



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

Expert Group Meeting on Harnessing Technology for Enhanced
Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Productivity and Competitiveness

Cairo, Egypt, 3-4 November 2007

INFORMATION NOTE

I. BACKGROUND

1. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the Arab Science and Technology Foundation (ASTF), are organizing an Expert Group Meeting on Harnessing Technology for Enhanced Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Productivity and Competitiveness on 3 and 4 November 2007 in Cairo, Egypt. The expert group meeting will be held concurrently and in complementarity with the Made in the Arab World Competition finals, that are being organized by the ASTF.

2. The expert group meeting is being conducted by ESCWA as part of its activities aimed at improving the performance and competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by facilitating their access to new technologies and innovative practices. The Made in the Arab World Competition Finals are the outcome of a series of national competitions aimed at directing research and development activities in the Arab world towards real technology and industry needs in a way to deliver business-oriented results. For more information on the competition, see <http://www.astf.net/mia>.

II. JUSTIFICATION

3. Most enterprises in the ESCWA region are of small and medium size. SMEs in the ESCWA region dominate economic activities in numerous services and manufacturing sectors and are major sources of income and employment. However, SMEs in the region suffer from low productivity and weak competitiveness and face constant survival pressures, a situation which is further aggravated by the rapidly changing arena of international trade and increasingly demanding market preferences.

4. The role of technology in enhancing SME competitiveness and productivity has been widely demonstrated. However, technology deployment by an SME is a difficult task, which may be hampered by the lack of competent technical and managerial human resources, low access to research and development, costly access to finance, as well as an inadequate legal framework. Public and private sector initiatives and instruments at the national and regional level can thus help SMEs to integrate production and process technologies into their business operations so as to strengthen their competitiveness in both domestic and international markets.

III. OBJECTIVES

5. In view of the above, the regional expert group meeting will seek to discuss institutional, legal, financial, and policy frameworks to overcome market failures and barriers associated with technology deployment among SMEs. Participants from the member countries will be invited to share their country experiences in terms of national policies and initiatives being undertaken to support technological development among SMEs. In addition, the expert group meeting will focus on mechanisms for strengthening SME competitiveness through linkages into value-added chains of production. Special

emphasis will also be placed on standards as instruments for motivating innovation and adaptation of technology. Finally, the expert group meeting will provide an opportunity for outlining successful technology tools for improving SME productivity at all stages of the production process.

6. It is expected that discussions among experts at the meeting will foster linkages and greater understanding about institutions and instruments for assisting SMEs to access, adopt and adapt new technologies. Outcomes of the expert group meeting will also contribute to the preparation of regional projects and activities being formulated and implemented by ESCWA, the ASTF and other regional and international organizations in the short term.

IV. MAIN TOPICS

7. The expert group meeting will examine and discuss:

- Policy and institutional frameworks as well as national and regional initiatives for assisting SMEs to access information on technology transfer opportunities, business linkages and support for innovation.
- Applications and instruments for assisting SMEs to harness technologies, such as models for improving the ability of SMEs to integrate into global markets through the use of new technologies in key sectors, and ways to integrate technology into SME production processes.

V. PARTICIPANTS

8. ESCWA has invited government representatives from ministries responsible for SME policy-making and development from each ESCWA Member State to participate in the expert group meeting, including representatives from ministries of industry, finance, economy, trade and technology. Private sector associations, non-governmental organizations and regional organizations engaged in SME issues related to technology and sustainable development are also invited to participate.

9. The meeting will be supported by international and regional experts in the fields of SME development, entrepreneurship, innovation and technology, as well as private sector representatives.

VI. DATE, VENUE AND DURATION

10. The two-day expert group meeting will be conducted at the JW Marriott Hotel in Cairo, Egypt from 3 to 4 November 2007. The meeting will be held concurrently with the Made in the Arab World Competition finals, which may be attended by participants in the expert group meeting.

VII. LANGUAGE

11. The expert group meeting will be conducted in the English language, with limited interventions made in Arabic.

VIII. LOGISTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

12. ESCWA will cover the cost of travel and provide a daily subsistence allowance for one delegated representative from the public sector unit responsible for SME development in each ESCWA member country. Additional participants are expected to cover their own expenses.

13. Room reservations can be made upon request by returning the meeting registration form to ESCWA. Reservations will be made at the JW Marriott Hotel or a nearby hotel in Heliopolis in the outskirts of Cairo.

IX. DOCUMENTATION

14. Delegated representatives of ministries responsible for SME support programs are invited to make a five to ten minute presentation on current and planned national policies and initiatives designed to support the integration and use of technology to enhance SME competitiveness and productivity. Presentations may be prepared in the Arabic or English language. Powerpoint presentations are preferred. Presentations should be submitted by 10 October 2007 to Ms. Carol Chouchani Cherfane at ESCWA by e-mail (chouchanicherfane@un.org) in order to ensure its inclusion in the final meeting agenda and to allow for the distribution of the presentation at the meeting.

15. Background documents for the expert group meeting include the following:

- Background paper on Harnessing Technology for Enhanced SME Productivity and Competitiveness
- Technology Transfer to Small and Medium Sized Enterprises and Identifying Opportunities for Domestic and Foreign Direct Investment in Selected Sectors (ESCWA study, available at: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/information/publications/edit/upload/sdpd-05-6.pdf>)
- ESCWA Technology Center for Development (Information and pre-feasibility study available at: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/ictd/etc/main.asp>)
- Potential of Manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises for Innovation in Selected ESCWA Countries (ESCWA study, available at: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/information/publications/edit/upload/id-01-2-e.pdf>)

Full documentation will be provided to participants at the expert group meeting. Meeting documents and presentations will also be available on the ESCWA website at the following link: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=406E>.

X. COMMUNICATIONS

16. All correspondence concerning the expert group meeting should be addressed to:

Ms. Anhar Hegazi
Director
Sustainable Development & Productivity Division
ESCWA
United Nations House – P.O. Box 11-8575
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel: (961-1) 869-666, ext. 6547 (direct)
or (961-1) 981-301(ESCWA switchboard)
Fax: (961-1) 981-510 / 511 / 512
E-mail: hegazi@un.org
Web: www.escwa.org.lb

Ms. Carol Chouchani Cherfane
Acting Team Leader
Technology and Enterprise Development Team
Sustainable Development & Productivity Division
ESCWA
United Nations House – P.O. Box 11-8575
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel: (961-1) 869-666, ext. 7573 (direct)
or (961-3) 769-466 (mobile)
Fax: (961-1) 981-510 / 511 / 512
E-mail: chouchanicherfane@un.org
Web : www.escwa.org.lb