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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT
OF THE SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM
BEIRUT, 25-26 NOVEMBER 2011

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Introduction

1. As the Secretariat to the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) convened the sixteenth meeting of the RCM under the chairmanship of United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro on 25-26 November 2011 at the United Nations House, Beirut.
2. The purpose of the meeting, which was attended by representatives of regional United Nations agencies and other regional organizations, was to (a) Review the Outcome of the Arab Preparatory Process for Rio+20 to assess potential directions and problematic areas; (b) Agree on the components of a regional Guidance Note for sustainable development post Rio+20; (c) Create a Joint Task Force to deliver a Guidance Note by November 2012. The thematic focus of the meeting was sustainable development in the Arab region in the light of preparations for Rio+20 and its possible outcome. This report is a summary of the key discussions and outcomes of the meeting.

I. PRESENTATIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND OUTCOMES

A. SESSION 1 – THE ROAD TO RIO

3. The purpose of this session was to assess the “Arab position” on regional preparations for the Rio Summit and to identify strengths and weaknesses of the process.
4. The Moderator, Assistant Secretary-General Mr. Thomas Stelzer, gave an overview of the global preparatory process for Rio+20 and focused on the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting and its main messages. He summarized the important views in the context of sustainable development governance and argued that linkages between the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) and the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) are critical in this respect to enhance policy coordination between regional and global levels. Mr. Stelzer then reviewed the outcome of the RCM in terms of the institutional governance, green economy and priority issues for the region. He further explained that a growing interest has emerged in the preparatory process for sustainable development goals and suggested that such goals are formulated on the basis of the priority areas identified during the preparatory process.
5. Mr. Adel Abdel Kader, from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) stressed that countries in the region are still exploring the green economy concept as there is no universally agreed definition and therefore no consensus on the green economy exists at the country level. He explained that conflicting views within different ministries give rise to suspicion and caution regarding green economy. Mr. Kader recommends that the United Nations supports countries in clarifying the green economy concept and focus the work in the context of the Arab spring, as there is a strong desire for social equity, unemployment, freedom of speech, food, water and energy security. Overall, Mr. Abdel Kader emphasized that the preparatory process was “very positive” and concluded with strong statements of commitment from the region to sustainable development, especially in reiterating commitment to the Rio principles as non-negotiable and in identifying and agreeing on emerging challenges facing the region.
6. Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad from the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) articulated the position of civil society organizations in preparations for Rio+20 on the basis of the consultative meetings held with 83 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in October 2011. Mr. Abdel Samad argued that there is pressing need to redefine the role of States and other development actors, to evaluate the concept of public-private partnerships, to strengthen institutions with a focus on bottom-up participatory governance, and to re-evaluate existing policies and trade agreements. Mr. Abdel Samad supported the establishment of a “Sustainable Development Council”, with the mandate and authority to monitor sustainable development initiatives in member States and hold them accountable for implementation. He further explained that the overarching development paradigm should be rethought, as global trade increased considerably over the past two decades but was not witnessed equally in the Basic Capabilities Index (BCI). He emphasized the need to

reshape production and consumption patterns that exploit unsustainable natural resources. In addition, he advised that any discussion of the green economy must take place within the contours of sustainable development and Agenda 21 as articulated at Rio.

7. Ms. Roula Majdalani, from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), provided a detailed analysis of the Arab Regional Preparatory Process as it brought together multiple United Nations agencies, government ministries, civil society organizations, and the private sector. Her presentation focused on the various consultations undertaken, the studies and reports produced, as well as the recommendations of the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting. Ms. Majdalani identified both the weak and strong elements in the recommendations; for example, a strong commitment to Agenda 21 on the one hand and a strong resistance to referencing democracy and governance challenges, or neglecting reference to a low-carbon economy altogether on the other hand. Ms. Majdalani then proposed further coordination within the RCM on the formulation of Sustainable Development Goals for the region as a way to increase the efforts of the preparatory process and to consolidate the significance of the Rio negotiations in member countries.

8. Mr. Achim Steiner, Chair of High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP), presented the keynote address. He stated the importance of Rio+20 to the agenda of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) and argued that the proposed themes of Rio+20 are clearly linked to the various crises affecting the world today. He explained the occasion of Rio has provided both rich and useful subject matters for debate, and placed green economy for poverty eradication at the top of the agenda for the Arab region. Mr. Steiner emphasized the existence of good experiences in the Arab region, such as solar photovoltaic systems in Egypt and Masdar City in the United Arab Emirates. Mr. Steiner once more stressed the potential of employment for the region through technological innovations and the development of the energy sector; highlighting that 20-25 per cent more jobs could be generated. Mr. Steiner also underlined priority areas for the future and emphasized that social equity must be at the heart of economic discussions, overtly factoring in the right to development, combating poverty and generating green jobs, advancing food security and sustainable agriculture, sustainable human settlements, and management of oceans and disasters. As the region experiences various transitions, maintaining productive capacity is important. Finally, Mr. Steiner argued that there is now more scope for action at both the regional and local levels.

