

Conflict and political instability in the ESCWA region

An overview of ESCWA's activities (2010-2011)

I. EVENTS

Regional Workshop- “Public Finance Reform as a Pre-requisite for Good Governance in the ESCWA Region: A Roadmap for Modernization” (June 2010)

With the aim of promoting good governance practices and enhancing public sector transparency and accountability, ESCWA, in cooperation with the Institute of Finance-Basil Fuleihan in Lebanon (IoF), organized this workshop to initiate dialogue on the current status, challenges and pitfalls of Public Finance Management (PFM), and promote the exchange of experiences between officials of ESCWA's member countries involved in conducting PFM reforms in their respective countries. Participants were presented with the latest processes and standards used in planning and implementing PFM reforms, including sequencing reforms, legal and institutional pre-requisites to conduct a successful reform project, working tools to be developed, common pitfalls of PFM reforms and others. The Workshop witnessed the participation of twenty governmental entities concerned with PFM from 12 different ESCWA countries. The Workshop succeeded in initiating regional exchange and cooperation in the field of PFM reforms, and concluded with key recommendations to improve PFM at regional level.

Special Event- “International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People” (November 2010)

With the aim of expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people, ESCWA, in cooperation with Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with relevant GA resolutions, including resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977 and 64/17 of 21 January 2010. The event comprised of an official ceremony, a panel discussion and a handicrafts exhibition, aiming to raise awareness on Palestinian rights and the role of the United Nations regarding the Question of Palestine. The observance day commemoration was held at the United Nations House in Beirut on 29 November. During the official ceremony, the message of the United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Ban-Ki Moon was delivered by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Lebanon, the statement of ESCWA was delivered by its Executive Secretary, the statement of Lebanon was delivered by a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the statement

of Palestine was delivered by the Minister of Planning and Administrative Development. The Panel Discussion entitled “Efforts to Attain Palestinian Rights” was moderated by Lebanese MP Bahiya al-Hariri. Panelists included the OHCHR Regional Representative for the Middle East, the Director of the Institute for Palestinian Studies, the Director of UNRWA affairs in Lebanon Field Office, the Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development and the Minister of Planning and Administrative Development of the Palestinian Authority. Arab and foreign ambassadors, diplomats and heads of UN agencies in Lebanon, as well as civil society representatives, academics and experts, participated in the ceremony. This event presented an ample opportunity to display the commitment of the UN to the attainment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. It also provided a platform for the Palestinian Authority and the Lebanese government to present their views. In addition, the commemoration was an opportunity for various stakeholders to visit the various means and efforts exerted to attain Palestinian rights.

Expert Group Meeting- “Governance and Conflict Relapse” in Beirut, Lebanon (May 2011)

The Expert Group Meeting (EGM) “Governance and Conflict Relapse” brought together experts in the field of governance and development to examine the constant pattern of intermittent conflicts and its ramifications.. Consequently, the first session of the expert group meeting examined the topics of governance deficit and conflict relapse, as the ESCWA region has been unable to escape what Paul Collier denotes as “the conflict trap” generated by economic rents that create vested interests; sectarian, tribal and ethnic affiliations that remain solid; strong anti-state actors and weak state institutions that abound and foreign interests and regional polarization that hamper national consensus. Experts examined trends of conflict and their relation to governance, exploring ways to break out of the conflict trap, while ensuring a peaceful democratic transition. There was a consensus that peace, stability, accountable governance and efficient and productive state institutions require a genuine process of national reconciliation and democratization. ESCWA suggested concentrating on mainstreaming good governance practices within public institutions dedicated to provide essential service delivery, such as health, education, water, electricity and transport, are to the benefit of everyone, regardless of political or ideological association.

In session two, participants debated whether the provision of essential services could act as a catalyst for peace and whether it could yield common ground if the necessary political will were to be mobilized to that very effect. Session three focused on incentives that could lead national actors and ruling elites to endorse good governance practices within specific national state institutions mandated with developmental functions. Participants’ recommendations underscored the need to look at both conflict and governance as a regional phenomenon, to employ and educate youth to prevent conflict relapse and ensure that development practitioners coordinate aid with national governments, while guaranteeing the development of indigenous governance practices.

