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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

**OF THE TWENTIETH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM
BEIRUT, 11 DECEMBER 2014**

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), acting as the secretariat of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), convened the twentieth RCM meeting at the United Nations House in Beirut, on 11 December 2014.

2. The meeting was attended by representatives of regional United Nations organizations and the League of Arab States. Representatives of select embassies attended the first two sessions as observers. The purpose of the meeting was to undertake the following:

- (a) Discuss the global vision of, and processes leading to, the consolidation of a post-2015 development agenda and the regional processes in support of a new sustainable development framework;
- (b) Review the status of the Arab uprisings after four years, explore how the United Nations can better support efforts towards reform within this context and discuss the role of the United Nations in crises and conflicts;
- (c) Review strategic collaboration priorities defined by the League of Arab States;
- (d) Review progress briefs of the five thematic working groups, the terms of reference for the Transitional Thematic Working Group on the Millennium Development Goals/Sustainable Development Goals and a proposal by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on regional consultations for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit.

3. The present report is a summary of the key discussions and outcomes of the meeting.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Drawing upon cross-cutting themes, the recommendations of the twentieth RCM meeting were introduced by the following preamble:

Recognizing the magnitude and possible irreversibility of the impact of conflicts on the region, as well as the economic, social and political ramifications of these conflicts, the twentieth RCM meeting emphasizes the regional imperative of not doing business as usual, overcoming deficiencies of past approaches to development and improving coherence across interventions.

5. The recommendations of the first session of the twentieth RCM meeting focused on better integrating regional priorities into an emerging post-2015 development agenda. Specific recommendations included the following:

- (a) RCM members are urged to collectively identify and advocate cross-cutting regional priorities for a post-2015 development agenda, such as foreign occupation, youth issues, migration, refugees and internally displaced persons;
- (b) RCM members are called upon to continue to advance regional priorities in the articulation of sustainable development goals, targets and indicators in line with universal principles, building upon the unfinished agenda of the Millennium Development Goals and taking into account the regional review of the global conferences of the 1990s, in collaboration with multi-stakeholder frameworks and relevant Arab ministerial councils;
- (c) RCM members are requested to support data collection, monitoring and analysis in the context of a post-2015 development agenda to inform policymaking and respond to the needs of member States.

6. The outcomes of the second session of the RCM meeting resulted from substantive discussions addressing social justice and development activities in crisis contexts. The following recommendation was made:

RCM members acknowledge the importance of social justice and resilience in the prevention, mitigation of and recovery from conflict and crisis, and RCM members are called upon to forge regional response strategies.

7. The third session of the RCM meeting focused on collaboration between the League of Arab States and the United Nations, and resulted in the following recommendations:

(a) Recalling the matrix of activities that was developed at the coordination meeting of the United Nations and League of Arab States, held in Geneva in June 2014, RCM members are called upon to enhance cooperation in line with the matrix by establishing time-bound action plans and identifying necessary resources;

(b) Referring to the upcoming 2015 Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, the League of Arab States is requested to elaborate plans and identify needs for Summit preparations, and regional United Nations organizations are called upon to continue providing support to the Summit and associated forums;

(c) RCM members welcome the invitation from the League of Arab States to convene the twenty-first RCM meeting at its headquarters in Cairo.

8. At the fourth session of the RCM meeting, the RCM thematic working groups and upcoming regional events were reviewed and the following recommendations were issued:

(a) RCM members take note of progress in the work of the thematic working groups on food security and international migration and the Taskforce on Statistical Coordination;

(b) RCM members recognize the successful establishment of the Thematic Working Group on Climate Change, and will consider new terms of reference based on the outcomes of the climate change negotiations;

(c) RCM members endorse the revised terms of reference of the Thematic Working Group on the Millennium Development Goals that has been redesignated as the Transitional Thematic Working Group on the Millennium Development Goals/Sustainable Development Goals (with an expanded background) and approve the request by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to act as its co-chair; RCM members are called upon to identify/reconfirm relevant focal points;

(d) RCM members agree to coordinate the work of the mechanism with the subregional mechanisms in North Africa;

(e) RCM members are encouraged to engage in the regional consultations on the World Humanitarian Summit, to be held in Amman from 3 to 5 March 2015.

II. PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. SESSION 1. INFLUENCING GLOBAL PROCESSES ON REGIONAL PRIORITY ISSUES: A POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

9. The purpose of the first session was to forge a common understanding of the overall global vision of a post-2015 development agenda, of measures leading to its formulation, and to review the regional processes in support of a sustainable development framework. Participants examined recent and forthcoming

achievements, including key outputs at the global level (e.g. the Secretary General's synthesis report and the proposal of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals) and at the regional level (e.g. various Arab regional consultations on sustainable development goals).

