

Twentieth Meeting of the
United Nations Economist Network (UNEN)

Wednesday, 13th October 2021
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, introduced the agenda: i) Digital Economy Report 2021 (UNCTAD); ii) Policy Briefs on Digital Economic Transformation, Innovative Finance, and New Economics for Sustainable Development (NESD) – Final Output; and iii) Discussion of Selected Policy Briefs.

Digital Economy Report 2021 (UNCTAD)

Mr. Torbjörn Fredriksson, Head, E-commerce and Digital Economy Branch, Division of Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD, presented the findings of the Digital Economy Report 2021 (<https://unctad.org/webflyer/digital-economy-report-2021>) and engaged in a discussion with participants. His presentation was made available after the meeting.

Policy Briefs on Digital Economic Transformation, Innovative Finance, and New Economics for Sustainable Development (NESD) – Final Output

Mr. Harris invited ideas on next steps regarding the finalization of the policy briefs. He mentioned that the envisaged timeline had foreseen that the policy briefs would be disseminated among UNEN members for comments and improvement during September-October and that final drafts with policy recommendations would be available by November. Mr. Harris also noted that the format/presentation of the policy briefs would have to be agreed upon.

Participants discussed that, as the policy briefs are rather detailed, it might be a good idea to prepare an umbrella paper highlighting the main points. For communication/presentation purposes, the briefs could be annexed to the umbrella paper. The question was raised if one output or a set of outputs were envisaged. Participants welcomed the proposal of an executive summary containing a concise and reader-friendly conceptual definition of each concept with a presentation of the details in the annexes.

It was also mentioned that the briefs should look at the linkages of the respective NESD concept to SDG targets. The interlinkages section should also identify trade-offs. A proposal was made to look at mechanisms that support SDG implementation at the national level. It was stressed that the briefs should avoid duplication, ensure synergies and bring the coordination among UN agencies to bear. The briefs aim at promoting integrated policy making, challenging mainstream economics, and triggering discussions with stakeholders. The importance of reaching out to stakeholders beyond UNEN was highlighted. A suggestion was made to map out UN system capacity with regard to the policy proposals of the briefs.

Mr. Harris noted that a meeting with working group co-leads had been scheduled for the coming days to discuss how best to move forward based on the outcome of today's meeting.

Discussion of Selected Policy Briefs

Due to time constraints participants agreed to send comments on the policy briefs to the respective co-leads. Mr. Harris noted that the following briefs, which had previously been circulated, would be re-circulated to UNEN members to facilitate the process of reviewing and providing feedback/comments:

- Blue economy
- Circular economy
- Innovative finance
- Digital economic transformation
- Green economy
- Social and solidarity economy

Updates on the remaining briefs (Purple/care economy; Orange/creative economy; Yellow/attention economy; and frugal innovation) would be shared once available.

Any other business

The question was raised if forthcoming UNEN meetings could be shifted from Wednesdays to another day to avoid scheduling conflicts with the RCO clinics that were usually held on Wednesdays. No agreement was reached, but a number of participants noted their availability on Tuesdays.