

Seventh Meeting of the
United Nations Economists Network (UNEN)

Tuesday, 14 April 2020
8:30 – 10:30 a.m.

Mr. Elliott Harris, Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and Chief Economist of the United Nations, noted that the following agenda items would be discussed: (a) discussion of comments received and next steps regarding the second phase of UNEN/roster of experts; (b) receiving updates from each working group of the UNEN report for the 75th anniversary of the UN; and (3) any other business.

A. Discussion of comments received and next steps regarding the second phase of UNEN/roster of experts

Mr. Harris noted that comments on the preliminary concept note, dated 20 December 2019, had been received received from ECLAC, ECE, and RCO Turkmenistan and shared with UNEN members. The concept note had also been discussed at the 6th UNEN meeting on 14 April 2020. Comments during that meeting had focused on the advantages of building the roster of experts on existing regional networks and knowledge-hubs articulated around issue-based coalitions. It was also mentioned that there was limited capacity within UNEN to establish a roster and a reasonable guarantee that UNEN would be able to respond to questions from economists working in Resident Coordinator Offices (RCO) in a timely and substantive manner was needed. Suggestions were made to anchor the roster to CCAs to avoid duplication.

Mr. Harris responded to these comments as follows:

- UNEN is a global network bringing global expertise to regional and country levels.
- The roster of experts should play to the strength of UNEN. UNEN will leverage system-wide knowledge and make it widely available. RCO economists will be enabled to draw on the experience from economists from the whole UN system.
- Issue-based coalitions focus on cross-cutting themes, not necessarily economic and social themes. For the UNEN roster, a multi-disciplinary thematic approach is envisaged.
- The following questions would need to be addressed: (i) what does UNEN want to achieve? (ii) what should the role of the roster be? (iii) what expertise do we have in UNEN? and (iv) how do we channel requests?

Participants noted that the readiness of agencies to commit to the roster would need to be determined. It was also mentioned that the offer should be tailored to the demand and a needs

assessment should be undertaken. Participants indicated that it might be easier to get the second phase of UNEN off the ground if the roster is linked to a specific objective, such as supporting CCAs and/or contributing to the UN system response to the COVID-19 crisis. As CCAs do not seem to sufficiently address economic and social issues, it might be useful to support UN country teams during the CCA process. This should be done by building on existing structures and taking into account tools, such as the economic transformation companion piece. In 2020/2021, 30 countries are undertaking CCAs. UNEN could limit its support to some of these countries, leverage the acquired knowledge and make it available to other countries. It was noted that an informal community of practice approach might spark a formal request for support by UNEN.

ASG Harris referred to the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19, which is in the process of being shared with Member States and the UN system. He noted that the framework, which is spelling out the UN offer, is adapting existing programmes. He stressed the importance of resisting the likely demand for UNEN to become an integral part of UN country teams. He also emphasized that in moving forward with the second phase, the next steps would be aligned with the regional commissions.

Mr. Harris noted that this issue would be re-considered at the next UNEN meeting, a summary of discussions would be shared, and agreement would be sought on suggested next steps.

B. Updates of each working group of the UNEN report

The first working group (introduction) reported that key messages had been submitted from all working groups. A draft of the introduction would be shared during the first week of May.

The second working group (climate change) thanked colleagues for the helpful comments. The focus of the chapter was on describing the trends (including biodiversity, land degradation and climate change), as well as understanding the drivers. The chapter concluded with policy recommendations.

Mr. Harris noted that Mr. Alex Julca had been in contact with working group leads on a set of important interlinkages and would reach out to colleagues regarding the drafting of a text box on interlinkages. Examples of interlinkages could be included in the respective chapters. No additional chapter on interlinkages was suggested, but a text box and inclusion of interlinkages in the introductory chapter was recommended.

The third working group (emerging and frontier technologies) noted that it would undergo one more round of comments prior to finalizing the chapter. Mr. Harris inquired if there was scope for a text box on technology in the COVID-19 crisis. The working group agreed that a reference

to the crisis was important. Other chapters were also encouraged to include a reference to the pandemic to make the publication more relevant.

Working groups agreed to prepare one-pagers on the impact of COVID-19 on the respective megatrends.

The fourth working group (demographic trends) reported that it was undergoing one last round of revisions prior to finalizing the chapter. It was noted that COVID-19 has an impact on mortality, but not on the age structure.

The fifth working group (inequalities) noted that COVID-19 could be incorporated in a text box. The chapter had been shortened. Interlinkages were discussed at the beginning of the chapter.

The sixth working group (urbanization) reported that a first full draft would be circulated shortly. The chapter, while retaining its basic structure, had been tightened. The working group would prepare a one-pager on urbanization and COVID-19.

Mr. Harris stressed that the narrative of the report should contain a clear message on SDGs. Mr. Harris indicated that a revised timeline had been circulated. He proposed to move the deadline for submission of the final drafts of the chapters to 30 April. A consolidated draft will be ready by 15 May for peer review.

C. Any other business

Mr. Harris invited UNEN members to join the core group in charge of integrating report chapters. He also asked to share any suggestions for peer reviewers.

The meeting discussed what UNEN can do to support the analytical work on the COVID-19 crisis from the economic and social perspective. It was suggested to create an inventory on what the UN system is doing. Reference was made to a spreadsheet prepared by DCO on UNSDG websites on COVID-19. Mr. Harris invited colleagues to join an online consultation on UNEN. Information on the online consultation would be sent via email.