



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



البرنامج السعودي
لتنمية وإعمار اليمن

The Saudi Development and
Reconstruction Program for Yemen

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Report

Regional Meeting with Government Representatives from Arab Least Developed Countries, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen, and Regional and International Partners on Assessing the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) as Part of Building the Agenda for the Next Decade for Least Developed Countries, 18 February 2021

Summary

The Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 (IPoA) is coming to an end. The overarching goal of the IPoA was to overcome the structural challenges faced by least developed countries (LDCs) in order to eradicate poverty, achieve the internationally agreed development goals and enable graduation from the least developed country category. The Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (UNLDC-V) will be held from 23 to 27 January 2022 in Doha, Qatar, and will be preceded by a comprehensive preparatory process based on national, regional and global reviews of the IPoA. This conference is closely related to ESCWA's work as a new programme of action for LDCs will be adopted. This new programme will be designed to cover the remaining 10 years of the 2030 Agenda's implementation period. It is therefore of particular importance to each LDC member of this regional commission, as well as to donors of development assistance. The conference is expected to conduct a comprehensive review and assessment of the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) in each of the LDCs, as well as at sub-regional and regional levels. Best practice, lessons learned and challenges faced will also be shared in order to produce a comprehensive 10-year strategy to enable LDCs to graduate from this category and achieve the sustainable development goals. The strategy will be built upon a solid foundation of national ownership and leadership as well as the promotion of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development among LDCs. The results of these large-scale reviews will enhance the work of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee (PrepCom).

Therefore, as part of its mission to support States within the region, and the efforts of the United Nations system to support the least developed countries, ESCWA has launched a regional initiative that aims to gather the views of the LDCs, ESCWA donor members, and specialized regional agencies and bodies. This involved organizing a regional meeting of the four Arab LDCs (Mauritania, the Sudan, Somalia and Yemen) on 18 February 2021 and preparing a report that monitored and analysed Arab bilateral and multilateral measures to support the Arab LDCs. The aim of this process was ultimately to identify shared views among countries in the Arab region to support the design and implementation of the future action plan for LDCs. The ESCWA report identifies examples of best practice in member countries to strengthen regional partnership and meet commitments towards LDCs and conflict-affected countries. The report also recommends mechanisms for building resilience and addressing the chronic, multifaceted issues faced by Arab LDCs, and most importantly, for helping them to embark on the path of inclusive sustainable development, increasing financial assistance and improving social and economic support as needed.

For this purpose, ESCWA organised a regional meeting as part of the preparatory process in advance of the 2022 meeting in Doha. This meeting presented an opportunity to exchange views with official representatives from Arab LDCs and to discuss relevant findings from the report.

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Introduction

1. The Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 (IPoA) is coming to an end. The overarching goal of the IPoA was to overcome the structural challenges faced by least developed countries (LDCs) in order to eradicate poverty and to achieve the internationally agreed development goals. The Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (UNLDC-V) will be held from 23 to 27 January 2022 in Doha, Qatar, and will be preceded by a comprehensive preparatory process based on national, regional and global reviews of the IPoA.
2. This conference is closely related to ESCWA's work as a new programme of action for LDCs will be adopted. This new programme will be designed to cover the remaining 10 years of the 2030 agenda's implementation period. It is therefore of particular importance to each LDC member of this regional commission, as well as to donors of development aid. The conference is expected to conduct a comprehensive review and assessment of the implementation of the IPoA in each of the LDCs, as well as at sub-regional and regional levels. Best practice, lessons learned and challenges faced will also be shared in order to produce a comprehensive 10-year strategy to enable LDCs to graduate from this category and achieve the sustainable development goals. The strategy will be built upon a solid foundation of national ownership and leadership and the promotion of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development among LDCs. The results of these large-scale reviews will enhance the work of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee (PrepCom).
3. As part of its mission to support States within the region, and the efforts of the United Nations system to support the least developed countries, ESCWA has launched a regional initiative that aims to gather the views of the LDCs, ESCWA donor members, and specialized regional agencies and bodies. This involved organizing a regional meeting of the four Arab LDCs (Mauritania, the Sudan, Somalia and Yemen) on 18 February 2021 and preparing a report that monitored and analysed Arab bilateral and multilateral measures to support the Arab LDCs. The aim of this process was ultimately to identify shared views among countries in the Arab region to support the design and implementation of the future action plan for LDCs.
4. The ESCWA report identifies examples of best practice among Member Countries to strengthen regional partnership and meet commitments towards LDCs and conflict-affected countries. The report also recommends mechanisms for building resilience and addressing the chronic, multifaceted issues faced by Arab LDCs, and most importantly, for helping them to embark on the path of inclusive sustainable development, increasing financial assistance and improving social and economic support as needed.
5. Consequently, this regional meeting has been arranged within the context of the preparatory process preceding the 2022 meeting in Doha. This meeting presented an opportunity to exchange views with official representatives from Arab LDCs and to discuss relevant findings from the report.

