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Ad Hoc Experts Meeting

Rio+20: Progress and issues for North Africa

Rabat, Morocco, 7 March 2012

Aide – memoire

Context and justification

1. In 2009, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to hold the next United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Brazil in June 2012. This Summit to be held on 20 to 22 June 2012, 20 years after the adoption of Agenda 21 has set itself three major objectives:

- ✓ Renewed political commitment for sustainable development;
- ✓ Assessment of the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development
- ✓ Addressing new and emerging challenges.

The Conference will also focus on two themes:

- (i) the Green economy in the context of Sustainable Development and poverty eradication;
- (ii) the institutional and strategic framework for sustainable development.

2. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), plays a key role in supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development programme at regional and sub-regional level, in accordance with the mandate given it by the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the UN General Assembly. It acts in particular through the Committee on Food Security and Sustainable Development, set up in 2007 by the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. This committee is the framework for the assessment of progress to date in the implementation sustainable development commitments. The ECA set up the biannual report on Sustainable Development in Africa as a monitoring and advocacy. In 2011 the ECA published its fourth report on the theme “Managing the natural resource base for sustainable development in Africa” and has just started preparation of the fifth edition devoted to green growth.

3. To support Africa in preparing for the conference, the ECA has since 2010, in close collaboration with the regional and sub-regional organizations and development partners, in particular the African Development Bank, the UNDP, UNEP and UNDESA, been steering the African preparatory process for RIO+20 which has involved:

- ✓ producing a number of reports on: implementation of SD, the strategic and institutional frameworks, the emerging challenges, climate change and the green economy;
- ✓ organizing regional and meetings to facilitate consultations and coordination;
- ✓ Preparing a joint African declaration for Rio+20 which will be put forward for adoption at the African Union Summit in 2012.

4. Over the past decade, African countries have shown real and positive growth rates in spite of the financial and economic crisis. The overall GDP growth rate was 4.7% in 2010 and should reach 5.7% in 2011 (ECA, 2011). This improvement is not however been matched by social in terms of a lowering of unemployment, poverty and inequalities (Africa is the lowest performing region in the fight against poverty: extreme poverty has increased), in the light of high demographic growth¹. This situation also hides the ongoing exhaustion of natural resources and the increase in the level of pollution. (Economic Report on Africa 2011, ECA). Despite being plentiful and of high economic value, there is a continued deterioration of natural resources. Six of the 25 most important biodiversity sites with worldwide recognition are in Africa. The effects of climate change and ever more frequent natural catastrophes are already being felt on human resources, ecosystems and means of production (water, land, biodiversity). Land degradation is likely to continue (in some countries over 50% of the population is now living on degraded land). Food security has declined on account of natural catastrophes, low agricultural productivity, in appropriate public policies and conflicts. The food production index has risen overall but remains weak in relation to world standards.

5. In 2011, as part of the African preparatory process for Rio+20, the Arab Maghreb Union piloted, with the technical and financial support of the ECA and the African Development Bank the drafting of the sub-regional review of the implementation of Sustainable Development in North Africa. The report written by a consultant was submitted at a consultative meeting to the experts of the sub-region. Their recommendations allowed the report to be finalized. The aim of this initiative is to ensure the issues, priorities and expectations of the sub-region will be taken into account in the outcomes of Rio+20.

6. The review of the situation of the activities associated with Sustainable Development in North Africa showed the progress made but also the major challenges that still exist. Poorly diversified economies, with low added value remain vulnerable in the face of shocks from outside and do not create enough sustainable jobs. According to 2010 ILO data², the average unemployment rate in North Africa is estimated at 9.8%. Youth unemployment (~23.6% in 2010) and female unemployment (15% compared with 7.8% for men) is particularly worrying. Relative poverty and inequalities persist. On an environmental level, the region is marked by the exhaustion of natural resources and the degradation of the environment. There must be sustained efforts to achieve MDG objective 7 "Ensure environmental sustainability". The impacts of climate change and natural catastrophes associated with it are already noticeable: shortage of water resources, increased desertification and land degradation, lowering of agricultural productivity.

¹ Africa has nearly a billion inhabitants, which is 15% of world population. Demographic growth is likely to remain well above the world average over the coming decades (UNFPA, 2011).

² 2011 ILO Report on North Africa: mettre les jeunes au centre des préoccupations (focusing on young people).

7. Many studies and projects have been carried out over the last three years (OECD, UNEP, ILO, UNIDO, FAO, UNCTAD, African Development Bank, UNRISD...) show that the fight against climate change and the transition to a green economy might offer solutions to deal with the challenges over the protection of the environment, efficient use of natural resources, the creation of sustainable jobs, economic diversification and promotion of industrial competitiveness. UNEP defines the green economy as an economy as one which results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities". It is therefore an economy which strengthens convergence between the three pillars of Sustainable Development. This transition however is not without risks and its success will depend on the ability of countries to implement appropriate reforms. These reforms will require a change in behaviour (sustainable practise, clean technology options), adjusting economic and regulatory instruments, in particular to support the necessary innovation, development of new financing mechanisms, consistent with national and regional strategic priorities. Greater regional integration and strengthened international partnerships supporting this approach should allow the promotion of technology transfers, reduce obstacles to exchanges and favour investment.