10. The moderator, Ms. Nada al-Nashif, Assistant Director-General and Regional Director of the Regional Office for Arab States of the International Labour Organisation, opened the session by noting that the recently released synthesis report of the Secretary-General raised the bar for the United Nations and its partners to meet the expectations generated by the worldwide consultative processes on a post-2015 development agenda. She said that the Organization was at a historic crossroads where it was being presented with the following two choices: deliver on United Nations values and international commitments, or continue applying a business-as-usual approach to the current crises and challenges, with increasingly grave consequences for much of the world's population.

1. Presentations

11. Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, gave a presentation that summarized the consultations and inputs at the global level on a post-2015 development agenda and forecasted key opportunities and challenges for ensuring a strong, transformative agenda to be agreed at the September 2015 Summit. Mr. Gass said that the emerging development agenda represented a paradigm shift since the 2000 Millennium Declaration, a point that was often overshadowed by debates on the number and range of goals and targets put forward by the Open Working Group. He identified three of the most critical paradigmatic shifts as follows: discarding the donor-recipient development model in favour of a universal agenda; moving from national progress averages to focusing on "leaving no one behind"; and renewing the commitment to pursuing an effective accountability framework for stakeholders in the post-2015 context, both duty bearers and rights holders. He added that each of those shifts would have significant implications for the way the United Nations functioned.

12. Regarding universality, the Organization would need to reconsider how it conceptualized its work on major development challenges, which affected rich and poor countries alike (e.g. income and wealth inequality and youth unemployment). The notion that no one should be left behind in the next development agenda would also challenge the United Nations to work with countries in finding and targeting the most vulnerable groups to ensure that development progress was inclusive and sustainable. The Summit in September 2015 should be seen as an opportunity to highlight leaders' commitment to the new development agenda based on a reinvigorated global compact for implementation and accountability. On that final point, he said that the Secretary-General's synthesis report set out potential review mechanisms for the new development agenda, including the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. The regional tier's potential to contribute to accountability in the post-2015 context held great potential, but could benefit from more concrete ideas. Resources for accountability efforts would be extremely limited, so regional actors and mechanisms, including RCM, needed to be lean, efficient and mindful of the most appropriate subsidiarity methods for the regional tier.

13. Ms. Roula Majdalani, Director of the ESCWA Sustainable Development Policies Division, presented regional processes in support of the post-2015 development agenda. She began by providing an overview of the extensive consultations that had taken place in preparation for a new development agenda since the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), and highlighted the recurring complexities and challenges raised by regional actors as part of those discussions, including the following: pervasive conflict and political instability; contrasting development profiles and needs; and weak institutional capacities. She said that there was much to build on at the regional level given that Arab consultations were inclusive and open; had strong political backing from regional actors such as the League of Arab States; had successfully pushed member States toward a general alignment of priorities and a vision for integration; and had sparked important discussions on regional approaches to the means of implementation.

14. An initial ESCWA analysis of the Open Working Group proposal and the Secretary-General's synthesis report had identified several regional priorities that merited further attention in the discussions and negotiations that had begun at the United Nations Headquarters in January 2015, including the following: the needs of refugees and internally displaced persons; the impact of occupation on development; support to the key enablers of peace and security; regional approaches to the means of implementation; the role of a rights-based approach to development; and monitoring in a regional context.

2. Discussion

15. RCM members devoted much of the discussion that followed to the role of data collection and analysis in supporting implementation, monitoring and accountability of post-2015 sustainable development commitments in the Arab region. There was wide agreement that the experience of the Millennium Development Goals on data and statistics had provided important lessons for the United Nations to apply over the period 2015-2030. It was argued that accountability as originally conceived in the Millennium Declaration was more of a boundary-pushing political commitment of States to their citizens than what it had eventually become – a technocratic, statistically driven approach to designing targets and indicators. As a result, the Millennium Development Goals had never achieved full ownership among many of the countries that should have benefited the most from their creation.

16. In 2015 and beyond, that issue had at least two important implications, particularly for the Arab region. Firstly, regional United Nations entities should look closely at how data could be used, not only for monitoring progress, but also for contributing to effective policy formulation in the region. Focusing on how data could serve policy rather than the other way around, on a country-by-country basis, would ensure a more embedded, bottom-up approach to monitoring, review and accountability among Member States in the region. In that regard, ESCWA was co-chairing a new Development Account project aimed at improving the link between data and policy through needs assessments, to support sustainable development goals and the subsequent translation of policy needs into statistical indicators and related capacity-building programmes.