Opening

6. The meeting began with opening remarks by Mr. Tarik Alami, the Cluster Leader on Governance and Conflict Prevention at ESCWA, delivered on behalf of Dr. Rola Dashti, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA. Mr. Tarik Alami stressed the importance of the regional meeting for discussing the key challenges and structural shocks that prevented the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020, as well as for setting national priorities for LDCs for the next decade (2021-2030), and for discussing the options available for sustainable development and peaceful transition in countries affected by armed conflict. He explained that with the 2011-2020 decade - the implementation period for the IPoA - coming to an end, ESCWA had launched a work stream of regional assessments that included a report entitled "Arab LDCs: Development Challenges and Opportunities". The report included monitoring and analysis of Arab bilateral and multilateral measures to support the Arab LDCs and identified examples of best practice among Member States to strengthen regional partnerships and meet commitments to LDCs and conflict-affected countries. He also explained that the main objective of the regional work stream launched by ESCWA was to identify shared views among countries in the Arab region, to support the design and implementation of the future action plan for LDCs, which would be adopted at the Fifth International Conference of the Least Developed Countries, and to further align the action plan with the requirements of the remaining decade of the 2030 Agenda's implementation period. He also explained that the meeting presented an opportunity to share experiences and exchange views on issues relating to: anti-corruption measures, poor governance, methods of identifying sectors in need of development to facilitate the necessary steps in the development of the Arab LDCs (the Sudan, Somalia, Mauritania and Yemen), macroeconomic policies required to ensure sustainability, social protection policies required to protect various groups - particularly those that are vulnerable - and ways of addressing the effects of climate change in the medium- and long-term. He stated that the funding gap remained a major obstacle to development in LDCs within and outside of the Arab region. He also explained that Arab States - primarily the Gulf States - were among the major contributors to flows of official development assistance (ODA) via bilateral or multilateral institutions. Such assistance was targeted at improving the infrastructure and implementation of socio-economic development projects in the region, and was in many cases accompanied by humanitarian aid, for which the Arab region is often a major source. He expressed the hope that the funding gap could be filled through cooperation, concerted efforts and encouraging partnerships, in line with the 2030 Agenda and Goal 17 in particular. The regional work stream undertaken by ESCWA aimed to map Arab ODA flows more accurately and to derive lessons learned from the support provided over the past decade. He explained that the meeting should not neglect to discuss contexts of armed conflict, guided by the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Even in the case of emergency humanitarian assistance, relief interventions must be undertaken with a forward-looking perspective, as part of a long-term sustainable framework that would facilitate investing in development and would contribute to peace. In light of the tripartite approach that ESCWA had been working to develop, he called for policy options to be considered for proposal during the Fifth Conference on the Least Developed Countries and in other regional and international forums.

