. Launch of the Arab Maghreb Union project supporting the development of a gender strategy for the General Secretariat of the Union

46. In view of the interest of the AMU General Secretariat in adopting a specific gender strategy to fulfil its commitments and implement the provisions of the various regional and international instruments for the strengthening of equality between men and women and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in its work, the General Secretariat and the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa agreed to incorporate that theme in the 2014–2015 multi-year cooperation programme.

47. The aim is to achieve a more vigorous integration of social dynamics in the regional agenda, particularly regarding the gender dimension.

48. The adoption of a gender strategy should be viewed as a significant step for the AMU General Secretariat, since it would facilitate the development of a road map for genuinely taking into account the gender dimension in the institution's internal operational procedures and its work. Such a strategy would bring AMU one step closer towards greater mainstreaming of a gender approach in all its programmes, so as to better help the region achieve its structural transformation and its equitable and inclusive development objectives. The aim of this activity is to:

- (a) Build the capacity of AMU General Secretariat workers and administrative staff in respect of mainstreaming a gender approach in the processes, structures and programmes concerning member States;
- (b) Develop guidelines to assist the various departments of the organization in mainstreaming the gender component in the planning, coordination and implementation of AMU programmes, and in the products developed for member States;
- (c) Build the capacities of member States in respect of tracking progress in the implementation of conventions relating to gender equality and promotion of women.

49. Expected results are:

- (a) Upgraded AMU General Secretariat capacities to implement, monitor and evaluate its gender-related programmes and projects;
- (b) Better planning and budgeting of gender-related activities;
- (c) Ensured sustainability of AMU actions and of the information and awareness-raising tools that it produces to promote better mainstreaming of gender equality in the wider regional integration processes.

E. Capacity-building for the use of inward remittances by migrant workers for development purposes

50. This activity is undertaken in partnership with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

51. The project is aimed at building the capacities of government officials and financial institutions to formulate and adopt strategies, policies and programmes aimed at increasing the impact of migrant workers' remittances on development financing in the countries selected and supporting the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

52. Under this project, in partnership with ESCWA and under the high patronage of the Minister of Moroccan Expatriates and Migration Affairs, ECA held, on the margins of the ninth African Development Forum, a consultation workshop on the optimum use of migrant worker remittances in contributing to the development of North African countries. The presentations and discussions at the workshop, which was attended by some 50 experts, emphasized three major challenges:

- (a) The level of efficiency of national strategies and policies for channelling remittances towards development;
- (b) The relative weakness of the financial and institutional infrastructures necessary to support remittances;
- (c) The inadequacy of data and information on migrant remittances.

53. For ECA, this activity builds on the work on migration issues initiated in 2008. It allows for the effective implementation of the outcomes of the second High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, held at United Nations Headquarters in New York in October 2013. During the High-level Dialogue, the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, underscored that global remittances, including to high-income countries, were expected to reach \$550 billion in 2014 and to surpass \$700 billion by 2016.

54. Initial results of the studies commissioned under this project will be available in May 2015.

F. Other soft assistance activities

55. At the invitation of the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Islamic Development Bank Group, ECA convened, jointly with the Centre, WTO, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the World Customs Organization and the International Trade Centre, a seminar on non-tariff trade barriers between African OIC member countries, held from 19 to 21 November 2014. The purpose was to share analyses of and experiences regarding non-tariff barriers in African OIC member countries, and to propose actions and opportunities for their reduction. ECA presented a paper on non-tariff barriers in Africa and co-chaired debates on other sub-themes. The paper attracted great interest from participants and contributed to fulfilling the objectives of the seminar. In the paper, ECA gave specific details on the non-tariff barriers most widely used in Africa, the importance and relevance of the data included in the various Assessing Regional Integration in Africa reports and the survey conducted in September 2014 by the Subregional Office for North Africa on transport and trade facilitation in North Africa, the measures taken by the regional economic communities on non-tariff barriers, and the opportunities offered by the BIAT/CFTA programme. At the request of the participants, part of the general debate at the end of the seminar focused on the ECA initiative to design an index on regional integration in Africa.

56. At the invitation of the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies of Morocco, the Office actively participated in the external review of the report on the thematic study entitled “Morocco-Mauritania relations: current situation and prospects”, on 11 December 2014. The external review made it possible to examine and enrich the report, particularly its “diagnosis” and recommendations, with a view to strengthening regional integration in North Africa.

IV. Strategic partnerships

57. In addition to the partnership of the Office with AMU (see section II.B above) through the multi-year cooperation programmes, its partnership with other United Nations agencies on economic and social development and regional integration in North Africa through the Subregional Coordination Mechanism (see section II.B above) and its participation in the work of the United Nations country teams, the Office secured other strategic partnerships for the implementation of specific projects. Those collaborative partnerships were established with United Nations regional commissions, namely, the Economic Commission for Europe and ESCWA.

A. Partnership with the Economic Commission for Europe

58. The ECA Subregional Office for North Africa entered into a partnership with the Economic Commission for Europe for the implementation of the project entitled “Strengthening the capacities of developing countries and of countries with economies in transition to facilitate border-crossing procedures, cooperation and regional integration”. The aim of the project is to strengthen the capacities of developing countries and of countries with economies in transition to facilitate border crossings by increasing secure electronic sharing of information among customs administrations. It is also aimed at helping to secure the supply chain and public revenue from the international transport of goods. The project is further aimed at expanding cooperation among customs administrations and promoting the use of standard international electronic messages, in particular for transit-related operations. The project will end on 31 December 2015.

