

Introduction

1. The role played by national science and technology (S and T) capabilities in meeting the challenges and making optimal use of the opportunities posed by regional, as well as global changes cannot be overemphasized.
2. Most ESCWA member countries have taken concrete steps toward building essential components of their national S and T systems. Efforts have so far focused on setting up institutions of higher learning and limited infrastructural arrangements. Only a small number of countries have, in fact, formulated explicit S and T policies. An even smaller group of countries have managed to link their S and T policies to national development plans and custom-designed initiatives aimed at their implementation.
3. Recent experiences in both developed and developing countries clearly indicate that achieving sustainable objectives in technological capacity-building in today's knowledge-based global economy requires new strategic initiatives and fresh means for their implementation. Enhanced competition, vanishing trade barriers, more stringent intellectual property regimes and deeper concern for a wide variety of economic, social and environmental concerns are all factors that, of necessity, must go into shaping the substance of such interventions and the design of corresponding implementation modalities.
4. The formulation of initiatives aimed at enhancing S and T capacity in specific priority areas is, therefore, an issue of primary importance for the ESCWA member countries. Integrating such initiatives within existing and evolving policy frameworks constitutes another urgent need for many ESCWA member countries, as does the reviewing of methodologies designed for their implementation and follow-up.
5. This ESCWA Meeting was designed to build upon results achieved through previous ESCWA activities with the aim of enhancing technological capabilities in its member countries. In particular, its intention was:
 - (a) To review the variety of cross-cutting and generic S and T capacity-building initiatives;
 - (b) To examine the design of initiatives for technological capacity-building in specific high-technology areas and for special applications;
 - (c) To improve the performance of business enterprises through upgrading core business functions;
 - (d) To provide concerned institutions in the member countries with guidelines for the design of their own S and T initiatives.
6. The Meeting targeted the principal national and local policy-making bodies and included the participation of high-level decision makers from governmental and non-governmental institutions. Private sector institutions from production and concerned service sectors also attended the Meeting and contributed to its proceedings.
7. Practical aspects of setting up special initiatives aimed at S and T capacity-building in areas of priority concern for the largest possible group of member countries were addressed with a view to enhancing future cooperation among concerned institutions.
8. The Meeting's contributions and discussion sessions stressed initiatives aimed at improving productivity, quality and competitiveness of private sector enterprise. They also addressed the design of initiatives that ensure:
 - (a) The introduction and dissemination of selected new and advanced technologies for the benefit of selected sectors of priority concern for the member countries;
 - (b) Involvement by the private sector in acquiring, implementing and disseminating new technology inputs;

(c) Maximizing benefits for the private sector, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), from national S and T infrastructure-building initiatives;

(d) The institution of modalities that allow coordination of S and T capacity-building efforts at the national, regional and international levels;

(e) “Technology blending”, with a view to improved competitiveness, productivity and environmental compatibility in traditional manufacturing and services activities.

9. The Meeting was held with substantive and financial support from a number of United Nations agencies and regional and national organizations. In particular, the Cairo office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Arab School for Science and Technology and the National Council for Scientific Research of Lebanon participated in and supported the Meeting.