17. Secondly, many participants emphasized the importance of continuing to highlight key regional issues that could not be addressed through a system of goals and targets, no matter how rich or revolutionary the source or type of data. Violence, whether as a result of conflict, humanitarian disasters, occupation or terrorism, plagued the region and it was not yet clear how efforts for peace and security fitted into the emerging framework, including the 17 goals and the six thematic clusters described in the Secretary-General's synthesis report. In terms of enablers for development (an issue linked to accountability), participants asked how development actors would assess and recommend the willingness and capacity of institutions in the region to respond to development needs, especially in view of the complex political transformations that had taken place since 2011. Much of the potential success of a post-2015 development agenda would hinge on whether such issues were taken into consideration, therefore United Nations regional entities must ensure that they remained on the table as part of the discussions in 2015.

18. Participants were reminded that Member States in the Arab region had been offered two regional frameworks for sustainable development (the African and North African framework and the Arab framework). Member States should use those frameworks to best meet their needs, supported by close coordination between development actors in each of the two regions, including through their respective regional coordination mechanisms.

B. SESSION 2. ENHANCING COORDINATION ON PRIORITY ISSUES: JUSTICE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

19. The objectives of the second session were to review the status of the Arab uprisings after four years; explore how the United Nations could better support reform efforts within that context; and discuss the role of the United Nations in crises and conflicts. The session was chaired by Mr. Fateh Azzam, Director of the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut, and included a

keynote address by Mr. Tarek Mitri, Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, former Lebanese Minister and former Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya.

20. Mr. Azzam opened the session by briefly discussing social justice, pointing out that it could be defined both as the just distribution of wealth, opportunities and privileges, and as a socially just society, based on solidarity and equality. He then briefly summarized recent changes in the Arab region, asking what role the United Nations would pursue in the future and how it would prioritize its work in Member States.

1. Presentations

21. Mr. Mitri gave the keynote address. Quoting political philosopher Martha Nussbaum, he said that in many Arab countries, the emotional lives of politicians and people alike were filled with uncertainty and fear, leaving little room for love. The Arab uprisings had manifested anger against neopatrimonial and authoritarian regimes in countries where there had been a fusion between the private and public; political power and State authority; and institutions and family networks, and where leaders were often more venerated than States. Social inequality, rather than social justice, had been the primary driver of the uprisings. The ensuing political dynamics and power struggles had over-shadowed justice issues and circumvented the consensus-building required for State-building. He asked whether justice was a condition for durable peace and argued that the pursuit of justice had been overshadowed by efforts to ensure national unity. Unfortunately, precipitated elections had exacerbated social divisions and had made national unity more unattainable. He added that social justice issues were not visible in the current discourse of the new political forces. On the contrary, injustice was being tolerated to avoid conflict, raising the question of the trade-off between justice and peace preservation. Apparently, many people were willing to sacrifice a great deal for stability.

22. The speaker noted that some form of justice was necessary to achieve reconciliation; a concept that was missing from the United Nations theory of democratic transition, which had proved to be a recipe for disillusionment and failure. Recalling his experiences in Libya, he argued that the sequence of elections, constitution drafting, then more elections and the empowerment of civil society had proved problematic. In Libya, there had been an obsession with democratic elections, with development actors, including United Nations agencies and their Western-funded civil society organizations, leading to a neglect of urgent social development and humanitarian concerns. The United Nations had been unable to intervene effectively in Libya, because of its emphasis on a democratic transition. In conclusion, he said that no matter how absent the issue of justice was from the public debate, it was the role of the United Nations and civil society to ensure that it was at the heart of the political debate.

23. Mr. Abdullah al-Dardari, ESCWA Deputy Executive Secretary for Programmes, gave a presentation on the regional impact of crises and conflicts, pointing out that recent events had proved that Arab countries were more integrated than they or the United Nations had assumed. There was a high level of correlation between the growth rates of countries' gross domestic product, as was the case with Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic; Libya and Tunisia; and Iraq and Jordan. Those correlations should be turned into positive conflict-mitigating factors, which required sufficient political will. Moreover, sustainable development goals should be envisaged within the framework of those conflicts. The correlations between peoples and economies in the Arab region warranted further exploration, not only to identify regional priorities, but to also determine how to develop them in the context of ongoing violence. In particular, a regional coordinated crisis management approach, a regional trade investment strategy and strengthened regional institutions were needed to build in-house resilience and nationally and regionally coordinated systems that ensured dignity and social justice.