7. H. E. Ambassador Mohammed bin Saeed Al Jaber, General Supervisor of the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen, stressed how pleased the Saudi Program was to participate in the important regional meeting and the importance of this strategic partnership with ESCWA, which had started with the interest of Saudi leadership in cooperative action and support for the LDCs. He also noted that the total amount provided by the Program for Yemen over the past two years was \$208 million. The amount provided to Somalia, the Sudan and Mauritania in past years - via the King Salman Relief Program, the Saudi Fund for Development and other institutions - had reached \$1.7 billion. He also stressed that the meeting was an opportunity for donor States and donor communities that would enable States to improve their centres in line with best practice, to gather views and to strengthen partnerships to support LDCs. He stressed the need to adopt a comprehensive approach to providing assistance and improving economic and social support and concluded his address by thanking ESCWA and all partners for their development efforts.

8. Ms. Fekitamoeloa Utoikamanu, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island

Developing States, welcomed the attendees and stressed that the 2021 conference aimed for a comprehensive assessment by LDCs and for a renewal of the partnership between government, public and civil society sectors, and that therefore, the preparatory process, including that meeting, were very important. She stressed that there was a risk that things would get worse as a result of the problems caused by the Covid-19 epidemic, which had affected multiple areas, in the form of increased poverty and negative impacts on health, climate variability, food security and other matters. Economic growth rates had declined during 2020, as the epidemic exacerbated problems. This adversely affected States' efforts to address challenges. She explained that the results of the meeting that day would allow those challenges and the ways to address them to be understood. She spoke of the importance of Dr. Rola Dashti's participation in the meeting, which involved African countries alongside other countries and international partners. She also indicated that there would be two further sessions after the preparatory session (in New York, May-June 2021) and an academic meeting in Finland in August and September to reflect on key areas for LDCs.

9. H. E. Ambassador Kamal Hassan Ali, Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Economic Affairs for the League of Arab States, stressed the importance of the regional meeting. He thanked ESCWA and the Saudi Program for organizing the meeting. The Ambassador also noted the efforts made by the League of Arab States to support the four countries, such as Resolution 57 to support Yemen and support development efforts and the decision to implement the Somali Development Plan and forgive debts. He mentioned that in recognition of the importance of security and peace, the League was preparing a report in Arabic on the impact of conflict on the development goals for 2030 in collaboration with ESCWA, UNDP and the International Organization for Migration. He also stated that the League had supported the development efforts of the Sudan throughout the current transition period. \$200 million had been provided via a four-phase joint cooperation mechanism. He said that the League's General Secretariat continued to support Somalia and its institutions and to forgive debts, and that the League had organized a high-level technical meeting to support the implementation of the development plan, which was attended by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. He referred to the reports of the Humanitarian Response Plan for Yemen from 2016 to 2020, where the total pledges amounted to \$14.46 billion, but only about \$9 billion of them were paid, and explained that as Yemen was experiencing the world's worst humanitarian disaster, the efforts were still insufficient.

I. Recommendations

10. The following is a summary of the main recommendations from the meeting:

- Focus on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and adopt this tripartite approach in the next decade;
- Reinforce efforts to strengthen public institutions;
- Address the roots of conflict, as ending conflict is a priority for growing humanitarian needs to be alleviated;
- Long-term sustainable development must be the explicit objective of all interventions;
- Aid planning should be in line with the principles of aid effectiveness;
- Give priority to human capacity-building for the majority of the population and to building their capacity for achieving social and economic development.
- Integrate climate change mitigation into all interventions;
- Respect national ownership of development plans;
- Strengthen and diversify financing capabilities - particularly self-financing capacity, such as via effective tax reforms - in order to finance development plans in a way that ensures sustainability, predictability and human security;
- Provide accurate official data and statistics;
- Transition from co-financing to blended financing.

II. Topics of Discussion

11. The meeting had two main sessions, the first of which focused on presenting and discussing the themes of the report on Arab LDCs and identifying national and regional priorities for inclusion in the global agenda for the next decade 2020-2030. The second session focused on the views of development partners and donors on the challenges and opportunities arising from the IPoA, and the national and regional priorities for LDCs that should be included in the global agenda for the next decade for the LDCs. The sessions of the meeting were chaired by Mr. Karam Karam, Regional Adviser on Governance and Institution-building Issues at ESCWA.