Technical Meeting- “Workshop on Macroeconomic Simulations for Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Achievements” in Beirut, Lebanon (September 2011)

The Technical Meeting on “Macroeconomic Simulations for MDG Achievements” brought together experts in the economics field to consider the usage of innovative analytical tools, such as MAMs (Maquette for MDG Simulation), in achieving the MDGs and putting forth economy-wide strategies to aid policies on social and economic performance. Participants discussed the main findings of recent studies conducted in the Arab region on the feasibility of achieving the MDGs under different financing scenarios and how to address possible macroeconomic trade-offs emerging from scaling up public spending for the MDGs. For example, several key policy issues laid forth included assessments of the impact of basic price shocks on the MDG achievement and costing and assessment of the macroeconomic and poverty reduction implications of the implementation of large-scale infrastructure investment plans. Recommendations revolved around the need to create policy coherence by identifying macroeconomic trade-offs and assess the options to offset possible trade-offs. MAMS analyses could help guide the decision-making process by quantifying said trade-offs and suggesting where to seek greater policy coherence. Also, alternative presentations of findings- such as briefings on budget implications of alternative scenarios, policy briefs, presentations, or hands-on sessions to fine tune simulations- could be means to identify or organize (multi-stakeholder) platforms for policy dialogue where some results can be discussed.

Expert Group Meeting- “Sustainable Development under Crisis Conditions: Conflict and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG)” in Beirut, Lebanon (September 2011)

The Expert Group Meeting “Sustainable Development under Crisis Conditions: Conflict and the MDGs” was aimed at bringing together experts in the field of conflict and development in order to provide significant inputs into the debate of the conflict-MDG nexus, particularly in the Middle East region. The meeting examined the relationship between MDGs specifically and development more generally, including conflict onset, perpetuation and relapse. Participants offered a number of recommendations pertinent to said nexus in the ESCWA region underscoring the need to look at both conflict and MDGs as joint rather than separate issues.

II. FIELD PROJECTS

Field project- “Support to Decentralization and Local Governance for Service Delivery in Iraq” programme (June 2011)

The project involved a consortium of implementing UN agencies alongside relevant Government of Iraq institutions and aimed at addressing the different dimensions of fiscal, functional and political decentralization, and at presenting the Government of Iraq with policy

recommendations to enhance the decentralized framework and related governance structures in place. ESCWA's component of the project comprised the undertaking of an in-depth situation analysis on local governance and e-governance covering all governorates councils and selected district and municipal councils in the prospect of improving work efficiency and enhancing coordination across sectors with relevant line ministries and other central and local level institutions to ensure effective accountability, and institutional arrangements for participatory planning. ESCWA also strived to strengthen the role of local government as an actor for change and development and implemented series of capacity building activities that included exchange visits and study missions. The programme succeeded in establishing regional and international linkages with municipalities and concerned bodies and institutions, but also in facilitating networking and sharing of experiences and knowledge in the field.

The programme culminated in the organization of the first National Conference on Decentralization and Local Governance that took place in Erbil, Iraq. The conference aimed at presenting and validating the findings and recommendations of the undertaken Situation Analysis, which was implemented by ESCWA alongside selected national partners, and which evaluated the existing decentralized and governance infrastructure in Iraq and yielded policy recommendations. More than 120 participants from federal, regional and local governments, alongside representatives of Iraqi parliament, including H.E. Dr. Barham Saleh, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister, civil society and private sector participated.

“Iraq Public Sector Modernization Programme” (I-PSM) (December 2011)

The “Iraq Public Sector Modernisation (I-PSM) Programme” is a United Nations Country Team (UNCT) led and implemented programme aiming at supporting the Government of Iraq in modernizing its public sector by adopting a reform strategy and piloting its implementation in three selected social service sectors that most significantly impact the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, namely the sectors of health, education, and domestic water supply and sanitation. The first phase of the programme consists in an in-depth assessment endeavour that is expected to support the development of the most suitable and adaptable modernization strategy based on Iraq's reality.