24. Mr. Adel Abdellatif, Chief of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Programme Division, made a presentation on building resilience and the development role of the United Nations in times of crisis. He said that the United Nations approach to countries undergoing social change

was too standardized and needed to be reconsidered. If, according to the World Bank, it took a country 15 years to recover from civil war, then many Arab countries would not recover during the course of the implementation of the sustainable development goals. Defining resilience as the ability and strength of individuals, institutions and Governments to cope with crises, recover from them and transform into a conflict-free society, he indicated that the United Nations should focus on building resilience in conflict situations, especially in countries suffering from spillovers. United Nations agencies needed to merge humanitarian interventions with development activities. At present, recovery in the region was taking too long. He asked how the subregion would cope with ongoing crises, and if the region had not experienced those crises, how could the support that Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries offered for conflict assistance have instead been used to improve development.

25. Mr. Samir el-Hawary, OCHA Humanitarian Affairs Officer, discussed coping with complex emergencies and humanitarian crises, asking what the limits of humanitarian action were. The application of humanitarian principles (impartiality, neutrality and humanity) and the provision of palliative relief until a political solution was found were means to ensure that the most vulnerable were not sacrificed during a conflict. Justice was a political issue and humanitarian organizations had a limited role in political processes, but a large role in protecting civilians and alleviating human suffering. However, the provision of humanitarian assistance, as in the Syrian Arab Republic, was not sustainable in the long term, and there was a need to better bridge the gap between humanitarian assistance and development. There were numerous terminologies for such interventions and approaches, but in reality it was just a constant repackaging of the same concepts with no consideration of structural goals and limitations. It was vital to overcome the deficiencies of the past. Regarding the Syrian Arab Republic, he asked how additional funds could be accessed (not just humanitarian funding); how to ensure the mobilization of development actors in crisis contexts; when bolstering the resilience of governance systems and civil society, what will was there to phase out the role of the international community; and how to maintain respect for the humanitarian imperative in a plan that also had a political agenda (such as promoting stability and addressing causes of poverty and inequality).

26. Ms. Samira Atallah, Director of the ESCWA Centre for Women, concluded the presentations with a discussion on how to better protect women and children in crisis and conflict. She presented the following four areas for discussion: the specific needs of women in war; the responsibility to protect them; how to protect women and children if the State was one of the actors targeting civilian populations; and lessons learned from the current situation in the region. She said that, when addressing those questions, it was important to look at the determinants that made women more vulnerable in conflicts, war and displacement. Women were already disadvantaged given that they were marginalized by pre-war structural factors. They were exposed to rape as a war tactic; in the Arab region, refugees were being sold into sex slavery. There was unprecedented violence against women and an over-sexualization of conflicts. Syrian refugees were being sold into child marriage as a coping strategy by their families. Rapes were occurring unpunished in refugee camps, depending on the legal structures of the host country. International instruments existed, including human rights law, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Beijing Platform for Action and Security Council resolution 1325, but were they effective. In fighting human trafficking, there was the approach of protection, prevention and prosecution, but when a refugee was raped and impregnated in a United Nations refugee camp, the United Nations helped only with the safe delivery of the child (protection), and not with prevention or prosecution.

2. Discussion

27. A wide-ranging discussion followed, with considerable focus on issues of social justice, the impact of conflict in the region, the post-2015 global development paradigm and sustainable development goals, regional needs and priorities, and challenges faced by the United Nations in the region. The discussion began with a frank assessment of some United Nations actors' recent poor coordination, as with the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, and how a lack of cooperation could result in Member States' priorities, such

as security, trumping United Nations priorities, such as social justice. Similar concerns were aired by many RCM participants, including the observation that better United Nations coordination would also lead to a better identification and action on regional development priorities.

28. Numerous participants discussed the impact of conflict on the region, emphasizing the unsustainability of humanitarian aid at its current levels; the irreversibility of some impacts, including some population flows; the destruction of political and social economies, trade routes and cultural heritage sites; and the overall militarization of the region. It was pointed out that the region lacked a disaster management mechanism and an implementation plan for Security Council resolution 1325. Participants also said that a regional vulnerability assessment should be undertaken to provide United Nations actors with accurate data for policy design and to better identify emerging issues, such as HIV/AIDS infection rates that were increasing in the Arab region. All participants emphasized that resilience must be bolstered across the region.

