

Third Meeting of the
United Nations Economists Network (UNEN)

Tuesday 26 November 2019
9:00 – 11:00 a.m.

Mr. Elliott Harris, Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Chief Economist of the United Nations, opened the third meeting of the UNEN, outlining four main objectives of the meeting; a. to establish the time line and work plan for the UNEN report for the 75th anniversary of the UN; b. to receive updates of the six thematic briefs, if any, and c. other issues.

a. Content, timeline and workplan of the UNEN report

A question came up about how the report would address complementarities among mega trends if it examines one mega trend in each chapter. While it is important to examine impacts of various mega trends on the achievement of the SDGs, it would be equally important to incorporate analyses why and how many of these trends became mega trends. Interactions among the mega trends and their effects on achievement of the SDGs should be the cornerstone of the report. There was a suggestion to present only peer reviewed materials from reputable sources in the report, particularly related to environmental issues, to avoid potential controversies. There were also suggestions for the report to adequately reflect regional perspectives on global mega trends – as often captured and highlighted in the research undertaken by UN regional commissions – which can be different from a global perspective. FAO volunteered to co-lead the chapter on urbanization.

A number of participants sought clarification about the word limit of a chapter, its writing style, tone, referencing and etc. and suggested that it would be better to standardize and harmonize the writing style from the beginning, with necessary guidelines. For example, participants expressed the view that listing key messages at the beginning of each chapter would help to identify gaps and overlaps among chapters. Others suggested that it would be better to circulate an outline of each chapter as soon as possible to ensure better linkages and consistency among the chapters. Some suggested that ‘unite docs’ can be used to share documents among the members. Given that Chapter I would present an introduction and an overall framework of the report, it should be sequenced following the review of draft outlines of other chapters.

Responses of the ASG/Chief Economist:

In response to the questions and comments above, the ASG underscored the following;

- Chapter should not be telescopic, but rather present a comprehensive analysis of various dimensions of a mega trend;
- The tone of the report should not be prescriptive, but rather compelling and convincing, based on data with clear, logical and effective arguments. Data should be used to support the narrative, but not vice versa;
- Concerns with political economy challenges should be adequately highlighted to convey clear messages to policymakers. There is a clear need for policy-makers to take adaptive policies and interventions to respond to short-term challenges, but long-term policies, which often go

beyond the political cycle, will remain an imperative to comprehensively address the impacts of the mega trends;

- Each working group should make appropriate choices regarding indicators, global vs. regional perspectives and a working or theoretical framework for a chapter in line with the broader objective of the report;
- Editorial guidelines, outlining the structure of a chapter, writing style, word limits, referencing styles and literature reviews etc will be shared with the working groups.

After extensive discussions, the meeting agreed on the following production timeline of the report:

Timeline

<u>23 March 2020:</u>	1 st draft chapters to the ASG/Chief Economist
<u>6 April 2020:</u>	1 st consolidated draft report
<u>April 2020:</u>	Send the draft report to peer reviewers (comments to be back in <u>May</u>)
<u>May-June 2020:</u>	Revise the draft report, editing and proofreading
<u>July 2020:</u>	Typesetting, translating and printing
<u>September 2020:</u>	Launch of the report

Work plan

Beginning in December, UNEN will convene monthly to discuss and review progress:

18 December 2019 (4th meeting)

- Working group leads report on progress made since the 3rd UNEN meeting.
- Participants begin to identify/nominate peer reviewers of draft report.

22 January 2020 (5th meeting)

- Working group leads report on progress made since the 4th UNEN meeting.

26 February 2020 (6th meeting)

- Discuss draft sections of the report.

Working group modalities

- The ASG/Chief Economist encouraged (co-) leads of each working group to contact the focal points of each entity and to organize a first working-group meeting in late November or early December to come up with an outline, with bullet points of the main messages/analyses of a chapter.
- In the first meeting, each working group is also expected to assign a specific task to each participating entity and set up an internal schedule.
- The first working group should aim at stock taking, identifying available materials, arguments and existing research among the sub-group members. Each working group is expected to report back to the network meeting in December.

b. Update on UNEN thematic briefs

The ASG reiterated that the thematic briefs would be in-depth analytical papers on six specific issues that are not examined in detail in the UNEN report. These briefs should be available for the UNCTs to help them understand the issues and devise policy solutions. The six topics agreed in the first meeting are:

1. Beyond GDP
2. Debt
3. Migration
4. Taxation
5. Nature-based solutions
6. Social protection

UNEP presented progress made on two briefs, nature-based solutions and beyond GDP. On the former, the brief would examine the current state of the nature-based solutions and present the taxonomy of interventions and their synergies and trade-offs with market-based solutions. Its draft would be ready by the 2nd or 3rd week of January 2020. For *Beyond GDP*, a few eminent experts and UN staff members have already contributed to the brief, which would be ready by the end of January 2020. UNEP will share the outlines of these briefs with interested agencies.

DESA/Financing for Sustainable Development Office (FSDO) informed about the brief on *Debt*. It would coordinate with several UN agencies, IMF and the World Bank, based on the Inter-Agency Task Force of Financing for Development. ESCWA expressed interest in contributing to this brief. The FSDO would also coordinate a brief on Taxation. ESCWA stated that debt and taxation are both sensitive issues for countries in the Arab region and, despite several IMF recommendations, the countries are yet to establish an analytical framework for the region. Because of the situation, ESCWA does not have a policy on how to approach these issues. The ASG responded that the group can prepare several briefs, each highlighting regional or topical issues.

ECA, the coordinator for the brief on *Migration* would soon contact interested agencies and inform about the analytical approach for the brief. It was suggested that IOM should be part of the working group. The UN Network on Migration can be utilized to form a working group on this brief, DESA/Population Division suggested.

A *Social Protection* brief would be led by ILO. ILO proposed to draft a brief on the informal employment based on the 2018 report *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, as the informal sector employs about 60 per cent of global work force. UN Habitat indicated interest on contributing to the brief.

c. Other issues

Briefing on the recently held global meeting of the UN Residents Coordinators, the ASG proposed the creation of a roster of UN economists with their specialized areas. With this roster, UNEN will be able to respond to questions from UN country economists/Resident Coordinator Offices on different economic and social policy issues and support their efforts to promote sustainable development.

There should be a mechanism or platform in place – perhaps hosted on the DCO website – for UN country economists/Resident Coordinator Offices to send a question on economic, social or environmental issues and a UNEN member or members should be in a position to respond to those questions.

UNEN will also benefit from the questions posted on the web as they would suggest potential topics for future thematic briefs and make the briefs more relevant to the UN work on the ground.

In response to the ASG's suggestions, participants from regional commissions informed that they have established a regional knowledge hub following the reform of the regional commissions and were frequently in contact with the UN Resident Coordinator Offices/UN country teams in their respective regions both through formal and informal channels.

It was suggested to develop on-line FAQs in the proposed platform.