12. As part of the first session, Mr. Youness Abouyoub, Head of The ESCWA Governance and Institution Building Department, gave a presentation on the themes of the ESCWA report. The presentation covered three themes: (1) the challenges of the past decade; (2) the challenges for donors and beneficiaries; and (3) a forward look at the next decade. On the first theme, he mentioned the challenges of governance and political instability, as lack of transparency and accountability within governance systems were among the main causes of political instability in some Arab LDCs. If the issue of governance remained unaddressed, the prospects for stability, peace and sustainable development would remain elusive. In terms of structural social and economic challenges, consumption-based development had failed to help develop sustainable productivity sectors. Inadequate social infrastructure had weakened the population's resilience and undermined their ability to cope with emerging crises, diseases and epidemics, and had reduced opportunities for the development of economic potential. Similarly, inadequate development policies had weakened State institutions and had also failed to achieve equitable social and economic development. All of these factors had exacerbated poverty levels. On the second theme, Mr. Abouyoub noted that the principles of aid effectiveness highlighted complex issues of conflict of interest between the between donors of assistance, receiving State administrations and the intended beneficiary populations. Difficulties in implementation had led to a lower level of development and had worsened absorptive capacity in the four countries. The shift from humanitarian assistance to development presented long-term challenges and risks for the future and a three-dimensional strategy should be adopted based on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. He also mentioned the challenge of overdependence on assistance, absorptive capacity and emerging crises, as climate-related crises are likely to increase in frequency and severity. Therefore, measures to mitigate the negative effects of such crises should be included in all national plans and in the Financing for Development process. The need for humanitarian activities would remain high, but they should be provided within a framework that closely links relief work with development and peace. The long-term impact of the Covid-19 crisis must be addressed over the course of the decade through capacity-building and funding for all relevant social, financial and medical needs. On the third theme, Mr. Abouyoub stressed that all interventions must be guided by the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Such an approach would enable both donors and countries receiving assistance to meet humanitarian needs, without simultaneously hindering development priorities. He also stressed that relief assistance must be planned in line with the principles of aid effectiveness and that sustainable development and human capacity-building must be the clear objective of all programmes.

13. The presentation was followed by contributions from the four countries, in which government representatives of the four Arab LDCs - Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen - presented their views on the following questions: (1) What were the main challenges for development work over the past decade? (2) What national priorities should be included in the global agenda for the next decade for LDCs?

14. Mr. Eli Oudeika, a representative of Mauritania, stated his country's national priorities. The first strategic pillar was sustainable and inclusive growth through structural economic and societal transitions that ensure social cohesion, economic diversification, innovation and support for productive sectors. The second strategic pillar was the development of human capital by supporting access to education, health and social protection. The third strategic pillar was the strengthening of the rule of law, equality, security and respect for human rights. The vision combined ambition and realism to lay solid foundations for supporting growth. The 10-year plan would lead to economic growth of up to 7 percent by 2025 and would contribute to productive capital and a more resilient economy. He also noted that Mauritania had held 15 strategic workshops that comprised of

selecting priorities as well as reform-related workshops and programmes. A vision to continue and develop them had been developed. Strategic risks, including the security situation, the effects of climate change and economic shocks, had also been identified. He explained that among the challenges to achieving the goals were the availability of human resources, the intensity of competition, low productivity, dependence on exports of manufactured goods and the digital divide.