29. RCM participants also discussed how the sustainable development goals and post-2015 processes represented an opening for a new global development paradigm but, owing to the regional conflicts and context, the region risked not engaging with that new paradigm. It was agreed that the current sustainable development goals did not represent regional priorities. Some participants proposed that, if the goals could not be changed, then regional United Nations actors should focus on amending the indicators and targets. The goals did not reflect the region's challenges, notably conflict, nor its priorities on youth, migration, occupation, refugees and internally displaced persons.

30. Some participants discussed the challenges and opportunities of country-level work, including the risks of censorship on certain topics (both self-censorship and implicitly or explicitly by Member States) and the potential for country-level work to lead the way on issues such as better identification of vulnerable groups. Lastly, the discussion returned to ensuring that United Nations values, including human rights and social justice, were implemented, even on topics sensitive to some Member States.

C. SESSION 3. TOWARDS AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION: THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES

31. The purpose of the third session was to discuss ways for RCM members to work more closely with the League of Arab States, to generate concrete ideas on how RCM could support the fourth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit and related side events, and to briefly review the progress of activities agreed upon at a general coordination meeting of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, held in Geneva in June 2014.

32. The moderator, Mr. Nadim Khouri, ESCWA Deputy Executive Secretary for Programme Support, opened by highlighting the privileged and strategic relationship between the United Nations and the League of Arab States. He said that United Nations organizations could collectively provide relevant and targeted support to the League in many thematic areas. He suggested that United Nations organizations should regularly report on their planned activities and identify mechanisms to enhance coordination, including through the thematic working groups.

1. *Presentation*

33. Mr. Tarek el-Nabulsi, Head of the Coordination and Follow-up Unit in the office of the Under-Secretary-General for Social Affairs at the League of Arab States, delivered a presentation that focused on the progress of the United Nations-League of Arab States matrix of activities, agreed at the general coordination meeting held in Geneva. He said that the League planned to coordinate a common Arab position on the post-2015 development agenda, and on preparations for the upcoming fourth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit and related side events.

34. He indicated that follow-up on the activities agreed in Geneva had been inconsistent and at times weak. He suggested that meetings between United Nations and League of Arab States focal points should happen more frequently, and that human and financial resources should be identified to implement agreed activities. He added that the matrix did not always indicate which United Nations agency would take the lead in the organization of a specific activity, or how coordination between different entities would take place.

35. He briefed RCM members about the meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, held on 30 October 2014, and highlighted the key points of the Sharm al-Sheikh Declaration on development priorities of Arab people within the post-2015 global development agenda. He noted that the meeting resulted in a revised matrix of 15 priorities and targets originally issued at the meeting of the Council of Ministers of Social Affairs, held in Amman in May 2014. Regarding sustainable development goals, he said that accurate data and statistics continued to be a bottleneck for the measurement of indicators and called on United Nations agencies to provide more coordinated support to Arab countries in the collection, analysis and dissemination of data, and in the harmonization of regional datasets.

36. With regard to the organization of the fourth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, he confirmed that Tunisia would host the Summit as originally planned, but that final dates had not yet been set, noting that the meeting might take place in May 2015. He confirmed that all ministerial councils had completed their work and that the League of Arab States would welcome the support of United Nations agencies in the organization of side events, in particular the Youth Forum and Civil Society Forum.

2. Discussion

37. Mr. Hamed al-Hammami, Regional Director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), expressed the organization's interest to fully cooperate with the League of Arab States in areas of common concern, and noted that UNESCO had supported statistical capacity-building in the areas of education and culture.

38. Ms. Karima Bounemra, Director of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Office in North Africa, also welcomed increased cooperation with the League. She suggested that RCM members should focus more on the global strategic vision and direction of engagement with the League and less on the specifics of operational activities.

39. Mr. Iyad Abumoghli, Regional Director and Representative of the UNEP Regional Office for West Asia, highlighted the partnership between UNEP and the League, indicating that a memorandum of understanding had recently been signed between the two entities and praising the collaboration between ESCWA and the League in the post-2015 preparations.

40. Ms. Karima Al Korri, Chief of the Population Section at ESCWA, expressed the willingness of ESCWA to collaborate with the League on the preparations for the Youth Forum on the sidelines of the Arab Development Summit, and requested that the League provide guidance on the modalities, procedures and coordination structures for the Arab Youth Forum.

41. Mr. Samir el-Hawary said that OCHA had put in place six-month workplans with the League, which were reviewed on a regular basis. He welcomed the involvement of all United Nations agencies working in the humanitarian field.

