

## Report of the Western Asia Regional Preparatory Meeting on “Science, technology and innovation for sustainable development” for the 2013 In

the preparation of the 2013 annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council, a regional preparatory meeting on the theme “Science, technology and innovation (STI) for sustainable development” was held on 26 November 2012 in Amman, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The meeting was hosted by the Government of Jordan in cooperation with the United Nations ESCWA Technology Centre, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The meeting brought together a diverse group of regional stakeholders to discuss the state and present role of scientific research and innovation in Western

contribute to society, especially young people and women.

*f* Open access resources whether open educational resources, research publications, virtual libraries or open patent information – are

## I. Introduction

In July 2013 the United Nations Economic and Social Council will hold its seventh Annual Ministerial Review in Geneva, Switzerland. The Review will focus on science, technology and innovation, and the potential of culture, for promoting sustainable

future socioeconomic progress given the importance of knowledge in determining the wealth of nations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this context, several regional realities and priorities

B. Roundtable discussion 1 Enabling productive capacities in science, technology and innovation (STI) in Western Asia

H.E. Dr. Lahcen Daoudi, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Morocco, who chaired the roundtable discussion, warned that only the strongest will

worth noting, Dr. Hamze also identified opportunities for improvement in the region. Regional cooperation is one area on which Western Asia is lacking. Although countries in the region often partner together on various projects, they are usually financed and administered through outside intermediaries (e.g., European Union) and as a result can reflect external rather than regional needs. Considering the advanced economic status of some countries in Western Asia, there could be options to think in terms of stronger local and regional partnerships. The speaker was also concerned that, relative to other countries, the production of knowledge in the region is much more easily achieved than the implementation of knowledge. The relationship between research and higher education systems needs to be examined, as too much research undertaken in the region is linked neither to innovative nor problemsolving on sustainable development challenges. At the same time, Dr. Hamze acknowledged that prioritization of issues for research is necessary but difficult, given the diversity of emerging challenges faced by the region.

Ms. Rana Zayadin, Executive Director of Outreach, Royal Scientific Society (RSS), Jordan, spoke on behalf of HRH Sumaya Bint El Hassaneh, President of RSS. She highlighted a few critical challenges to STI advancement in Jordan. First, most small and medium enterprises in Western Asia—over 95 per cent—are actually microenterprises, making it very difficult for entrepreneurs to take risks that might drive innovation. As the result of their small size and limited resources, many of these enterprises have limited knowledge of the standards within their sector, without which innovation is unlikely to occur. Ms. Zayadin suggested that the region may have more to offer in innovations occurring outside of the science and technology sectors.

Dr. Saif Abdullah Al Haddabi, Assistant Secretary-General, the Research Council, Oman, discussed the importance of technology transfer for successful scientific collaboration. There is still a lot to be gleaned and learned from large datasets being generated by new technologies. This could be better exploited by researchers to promote innovation in the region. Capacities are also undeveloped, with a particular need for improved financial capacities and funding opportunities. In line with the previous speaker, Dr. Al Haddabi added his comments by noting that innovation needed to be better defined and, perhaps, expanded to technological innovations occurring in the region, which could be scaled up or commercialized.

Mr. Fouad Mrad, Executive Director, ESCWA Technology Centre, who moderated the first roundtable discussion, suggested the panelists consider several key elements that had been raised thus far by other speakers. First, he asked how “cultures of innovation, or science” could be encouraged in countries in the region. Second, he wondered if the panelists would address how researchers (and funders) could successfully prioritize research needs given the wide range of questions and challenges deserving attention. What kind of science did regional actors want to promote: that is, science and technology for commercial development and application or science and technology for problem-solving? Mr. Fouad noted that these are not mutually exclusive. Finally, he recommended that panelists consider the extent to which local contexts could absorb capacities and the steps needed for improving their potential to do so.

During the interactive discussion that followed the roundtable discussion, participants asked a number of questions. Several participants said that innovation will not flourish in the region, unless science is more widely respected and plays a bigger role as an essential tool within societies. In countries in the region where this is not the case, many people with bright ideas relocate elsewhere. Ms. Kalonji suggested that governments could commit to a regional STI policy as one practical



goes beyond traditional government actors; instead, today's most successful networks are increasingly adapting distinct forms of governance, with the aim of linking different types of public and private actors within and across organizational and national boundaries. Given the increasing choice of networks, the importance of seriously investing in some networks and institutionalising network ties in these networks, it is necessary to develop clear networking strategies with clear objectives. Mr. O'Reilly concluded by noting that networks could be essential to the implementation framework of the post-2015 development agenda. Mapping existing and emerging networks, one of which UNIDO has done, would be a useful exercise in this regard.

Opening the roundtable discussion, the moderator Mr. Hanif



range of partnerships, each TTO concentrates on ~~costly~~ specific projects while



6. Actors in the region should put just as much effort into strengthening regional networks as they have into forging partnerships with actors outside of the region (e.g., in Europe and North America).
  7. The UN system and development cooperation providers should consider the great potential of international research collaborations and other international innovation-oriented networks and partnerships to help deliver on the 2015 UN development agenda.
  8. To maximize the potential for driving innovation, the UN system should consider developing better strategies for directly engaging private sector and civil society actors in STI projects in the region.
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