15. Mr. Moussa Mohamad Othman, the representative of Somalia, stated the priorities and goals that needed to be achieved. Somalia had suffered from the presence of terrorist groups, which had negatively affected development. Terrorists were in control of part of southern Somalia and in recent years some of these territories had been recaptured. At that time, an attempt was being made to end the power of these groups. Another challenge was that of serious shocks, such as the 2011 drought and the series of natural disasters occurring in 2017, which claimed millions of lives. Similarly, another significant challenge leading to significant losses was climate variability. Another challenge was the suffering caused by waves of epidemics, which had caused the displacement of a large number of people and had adversely affected infrastructure. Another shock was Covid-19 and locusts, which had destroyed vast agricultural areas, leading to food insecurity. There was also difficulty in enforcing the rule of law, as establishing a federal system required considerable time and effort. In addition, there were problems with elections and the constitution. Consequently, the political structure was fragile. Hence, the situation was extremely difficult, and a large proportion of the population was extremely poor. Consequently, there was a need to address all these challenges. In terms of priorities, a five-year plan had been developed, which was preceded by a tripartite plan. There was a lack of necessary data on health and development, but the new plan would span five years and include five key pillars: security, law, economic development, human rights and displaced persons, and a focus on vulnerable groups such as children. Security and stability in Somalia were a priority, and this entailed the confrontation of terrorist groups. Another priority was to improve growth, which entailed focusing on productive sectors and reducing unemployment and youth migration, which were having a negative impact on the country. Another priority was governmental institution-building where institutions were considered fragile and where there was a need to build capacity. Another priority was to attract foreign investment. The high cost of energy extraction had negatively affected investment. Another priority was to cancel debt by taking several financial management measures and addressing corruption, among other measures. For this priority, a long-term solution was needed to link the humanitarian situation to the development process.

16. Mr. Omer Mustafa Hassan Ahmad, Director of the International Organizations Department at the Ministry of Trade and Supply of the Republic of the Sudan, also stated the challenges faced by the Sudan. The first of these were: political instability, internal conflict and the secession of South Sudan, which had caused the Sudan to lose a large amount of resources, the most important of them being oil. He also spoke of the lack of oversight that had led to administrative and financial corruption. He referred to the sanctions imposed on Sudan, which had prevented the Sudan from integrating into the international community. All these challenges had caused economic and social problems, the most important of which were lower living standards, increased poverty and unemployment, reduced production, a lack of funding and technology, low quality education, malnutrition, especially among children, and an unstable exchange rate. He stated that the Government of the December Revolution had developed a programme of work in which it set out priorities, five of which related to peace and justice. He also said that one of the common challenges was the fight against money laundering and terrorist financing. He concluded by talking about the importance of remittances from expatriates, which could be used for development purposes.

17. Dr. Waed Badheeb, a representative of Yemen, shared the country's top priorities and challenges. The 10-year plan of the IPoA provided an ambitious plan to address economic and social challenges, as the world moved towards a decade of recovery, and moved away from cycles of poverty and conflict towards inclusive development. He also noted that Yemen had been experiencing difficult circumstances since 2011, resulting in the disruption of resources and of the oil production process, as well as the deterioration of infrastructure, which had exposed institutions to fragmentation. The ministries concerned had reached out to donors for the provision of development support, but the humanitarian needs of Yemen remained severe as the situation continued to deteriorate in all respects. In that regard, the donor response to the Ministry of Planning had been

somewhat weak. The government was also working with partners to strengthen the humanitarian support line in order to provide the necessary support. He said that there were still obstacles to the development process, most notably the challenge of restoring the State - as the conflict with the Houthis had led to the destruction of all sectors - and the fight against corruption in institutions. With regard to social indicators, indicators showed an increase in poverty and food insecurity as well as a rise in the number of displaced persons. The Covid-19 pandemic presented a challenge in terms of providing additional attention to the health sector. He explained that at that time, Yemen needed a high degree of coordination and that integration between the government and donors was required. Regional and international support would remain crucial until Yemen recovered. In terms of the key priorities for the next decade, he noted firstly that the State should be restored following the coup d'état, followed by a return to the rule of law and a transition from relief to development and economic diversification. He concluded by thanking all the partners of Yemen for their support.

18. The second session included a discussion of the views of development partners and donors on the challenges and opportunities resulting from the IPoA and national and regional priorities that were to be included in the global agenda for the next decade for the LDCs, focussing on the following questions: (1) "What are the mechanisms for linking peace, development and relief work?" (2) "How can development support become a tool for strengthening the governance system and the structure of national institutions?"