42. Mr. Adel Abdellatif also welcomed cooperation between UNDP and the League, and raised a question about support to the League in the implementation of the sustainable development goals. He indicated the central role of statistics and data collection and the unique capacity of ESCWA to provide that kind of support. He also noted that the Arab Council of Ministers of Social Affairs should work closely with other relevant Arab councils to cover the different sectoral areas of the sustainable development goals.

43. Mr. Mohamad Abdel-Ahad, Director of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) Regional Office, praised the excellent cooperation between UNFPA and the League in the area of population and reminded RCM members of the outcomes of the 1990s high-level conferences, including the International Conference on Population and Development, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the World Summit for Social Development and the fourth World Conference on Women, stressing that United Nations agencies should ensure that Arab countries remained committed to the pledges made at those global forums. He also addressed the issue of data scarcity and noted that UNFPA had been supporting the League's Pan Arab Population and Family Health Project (PAPFAM) and the Pan Arab Project for Child Development (PAPCHILD), which had been an important source of information on development. He called for greater cooperation among RCM members and suggested that the proposed Transitional Thematic Working Group on the Millennium Development Goals/ Sustainable Development Goals or the Statistical Taskforce might be the right forum for such coordination.

44. Mr. el-Nabulsi extended an invitation to hold the twenty-first meeting of the RCM at the League of Arab States headquarters in Cairo to allow more interaction between United Nations and League actors from different departments. He also requested suggestions for the theme of the United Nations-League of Arab States sectoral meeting, planned for 2015, and suggested the post-2015 development agenda as one option.

D. SESSION 4. PROGRESS OF WORK AND INFORMATION SHARING

45. Mr. Amjad Abbashar, Regional Director of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), presented the objectives of the fourth session, noting that participants had already received written progress updates on the work of the thematic working groups. He highlighted that there were proposed changes to two of the groups but the others would continue their work as envisaged. He noted that OCHA had requested to issue a brief invitation to RCM members to contribute to the World Humanitarian Summit and that the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) would like to provide an update on the Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). Lastly, he invited RCM members to present possible comments on recommendations issued at the nineteenth RCM meeting.

1. *Presentations*

46. Mr. Mohamed Aw-Dahir, Regional Food Security Officer at the Food and Agriculture Organization, presented the work of the Food Security Thematic Working Group, noting that Group members normally implemented their activities individually as there were no common resources, but there was a general agreement to coordinate activities and invite different organizations to participate in activities whenever possible, to encourage diverse views, avoid duplication and ensure the effective use of resources. He noted that the Group had decided to produce joint knowledge products, because there was a huge demand for analysis on food security in the region; building consensus on certain issues was therefore important and required teams to work together. He added that the Group had no issues requiring decision at the RCM level.

47. Mr. Pasquale Lupoli, Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa at the International Organization for Migration, presented the work of the Migration Thematic Working Group, noting that the mapping of migration-related activities of all agencies had been completed. A training workshop on migration and policy development had also been held at the League, with 19 representatives from nine countries taking part. A regional report on migration, in particular on forced migration and development, was being jointly prepared by Group members. The Group had no issues requiring decision at the RCM level.

48. Mr. Juraj Riecan, Director of the ESCWA Statistics Division, presented the work of the Statistics Task Force, noting that discussions had focused on the need for improving data on the region and merging resources to provide the best possible services. He noted that joint work has been carried out in the areas of population statistics, economic statistics and national accounts, environment statistics and statistical capacity development. He highlighted the importance of developing a systematic approach to statistical capacity

development, building on the progress made in harmonizing the work programmes of ESCWA and regional statistical capacity-building organizations, which had already significantly improved the integration of activities and allowed for the pooling of resources. He also stressed that other actors producing statistics in the region, such as the GCC Statistical Centre, should be involved in harmonizing regional work on statistical capacity development. The goal should not be to provide standardized training, but rather to help countries meet their needs, whether related to implementing surveys, reviewing data, improving organizational set-ups, or any other issues. He stressed that future challenges would include facilitating the sharing of data, where progress had been slow; preparing a comprehensive list of the services that RCM members could offer; and developing cooperation with ECA on data produced for countries in North Africa. Lastly, he noted that the Group had no issues requiring decision at the RCM level.

49. Mr. Iyad Abumoghli presented the work of the Climate Change Thematic Working Group, noting that much had been accomplished since its establishment in 2008. He proposed that RCM announce the successful completion of the Group's work, noting that 2015 would be an important year for climate change and that new issues were expected to come out of the Climate Change Summit towards the end of the year. RCM could therefore reassess the need for a Climate Change Thematic Working Group at the end of 2015, with possible new terms of reference.