B. Partnership with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

59. The Office took part in the twentieth meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism of ESCWA, held in Beirut on 11 December 2014. Participants in the meeting agreed on the necessity to strengthen cooperation between the Regional Coordination Mechanism of ESCWA and the Subregional Coordination Mechanism of the Subregional Office for North Africa. The impact of global processes on regional priority issues (post-2015 development agenda), improving coordination in addressing priority issues (justice in times of crisis) and the creation of an environment that facilitates regional integration featured among the most prominent topics of discussion. A session was also devoted to discussing the progress made by the thematic groups of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (working groups on climate change, migration, the Millennium Development Goals, statistics and food security) and to sharing information on future key events.

60. It should also be underlined that the Office contributed to an expert group meeting held by ESCWA for the review and validation of the regional report on the identification of legislative gaps affecting the full application in the Arab countries of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. The study involved seven countries, including Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. The meeting was also an occasion to highlight African good practices and their impact on women’s participation in the peace and security processes. Following the meeting, the Office plans to organize, sometime in 2015/2016, two workshops on capacity-building addressing the four parts of resolution 1325 (2000), intended for parliamentarians from the countries that were studied.

61. The Office also participated in the Arab Consultative Meeting on an Accountability Framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, held in Tunis on 15 and 16 September 2014. The aim of the meeting was the implementation of a mechanism for accountability in the Arab region. Recommendations referred to, among other things, the need to build the monitoring and evaluation capacity of national institutions and to initiate the development of a sustainable development index. The Office took the opportunity to share the results of the ECA African consultative meeting on the accountability framework for the post-2015 agenda, held in Addis Ababa on 21 and 22 August 2014.

V. Status report on the implementation of the recommendations made at the twenty-ninth meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts

62. The implementation of the recommendations of the twenty-ninth meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts adopted by ECA was an integral part of the ECA2014 work programme. Several of those recommendations were addressed in part II of the present report. However, to comply with the express request of member States, reference is made below to some of the achievements:

A. Using official sources produced by public authorities, including national statistics offices and public accounts, as the principle source for country profiles.

63. The Office has pursued its approach of giving priority to national data sources as a base for its policy analyses. Alongside formal and informal consultations with the national statistics offices of its seven member States, the Office is working in conjunction with the African Centre for Statistics towards the signing of cooperation agreements for the supply of the primary source data and the introduction of a technical assistance facility for the member States in the field of statistics.

B. Integrating into the country profiles an analysis of country vulnerability to climate change and an assessment of the economic and social impact of natural disasters

64. The country profiles prepared during the period under review do not yet include this dimension, but it is nevertheless envisioned that, as part of the 2015 objectives, this area will be given particular attention. As mentioned above, the Office supports AMU in the implementation of its action plan to combat desertification. Under that project an impact analysis will be conducted, and the results thereof will be used to provide relevant information for the thematic section of country profiles, albeit initially only for those of AMU member States. In any case, the Office is working closely with the African Climate Change Policy Centre and United Nations specialized agencies to increase its ability to identify the economic and social impact of natural disasters on the countries of the subregion.

C. Initiating, jointly with relevant institutions, a study on regional value chains

65. The study was launched and validated at an expert meeting held in Rabat (see section II.B above).

VI. Challenges, lessons learned and outlooks for 2015

66. The internal restructuring process of ECA, initiated in September 2012, reached its maturity phase during the period under review. The process has already led to the publication of different strategies adopted by ECA with a view to achieving its goals. The initial years of implementation show that although the outlook is good, many challenges remain, namely: the ability of ECA to determine how best to work effectively with the member States on the issue of data; the capacity of AMU to mobilize both human and financial resources for integration; and the impact of the political and social conditions of the subregion on the Office's capacity to deliver results.

A. Capacity-building for Arab Maghreb Union member States

67. It should be noted that during the period under review, the Office received very positive feedback from its clients. Its efforts have also been recognized and appreciated by the United Nations country teams, which stressed the active participation of ECA experts in their work, along with the ongoing advocacy work of ECA towards making the regional dimension a main component of United Nations action in North Africa.

B. Capacity of the Arab Maghreb Union and implementation of the multi-year cooperation programme

68. The challenging situation relating to the capacities of the General Secretariat of AMU did not show much improvement during the period under review. The General Secretariat is still faced with an inadequate allocation of human resources to carry out its difficult task, and requires more resource predictability to fulfil its mandate. The situation is at the root of the increased need of the General Secretariat for more support from its partners, including ECA. The Office mobilized current and potential partners for integration in North Africa at two major meetings; during various interactions with United Nations institutions and other regional partners, it stressed repeatedly the need to strongly support the subregional institution that is AMU. The Subregional Office believes that the signing of the memorandum of understanding between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and AMU is an important first step, along with the increase in the support given to AMU by the African Development Bank.

69. The study prepared by ECA on the feasibility of an independent financing mechanism of AMU also falls within the scope of the formulation of sustainable responses to the problem of the lack of capacities of the AMU institutions. The achievement of the desired results will however ultimately depend on a high-level decision of the statutory bodies of AMU and on a more sustained commitment of the States.

C. Political and social conditions of the region

70. The work of ECA and, more importantly, the growth and development of North Africa, were impeded by the political instability that continued in a large part of North Africa.

71. While the transition period was completed in Tunisia, as evidenced by the various elections that were conducted successfully, and, despite some difficulties, Egypt has seen some improvement in its political and social situation, uncertainties still remain as to the situation in Libya, which is a major economy in the subregion. The political stabilization difficulties prevailing in Libya add to major security challenges that are likely to affect the entire subregional environment.

72. The response to those challenges will require the conducting, with AMU, of a periodic review of the subregional priorities under the ECA-AMU multi-year cooperation programme, to ensure consistent alignment of the activities of the Office with the expectations of its member countries.