19. Mr. Adel bin Ahmed Al-Qassidi, Director of the Strategic Planning Department at the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen, stressed the need to ask the important questions, to look at development from a new perspective, and to shift from relief to development, focussing on a long-term, sustainable solution. He mentioned the importance of working in line with the five strategic pillars, focusing on accelerated growth and addressing challenges holistically, as there were no limits to innovation for effective development work. He also stressed that international organizations must bring real added value and must develop principles and approaches, and that inefficient development policies were one of the main factors affecting the effectiveness of implementation. He asked a question: "What can we learn from the past?" He noted that there were many lessons from the IPoA, leading to fundamental questions, such as: "Have development visions become more important than they were in the past and what are the features of effective visions?"; "What role have national governments played, how can this role be strengthened, and how can national ownership of efforts made be bolstered?"; "How do partners agree on an effective framework for work that aligns with donor plans?"; and, "How can donor efforts be made consistent with the most important principles - the importance of which we recognised in the past decade - and how can that help us with development in the next decade?"

20. The discussion then opened, and Mr. Abdelrahman Al Hamidi of the Arab Monetary Fund noted that the current crisis had caused more challenges than in the past, and the Fund estimated that these economies were shrinking by 2 per cent. There was a need for institutions in these States that could work in cooperation with supporting institutions. There were challenges in the area of human development, but the Fund had a close relationship with these four States. The Fund took into account the differing needs of the States and worked on the basis of these needs. The Fund had multiple facilities for achieving reform, and in order for the States to proceed, they must face the challenge of rising indebtedness. The Fund had a great interest in the digital economy, modern financial technologies, financial inclusion and support for Small and Medium Enterprises. The Fund would work with these States to reinforce strategies to support these areas. Mr. Hamidi stressed the importance of developing local capital markets to channel savings towards enterprise development, and that accurate official statistics were needed that would inform policymaking. He explained that the Fund was conducting remote training for the States, in partnership with other organizations and institutions.

21. Mr. Mohammed Al-Saati, of the Islamic Development Bank, made a contribution on the Bank's work. He confirmed that the Bank had provided a lot of assistance together with development partners in all fields. In terms of the strategic vision, there were many priorities, but the importance of building institutional capacity for these States was well-known. Among the priorities were job creation, the empowerment of women and young people, and improving health and education. Food security must be derived from these countries, as Somalia, the Sudan, Mauritania and Yemen were countries with a wealth of agricultural, fish and animal

resources that could not be found elsewhere in the region, and it was important to use these resources in a sustainable manner. The Bank had focused on partnership, with the Arab Coordination Group providing a lot to these States through the coordination of efforts. Attention must also be paid to the effectiveness of development. Platforms could be created to share information, to participate in development work on the ground and to reflect on the mechanisms for such work. In terms of finance and loans, efforts were being made in this area, but there were some challenges. Solutions to these challenges needed to be found to enable these States to obtain new loans. For example, it was important to consider blended financing, and not to overlook the role of the private sector, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic.

22. Mr. Abdullah Al-Musaybeih, of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, said that the main problems included funding gaps and a lack of coordination between donors. Communication between these States and financial institutions was very important, as at times it was almost cut off. There were also concerns about large amounts being provided to the States at a time when the States would not have the absorptive capacity to deal with such amounts.

23. Mrs Nada Al-Dossary, of the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen, said that in order to succeed in adopting a forward-looking vision, lessons learned must be emphasised. The Program for Yemen had provided 195 projects from 2018 to 2020, and the work in Yemen, for example, had faced economic, social, and security challenges. Innovative development solutions must be considered. Every challenge presented an opportunity to avoid such risks by introducing security and safety measures. One helpful solution was to have offices on the ground, directly coordinating and working on needs and priorities. There was also a need to strengthen the absorptive capacity of these states. All these efforts would bear fruit in the development process for the upcoming period.