ESCWA's component contributes to devising options and strategies enabling citizens' participation and public-private partnerships for enhanced service delivery, in addition to identifying and promoting mechanisms improving participation and inclusiveness in decision making, and effective local accountability and participatory planning in service delivery. In this prospect, in-depth field assessment on participation mechanisms, perception levels among constituents and private-public partnerships for service delivery were performed.

In addition, ESCWA's activities also facilitate the exposure of Iraqi decision makers and concerned stakeholders to success models and lessons learned with the aim of instigating policy

and strategy development for the identification of a comprehensive and adapted modernization plan across the Iraqi public sector. ESCWA planned and organized study missions targeting senior governmental decision makers and concerned national counterparts, on the topics of “Senior Executive Service”, “Public-Private Partnership (PPP)”, “Local Governance and Participation” and “Public Sector Modernization (PSM)”. The study missions’ aim at exposing beneficiaries to success stories and best practices pertaining to the mentioned subjects in the prospect of supporting the modernization of the public service through the introduction of new techniques and tools.

“Promoting Civic Values and Life Skills for Adolescents (12 to 19 years old) through education Programme” (Ongoing – Forecasted completion date: 31 Dec 2012)

The programme has been devised by ESCWA based on its monitoring of regional trends, and on several analytical activities performed, which led to identifying youth as the entry point for nation building and peace building in post-conflict contexts. Since early 2010, ESCWA has joined efforts with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in an endeavour to mainstream civic values and like skills among youth and concerned stakeholders utilizing educational mediums in an attempt to facilitate and improve the quality of education and reach vulnerable and marginalized groups, as well as enhance youth personal and social skills.

Through introducing the concepts of civic values, citizenship and tolerance, alongside with life skills, the project supports Iraq in developing further its educational curricula, which would shield youth from violence and confessional discord. By exposing Iraqi decision makers, educators and youth to these concepts and skills, ESCWA would be contributing to reinforce a sense of “national identity”, citizenship, promoting human rights, instigating a culture of tolerance and acceptance of the other within the different factions of the Iraqi social fabric, thus reducing on the long term the risk of internal conflict and ethnic and sectarian violence.

ESCWA has performed a perception assessment and comprehensive survey covering all involved stakeholders and identified entry points and focus areas that should be stressed upon through the institutional capacity building activities that are planned. ESCWA and its Iraqi and international partners have completed the perception assessment, which comprised 14 focus group discussions targeting youth, educators and parents, in addition to more than 500 interviews. The conclusions of the assessment were invested in the development of a specific action plan for the promotion of civic values and life skills on the national level. This Action Plan was developed based on a national assessment and with national input. It is expected to serve as the framework for the specific educational, training and awareness raising materials and curricula that will be developed but also as an advocacy tool for public sector officials in reforming the educational curricula.

III. PUBLICATIONS

Parliamentary Documentation- “Report on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan” (May 2010)

ESCWA prepared the Secretary General’s report on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan that was presented at the GA and ECOSOC, reconfirming its commitment of providing annual reporting to the Assembly and the Council on the socio-economic conditions of Palestinians in OPT and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan. It is noteworthy that this report was mandated by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2009/34, to be submitted to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session, through the Council, as a report on the implementation of that resolution. Moreover, the General Assembly, in its resolution 65/185, also requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to it at its sixty-fifth session. The report raised awareness on the dire conditions of the Palestinian people, as a result of the measures and practices of the Israeli occupation and the ongoing conflict. It presented updates and mapped the repercussion of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the use of arbitrary detention, disproportionate use of force, property destruction, home demolitions, mobility restrictions, lack of building permits, the building of a barrier, the expansion of settlements and closure policies were identified as a major obstacles continuing to intensify economic and social hardships of the Palestinian people in the occupied territory.