50. Mr. Abdallah al-Dardari presented the proposed changes to the terms of reference of the existing Millennium Development Goals Thematic Working Group, including coordination on post-2015 processes. The revised group, to be called the Transitional Thematic Working Group on the Millennium Development Goals/Sustainable Development Goals would continue to monitor the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the impact of conflicts on their attainment until the end of 2015, and would also coordinate regional contributions and information sharing on a post-2015 development agenda during 2015. The twenty-first RCM meeting, to be held in the fourth quarter of 2015, may then decide on a new thematic working group on the sustainable development goals.

51. Ms. Reem Nejdawi, Chief of the ESCWA Productive Sectors Section, noted that the objectives of the Transitional Working Group were to serve as a repository and collect feedback regarding key documents on the transition to a post-2015 agenda and sustainable development goals, and to coordinate inputs into key processes and reports leading into the post-2015 framework. She said that RCM members had been provided with draft terms of reference for the Transitional Group and were invited to submit feedback on them by 19 December 2015.

2. Discussion

52. Ms. Rima Khalaf, ESCWA Executive Secretary, noted that ESCWA would need to take stock of the Millennium Development Goal performance in the region by the end of 2015 to produce the Arab Development Outlook 2030 publication. Mr. Al-Dardari confirmed that the Arab Development Outlook 2030 would take stock of the latest data on the Millennium Development Goals in producing its baseline.

53. Mr. Mohamed Abdel-Ahad welcomed the suggested terms of reference for the Transitional Thematic Working Group and noted that it should also work on producing indicators for the Arab region. He expressed the interest of UNFPA in contributing to the finalization of the Arab Sustainable Development Report.

54. Mr. Iyad Abumoghli expressed the interest of UNEP to be considered as co-chair of the Transitional Group; a request which was welcomed by ESCWA.

55. Ms. Karima Bounemra expressed the interest of ECA to work with ESCWA on regional coordination. She noted that RCM Africa was also undergoing revision and invited ESCWA and the League to participate in its upcoming meeting in March 2015. She noted that ECA also held subregional RCM meetings, including one for North Africa, and that it would be important to coordinate its work with that of the Arab RCM.

56. Mr. Samir el-Hawary said that the World Humanitarian Summit was scheduled to take place in Istanbul in May 2016. Its purpose was to establish a forward-looking agenda for the humanitarian system, and bring together United Nations Member States, civil society organizations, humanitarian organizations, the private sector and communities. As part of the preparations for the Summit, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regional meeting would be held in Amman, from 3 to 5 March 2015, and OCHA was reaching out to different stakeholders and the media to prepare for it. He expressed the interest of OCHA to involve RCM in supporting the preparations for the regional meeting and offered to share a scoping paper, outlining critical issues, with RCM members. OCHA would welcome either individual consultations or a joint consultation with all interested RCM members to gather feedback on those critical issues.

57. Mr. Tarek el-Nabulsi noted that the League of Arab States had already held a meeting with Ms. Valerie Amos, the OCHA Under-Secretary-General, to talk about the League's role in helping ensure participation from the Arab region. He further noted that more cooperation would be welcome, because the issues to be discussed at the Summit covered a range of important themes. He also encouraged OCHA and RCM members to involve the subsidiary bodies of the League in preparations for the Summit. Mr. El-Hawary confirmed that the League was the co-chair of the regional steering group of the Summit and that OCHA would be happy to explore the possibility of supporting the League's subsidiary bodies.

58. Ms. Katja Schafer, Human Settlements Officer at UN-Habitat, informed RCM members that Habitat III would take place in Ecuador in October 2016, and that she hoped that the Arab region would take part in the preparations.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

59. The twentieth RCM meeting was held at the United Nations House in Beirut, on 11 December 2014. Four sessions were convened for the discussion of agenda items.

B. OPENING OF THE MEETING

60. Ms. Rima Khalaf, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive-Secretary of ESCWA, opened the meeting, welcoming participants. She highlighted the importance of 2015, wherein the sustainable development goals would be finalized and major conferences on financing for development and climate change would pave the way to the global post-2015 development agenda. She emphasized the uniqueness of RCM as a forum to explore those visions of hope at a time of change, both globally and regionally.

61. She said that the absence of justice drove people to resignation and despair, and fostered extremism, sectarianism and a recourse to violence. Dignity and justice, the main demands raised by thousands of Arab citizens during the uprisings, were two essential elements in the Secretary-General's synthesis report. She added that further consideration was needed to implement the new global development agenda, especially regarding violence and conflict, oppression and foreign occupation.