24. Mr. Adel bin Ahmed Al-Qassidi, Director of the Strategic Planning Department at the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen, stressed the importance of alignment between the priorities of the States and donors, which was more important than ever before. He stressed that donors should promote the idea of localizing development in these States. It was imperative to know what could be implemented based on existing institutional capacity, and consequently to support this capacity and involve atypical actors, since it was important to involve social institutions and create opportunities for the contribution of private enterprises.

25. Mr. Karam Karam of ESCWA commented that there was indeed no alternative to the role of public institutions in the development process.

26. Mr. Mohammed Al-Saati, of the Islamic Development Bank, added that there had previously been important experiences in the area of the sharing of expertise between institutions and States (such as between Suriname and Malaysia) and an opportunity was available for investment companies to cooperate with Suriname. Such experiences could be mirrored with the four States. Mr. Al-Saati proposed merging grants and loans in order to maximize benefits, but absorptive capacity remained essential in this area.

27. Mr. Youness Abouyoub, of ESCWA, praised Mr. Adel Al-Qassidi's contribution on institutions, as there had been shortcomings in the building of a modern state in some of the countries. He stressed that a qualitative improvement in sustainable development could not be achieved without such institutions and without facing major structural challenges, and the pandemic was the best proof of that. He also stressed that in the absence of statistical institutions, such shortcomings could not be observed in order for the necessary support to be provided. He also mentioned the efforts of ESCWA and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in providing capacity-building programmes, including online courses on topics such as public policy coordination and changing mindsets. A training programme on such subjects has been developed for the benefit of the States and the courses could be offered to other States.

28. The closing session was entitled "Towards a shared vision for building the agenda for the next decade for the LDCs: key recommendations." During the session Mr. Hassan Al-Attas of the Saudi Development and

Reconstruction Program for Yemen confirmed that there was a clear intention to unite efforts to work together for the benefit of the development process of the four States.

29. Mr. Karam Karam of ESCWA added that the main challenge was to transform these recommendations into a realistic model and realistic programmes that could form the next decade. A semi-sustainable mechanism and a flexible platform were needed that could transform these recommendations into concrete programmes.

30. Mr. Eli Oudeika, a representative of Mauritania, added that the idea of mixed financing was good, that institutional development was needed, and that he looked forward to technical support that would help the development process.

31. Mr. Hassan Mohamed Ali made some proposals on the issue of maintaining stability and law enforcement. He noted that there were some marginalized areas that were not under government control, and asked how such areas could be reached, noting that it was necessary to give institutions a role in reaching groups beyond government control.

32. Mr. Abdelrahman Al Hamidi, General Manager of the Arab Monetary Fund, added that the informal economy in the four States could exceed 50 per cent of the size of the overall economy, and that it was important to work to draw such economic activity into the the formal economy. The programmes should therefore include ways to do so in order to reduce unemployment. He noted the challenge relating to the data gap and lack of statistics on sectors other than social welfare institutions and that it was important to encourage such institutions to exist within the formal sector while ensuring tax equity.

33. Mr. Tarik Alami thanked the attendees and the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen and the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations for their participation and cooperation.

34. Mr. Adel Al-Qassidi stressed that the meeting demonstrated the passion for development work in the next decade. He commended the importance of the joint thinking process and the transformation of the resulting ideas into programmes of action for prosperity.

III. Objectives

35. The objectives of the regional meeting with representatives of the four States were to discuss the goals achieved, the development challenges faced during the IPoA decade and the national priorities that should be focussed on for the next decade: 2020-2030. The outcome of this meeting will help shape the debate on the next decade for the LDCs. The regional meeting aimed to:

(a) discuss the ESCWA report on the Arab LDCs with representatives of the States, donors and the international organizations concerned;

(b) Identify national and regional priorities for inclusion in the debate on the global agenda for the next decade.

IV. Attendees and work programme

A. Date and Venue

36. The meeting was held virtually on the INTERPREFY app on 18 February 2021.

B. Attendees

37. The meeting was attended by representatives of ESCWA and the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen, as well as government representatives of the Arab LDCs, Mauritania, the

Sudan, Somalia and Yemen, in addition to a range of regional and international development funds and organizations.