Parliamentary Documentation- “Human and Institutional Capacity Building: Prioritizing Institutional Development in the ESCWA region: Towards a Modernized Public Sector” (May 2010)

In this paper, ESCWA worked on analyzing the strong correlation between modernization of the public sector and development. The paper succeeded in providing representatives of member states during the 26th Ministerial Session of ESCWA with a set of policy recommendations to be implemented at the earlier stages in the process of administrative reform thus improving the outcome of the reform efforts. Among the recommendations listed were: encouraging actors involvement in reform decisions; improving collected diagnostic data; providing special training for public servants, and others responsible for managing reform; soliciting unwavering political will and commitment; developing incentive systems; and replacing the existing lack of trust in the public sector with a supportive attitude of a mobilized public. These recommendations could constitute a set of preliminary strategic approaches and act as catalysts instigating institutional development and ultimately resulting into the modernization of the public sector and a general development within ESCWA.

Non-recurrent Publication- “Food Security and Conflict in the ESCWA Region” (September 2010)

This study was prepared as part of a series of publications aimed at analyzing the socio-economic impact of conflict and its spillover effects on food insecurity in the ESCWA region. It argues that conflict-affected countries and territories can promote food security nationally and that the nexus between conflict and food insecurity can be broken through the provision of new economic opportunities. The publication analyzes sectoral and country-level policies and explores regional policy options while identifying data gaps and opportunities for further research, stressing that food security and conflict are intertwined regional issues. To that point, the study finds that the required solutions must involve a coordinated international, and more importantly, regional approach. It includes policy recommendations for Iraq, Palestine, the Sudan and Yemen as well as the region and the international community on the development of national and regional policies and programs to support food security while mitigating the impact of conflict.

Parliamentary Documentation- “Report on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan” (May 2011)

ESCWA prepared the report of the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population of the occupied Syrian Golan for 2010.

The report indicates that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, continues to constrain the existence and successful functioning of institutions of the Palestinian Authority and contribute to the economic and social hardship of Palestinians. This includes the Israeli army’s continued resort to arbitrary detention, disproportionate use of force, settlement expansion, property destruction, home demolitions, mobility restrictions, restriction of building permits and closure policies. The report also reports facts, figures and statistics that reflect the social and economic repercussions of the occupation, as well as the practices that exacerbate the living conditions of Palestinians and Syrians living under occupation.

Non-Recurrent Publication- “The Governance Deficit and Conflict Relapse in the ESCWA Region: An Overview” (August 2011)

The post-colonial socio-political landscape of the region encompassing ESCWA has witnessed a seemingly endless conflict, fragile peace (in an often temporary post-conflict era) and constant heightened levels of political tensions both within and between national borders. The study advocates that conflicts, political tensions, rentier economies and parochial systems of

governance have greatly undermined social cohesion and justice, inclusive growth, economic diversification, access to natural resources and -indeed- peace itself.

The study suggests that a series of mutually reinforcing interacting variables are the driving forces of a vicious cycle of governance deficit, conflict relapse and de-development. The link between development, governance and conflict is investigated through two proxy indicators- infant mortality and education (the proportion of the population that has attained secondary education). Given the differentiated impact of conflict and heterogeneous governance challenges in the 14 ESCWA member countries, they are grouped into 3 categories: “conflict countries”, “spillover countries”, and “indirectly affected countries”. Countries that are directly affected by conflict score relatively poorly with respect to the governance indicators utilized in the study. Other conflict-affected countries have seen some improvement in terms of governance but still underperform in terms of their governance outcomes in relationship to other countries with similar income levels around the world. Indeed, conflict and its spillover effects, cultures of discrimination and impunity, socio-economic marginalization and unemployment are important to consider when studying the link between conflict, development and governance in the ESCWA region. So is a thorough understanding of local and regional realities.

Following an empirical analysis of the seven governance variables and the risk of conflict relapse, the study reveals that the risk of conflict recurrence is considerably lower in countries with good governance. Five years after a conflict ends, the risk of recurrence is negligible in a country with governance levels at par with developed democracies. In countries with poor governance, it takes 15–20 years to achieve the same reduction in risk. Furthermore, the analysis in the study shows a positive correlation between repression levels and risk of conflict onset, and a positive correlation between onset of conflict in the neighborhood and conflict risk. The results indicate that education reduces the risk of conflict relapse also in the short run.