62. She recommended reassessing the challenges facing United Nations actors in the region, including higher standards for gender and minority rights, better coordination with civil society and eliminating discrepancies between humanitarian and development work. Lastly, she called on RCM members to identify the region's unique strengths and to align their work within the post-2015 development agenda. Given that not all the region's priorities might be included in the sustainable development goals, RCM offered an excellent opportunity to explore a regional perspective on the global development agenda.

63. Mr. Mourad Wahba, UNDP Deputy Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States, representing Ms. Sima Bahous, Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States,

highlighted the following four priorities: youth development requiring new approaches for young women and men to participate, contribute and lead across the economic, social and cultural spheres, given that over half the region's population was under 25; supporting better and more timely data collection and monitoring to help Member States and civil society organizations chart their courses with more clarity; utilising a resilience-based framework as an important tool to complement the vital humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis; and strengthening collaboration with the Leagues of Arab States.

64. Mr. Tarek el-Nabulsi, representing the Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States for Social Affairs, said that despite the conflicts and Israeli occupation, which had become obstacles to achieving inclusive regional development, Arab countries had made notable achievements with regard to the Millennium Development Goals. He welcomed proposals to review the Arab matrix of development priorities by ensuring its compatibility with the outcomes of the Open Working Group and the Secretary-General's synthesis report. Lastly, he confirmed the need for more cooperation, coordination and focal point engagement between the League and the United Nations.

**C. LAUNCH OF THE PROJECT ENTITLED
“PROMOTING FOOD AND WATER SECURITY IN THE ARAB REGION”**

65. On the sidelines of the RCM meeting, ESCWA and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) launched a four-year project to bolster food and water security in the Arab region. The project, including a 2.7 million United States dollars donation from Sida, aims to generate unique national and regional data on the present and future situation of food and water security; design coordinated regional policies to enhance food and water security; and help Governments respond to dwindling arable lands and increased water scarcity, while meeting growing food needs.

D. PARTICIPANTS

66. The meeting was attended by representatives of regional United Nations agencies and organizations, and the League of Arab States secretariat, with select embassies also present for the morning sessions. Annex I to the present report contains the list of participants.

E. DOCUMENTS

67. The list of documents submitted at the twentieth RCM meeting is presented in annex II to the present report.

Annex I

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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

| Title | Details |
|--|--|
| OPENING | |
| Speech of Ms. Rima Khalaf | Under-Secretary-General, Executive Secretary of ESCWA |
| Speech of Mr. Tarek el-Nabulsi | Head of the Coordination and Follow-up, Social Department, League of Arab States |
| Speech of Mr. Mourad Wahba | Deputy Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States |
| SESSION 1 | |
| Opening Working Group Proposal for Sustainable Development Goals | Full Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals |
| Sharm al-Sheikh Declaration (Arabic) | The Development Priorities of Arab People for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, Sharm al-Sheikh, 30 October 2014 |
| The Regional Processes in Support of the Post-2015 Agenda | Presentation by ESCWA |
| SESSION 3 | |
| United Nations-League of Arab States Matrix of Activities | Matrix agreed within the Framework of the United Nations-League of Arab States Coordination Meeting, Geneva, 17-19 June 2014 |
| Updated United Nations-League of Arab States Matrix - Social Cluster | Update provided by the League of Arab States on achievements in the social cluster |
| SESSION 4 | |
| Transitional Working Group (TWG) Note on Climate Change | Briefing Note prepared by Chair |
| TWG on MDGs | Progress Report prepared by Chair |
| MDGs/SDGs TWG | Progress Report and ToRs for the proposed TWG on Post-2015 prepared by Chair |
| TWG on Migration | Progress Report prepared by Co-Chairs |
| TWG on Statistics | Progress Report prepared by Chair |
| TWG on Food Security | Progress Report prepared by Chair |
| Matrix of Recommendations – Nineteenth RCM | Includes recommendations and status |
| World Humanitarian Summit – At a Glance | Brief Fact Sheet |
| World Humanitarian Summit – Regional Consultation – Middle East and North Africa, March 2015 | Development Actor Consultation – Concept Note |
| World Humanitarian Summit | MENA Scoping Paper |
| HABITAT III | UN HABITAT Urban Vision No. 3 |
| Towards a New Urban Agenda – UN HABITAT | Advocating for Integrated and Inclusive Sustainable Urbanisation |