C. Agenda and organization of work

38. The agenda and organization of work were adopted as follows:

18 February 2021	
12:30-13:00	Log in to test the platform
13:00-13:30	<p>Welcoming remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary of ESCWA. - His Excellency Ambassador Mohammed bin Saeed Al Jaber, General Supervisor of the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Programme for Yemen. - Ms. Fekitamoeloa Utoikamanu, Under-Secretary-General for the Least Developed Countries. - H. E. Ambassador Kamal Hassan Ali, Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Economic Affairs Sector for the League of Arab States
13:30-14:30	<p>First Session:</p> <p>Presentation and discussion of the themes of the report on the Arab Least Developed Countries, and identification of national and regional priorities for inclusion in the global agenda for the next decade 2020-2030.</p> <p>Chairing the meeting sessions: Karam Karam, Regional Adviser on Governance and Institution Building Issues, ESCWA.</p> <p><i>Speaker: Youness Abouyoub, Project Coordinator - Governance and Institution Building, ESCWA.</i></p> <p>Views of government representatives of the Arab LDCs, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen, in relation to the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What were the main challenges for development work over the past decade? - What national priorities should be included in the global agenda for the next decade for LDCs? - The Sudan: Mr. Omer Mustafa Hassan Ahmad, Director of International Organizations Department, Ministry of Trade and Supply. - Somalia: Mr. Moussa Mohamad Othman, Director of Planning Department, Ministry of Planning. - Yemen: Dr. Waed Abdullah Abdul Razzaq Badheeb, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation. - Mauritania: Mr. Eli Oudeika, General Director of the Politics and Strategies of Development, Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Promotion of Productive Sectors.
14:30-15:30	<p>Second Session:</p> <p>Views of development partners and donors on the challenges and opportunities arising from the Istanbul Program of Action, and on the national and regional priorities that should be included in the global agenda for the next decade of the LDCs, focussing on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the mechanisms for linking peace, development and relief work?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How can development support become a tool for strengthening the governance system and the structure of national institutions? <p>Preliminary remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Adel bin Ahmed Al-Qassidi, Director of the Strategic Planning Department at the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen. <p>Open discussion with participants on the key questions raised above.</p>
15:30-16:00	<p>Final Session:</p> <p>Towards a shared vision for building the agenda for the next decade for the LDCs: key recommendations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - H.E. Ambassador Mohammed bin Saeed Al Jaber, General Supervisor of the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen. - Youness Abouyoub, Project Coordinator - Governance and Institution Building, ESCWA.

Annex*

List of participants

Representatives of Arab least developed countries

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Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Promotion
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The Federal Republic of Somalia

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Deputy Director of the Arab Affairs Department
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The Republic of Yemen

Dr. Waed Abdullah Abdul Razzaq Badheeb
Minister of Planning and International
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Mr. Mohammed Ahmed Al-Hawri
Undersecretary of the Ministry of Planning and
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League of Arab States

H. E. Ambassador Kamal Hassan Ali
Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the
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Mr. Khalid Alotaibi
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King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre

Mr. Nayef Al Shemry

Arab Monetary Fund

Dr. Abdelrahman Bin Abdallah Al Hamidi
General Manager and Chairman of the Board of
Directors

Representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the World Bank

H.E. Abdelmohsen Alkhalaf
Executive Director of the Kingdom of Saudi
Arabia at the World Bank

Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development

Mr. Abdullah Khalil Al-Musaybeih
Regional Director for the Arab Countries
Mr. Ghazi Abdul Karim Al-Mutawa

Islamic Development Bank

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Director General of the Center of Excellence for
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Mr. Zouhair Kashghari

Mr. Samer Al Isawi

Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development

Mr. Abdullah Sheikh Cydia
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* Issued as submitted.

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Office of the High Representative for the Least
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Ms. Aniket Ghai

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Director of External Relations

Food and Agriculture Organization

Ms Angélica Jácome
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