The ESCWA and North Africa regions, according to the study’s findings, will see a sharp decrease in the incidence of internal conflict over the next decades. In fact, if utilized development variables (namely infant mortality, education and the age composition of the population) and the conflict history of countries are sufficient to accurately predict conflict, this region is likely to see a stronger reduction in the incidence of conflict than any other region in the world.

The study concludes by suggesting two strategic avenues that are well placed to break the governance deficit and conflict trap and by highlighting the importance of a concerted-coordinated international assistance with a long term commitment by donors and development practitioners that aims at building effective and efficient state institution that are in line with a national development vision and aspirations and ensure the development of indigenous good governance practices that are tailored to local needs and aspirations.

Recurrent Publication- “Trends and Impacts in Conflict Settings: Conflict and MDGs. Issue no. 2” (October 2011)

This paper aims to study the conflict – development nexus within the prism of the ESCWA region, paying particular attention to its five conflict-affected member states; Iraq, Lebanon, the occupied Palestine territory, Sudan and Yemen. To that point, it specifically addresses the exogenous and endogenous relationship between conflict and the MDGs encapsulating development.

The study’s findings include that one year of civil war in the ESCWA region yields a significantly higher penalty on the income of an affected country above and beyond the effect of a single year of an inter-state war and that of the non-ESCWA world. Another contribution of this publication is highlighting the cost of conflict going beyond income effects to include their direct developmental effects. The study also separates out civil wars from inter-state wars and shows that differences in developmental outcomes can be caused by different types of conflicts. Finally, it introduces a composite index and appropriate theoretical budgetary responses for better understanding the factors contributing to conflict, development, and shortfalls in MDG attainments. To that point, the study concludes that the five conflict affected countries will not be able to achieve the MDG targets by 2015 but proposes recommendations to accelerate their progression towards meeting the goals.

Technical Paper- “Good Governance in Conflict Affected Arab Countries: A Regional Perspective towards a New Paradigm” (October 2011)

The technical paper titled “Good Governance in Conflict Affected Arab Countries: A Regional Perspective towards a New Paradigm” provides a situational analysis regarding governance in conflict affected Arab countries from a regional perspective. Specifically, it investigates the governance deficit and institutional weaknesses that permeate these countries and asks whether it is an outcome of conflict or a precursor to it. The technical paper alludes to the presence of both, indicating the existence of a negative endogenous relationship between conflict and governance. The paper concludes with recommendations for improved governance as a tool for improved socio-economic performances as well as ending not just conflict but strengthening peace building efforts in post-conflict situations.

IV. CONTRIBUTION TO JOINT OUTPUTS

“Strengthening national capacity for the integration of sustainable development principles into development strategies in countries emerging from conflict”

In 2010, based on consultations with ESCWA, Lebanon was selected as a pilot country under the Division for Sustainable Development Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)’s Developing

Account Project I-ROA 105 “Strengthening national capacity for the integration of sustainable development principles into development strategies in countries emerging from conflict”.

Under said project, ESCWA produced the report “Review and Assessment of Capacity for Sustainable Development in Lebanon” to highlight the achievements and challenges of planning, drafting and implementing national strategies and policies that would integrate sustainable development and peace building approaches, in Lebanon’s political context. ESCWA also organized a Stakeholder Consultation Workshop, “Strengthening Capacity to Utilize Sustainable Development Principles in National Policy-Making in Lebanon”, which gathered key stakeholders from government, NGOs and UN agencies to promote trans-sectoral dialogue on national sustainable development policy-making in Lebanon. Of noteworthy mention is the presence of a representative of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers to address the attendees’ concerns and to encourage dialogue between the different stakeholders on how to effectively promote sustainable development in Lebanon. Also, ESCWA produced the report “Guidance Notes and Recommendations for Sustainable Development Planning in Lebanon” which built upon the initial report’s findings, the recommendations ensued from the workshop, face-to-face consultations with several Lebanese partners and stakeholders that took place in August 2011 and the “Guidance Notes for Developing National Sustainable Development Strategies” developed by DESA – and addressed some of the gaps that Lebanon currently faces in sustainable development such as inter-ministerial collaboration, the inclusion of social and environmental aspects in sustainable development strategies and the inclusion of civil society in the design of said strategies.