8. Although uncertainties and fears persist, a majority of industrialized countries appear to favour the green economy. The European Union (EU) which has just set out its new green growth strategy even takes the view that the transition to this type of economic model is an imperative. China's twelfth five-year plan (2011-2015) shows a strengthened commitment for the implementation of a green economy. For their part, developing countries fear that the green economy might be used as a pretext for the implementation of a a green protectionism by the industrialized countries "justifying" new protectionist barriers or conditions on development aid.

9. According to the latest UNEP report (2011), prospects linked to the green economy seem realistic in a number of activity sectors which have long-term potential for economic growth and definite social development (Renewable energies (RE) and energy efficiency (EE), sustainable agriculture , industry, water management, waste management, clean transportation, Finance, insurance...).

10. In this context, the region is already involved in actions in a number of fields (RE and EE, sustainable agriculture, water resource management, waste recycling, clean transportation, green cities). It must now focus on developing a more global strategy to make a better assessment of these possibilities, the challenges and reforms associated with this transition and create the conditions and framework for the development of the most profitable sectors and the involvement of all stakeholders at all levels. Although not seeing it as an urgent short-term imperative, North Africa regards the green economy as an opportunity to be seized, especially so as to promote the creation of new jobs.

Objectives of the Ad Hoc Experts Meeting

11. The main objective of the experts meeting is to strengthen the commitment for priority Sustainable Development (SD) issues and to define a better approach not limited to environmental questions alone but examining the relation between the three pillars of SD and in particular the human dimension. This will be one of the great challenges of Rio+20, especially if there is a wish to speed up progress toward the achievement of the MDG, with three years to go to the 2015 deadline.

12. The meeting is an integral part of the 27th session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts to be held on 6-9 March 2012 which includes a round table on the theme “Freeing North Africa’s potential as a centre of growth in the world”, alongside that of the next conference of African ministers for economic development. This round table will be held on 6 March 2012 and will tackle important issues relating to Sustainable Development (competitiveness, diversification, human capital, knowledge economy...). For North Africa which aims to become a regional growth hub, these are vital issues.

13. More specifically, the workshop will enable:

- An examination of progress to date, gaps and lessons drawn from the implementation of sustainable development in North Africa;
- Feedback on successful approaches to SD in North Africa;
- A discussion on priority issues in Sustainable Development and the expectations of the region in the light of Rio+20;
- Broad consultation with key stakeholders and partners on opportunities, challenges and means of action associated with transition to a green economy.

Participants

14. The meeting will bring together experts from the countries of North Africa and representatives of national institutions, the private sector, regional organizations, research centres, civil society, local communities and representatives of the United Nations system and development partners.

Workshop programme

15. The workshop will take place over a full day and a feedback session as follows:

- **Session 1: The challenges of Sustainable Development and Rio+20 expectations** (07 March 2012)

Experts will be informed of the main outcomes of the preparatory regional process started back in 2010 in Africa (ECA, African Development Bank, UNEP) and in the Arab region (ESCWA, UNEP, the Arab League). The session will also highlight lessons and successful approaches to SD in North Africa as well as its challenges. There will then be a discussion to identify the expectations of the region with regard to Rio+20.

- **Session 2: The green economy, a challenge for the promotion of sustainable growth and social integration** (07 March 2012)

The green economy is now seen as a tool promoting an integrated approach to SD. During this session, aspects dealing with economic and social opportunities of the green economy will be examined along with the associated challenges. There will be a discussion to get a better grasp of the way forward for countries to integrate this new approach in their development policies.

- **Session 3: Feedback and presentation of recommendations to the ICE** (09 March 2012)

The report of the experts meeting will be written on 08 March and the recommendations will be presented to the ICE on 09 March 2012.

Expected outcomes

16. Following the work done at the Ad Hoc Experts Meeting, the expected outcomes are as follows:

- An exchange of information on the preparatory regional process for Rio +20, progress and challenges with regard to Sustainable Development;
- A consensus on the expectations of North Africa for Rio+20;
- Guidelines for the formulation of a road map to give a better grasp of the potential and challenges of the transition to a green economy.

Output published

17. At the end of the workshop, the following will be produced and distributed.
- The workshop report which will include the main conclusions and recommendations;
 - The press releases;

Documentation and working languages

18. The programme of the experts meeting will be forwarded to all participants in due time. The workshop will be held in French, Arabic and English, with simultaneous interpretation.

Meeting dates and venue

19. The experts meeting will be held on 07 March 2012 at the Tour Hassan Hotel in Rabat, Morocco. It will take place after the round table (06 March 2012). The outcomes and the recommendations of the meeting will be presented to the ICE on 09 March 2012.

Contacts

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