Discussion and outcomes

9. Participants discussed the implications for the region of various issues raised by the preparatory process. Consensus on strengthening the social pillar of sustainable development merged with an emphasis on the right to development and “inclusive” development. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) questioned the lack of clear understanding of green and clean economies in the region and the need for Governments of the region to provide additional information, particularly through translating relevant reports into Arabic and disseminating through various means. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) stressed the importance of breaking down barriers between environmental and developmental issues. UNV stated that the discussion of green economy continues to be dominated by references to governments and the private sector and emphasized it is the collective responsibility of the United Nations to ensure a more participatory and inclusive development paradigm to Rio.

10. Assistant Secretary-General Mr. Thomas Stelzer stressed that Rio+20 is thematically the most important conference on the global stage and that it will set the post 2015 agenda. He explained the relation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to sustainable development and its objectives will be articulated especially by member States and that we must look collectively at both financing and new technologies and consider the ways in which integrated and inclusive development can be financed.

11. Participants agreed that a new development paradigm must be much more attentive to the social pillar and focus on the policies that would link economic growth to tangible and positive social impacts. From a civil society perspective, Mr. Abdel Samad argued that a focus on green economy may be distracting and that the focus should rather be how to ensure that trade and global economic governance work for sustainable

development. He explained that global partnership is not about finance but concerns global governance, which affects not only aid, debt and financing but also issues such as technology transfer.

12. On the basis of the discussion, the session concluded the following:

(a) Special attention to the social pillar of any sustainable development initiative must be given; special attention to the right to development must be at the heart of any new development paradigm;

(b) A more inclusive and participatory approach to sustainable development must be promoted by RCM members;

(c) More work is needed to ensure that the potential of green economy is made clear and relevant for the region, especially in the area of employment. Existing knowledge and initiatives on green economy should be disseminated.

B. SESSION 2 – THE POLITICS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

13. The purpose of this session was to consider how sustainable development may be placed on various political agendas in the region and to identify components of civic engagement in sustainable development.

1. *Presentations*

14. Ms. Razan Zuayter, Director of the Arab Group for the Protection of Nature, outlined the absence of political will when it comes to sustainable development in the Arab region. The speaker stressed that Arab Governments do not participate in international events and are not including civil society in their decision making processes. Similarly, Arab civil society organizations are to a large degree absent from global forums. Ms. Zuayter set out a number of recommendations: need for adopting human rights framework as a basis for sustainable development; adopting the principle of governance over resources; of *greening the economy* (rather than promoting “green economy”); ensuring that issues of conflict and occupation are placed on the Rio+20 agenda; and opening cooperation channels with countries of the South and Arab civil societies.

15. Mr. Walid Khadduri, former director of the Middle East Economic Survey (MEES), presented on the economics of sustainable development in the Arab region with a focus on the energy sector. Analysing the reasons that renewable energy is not taken seriously in the region, he considered different categories of Arab States and their engagement with oil production on the one hand and renewable energy on the other. He concluded by projecting the future production and consumption patterns for the region in terms of oil, renewable energy, transportation and technology.

2. *Discussion and outcomes*

16. Consequent discussions focused on two areas. Firstly, on the issue of political will and the extent to which, both internationally and nationally, a political appetite exists to formulate the necessary regulations for sustainable development. Secondly, on the issue of subsidies in the region in relation to the renewable energy sector, both its potential and to what extent governments are interested.

17. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), UNV, ESCWA, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) focused on the need for clear modalities from the United Nations on the participation of various groups and stakeholders, especially youth, in sustainable development as a way to gain the political will necessary to implement change. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNICEF, ESCWA and ECA also pushed for further United Nations thinking on the issue of renewable energy and the ways in which it is placed as a priority item on the agendas of States in the region.

C. SESSION 3 – WHAT IS “GREEN” IN THE ARAB REGION?

18. The purpose of this session was to identify feasible and relevant “green” elements to be promoted regionally.

1. *Presentations*

19. Mr. Joselius Samaneigo, from the Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), presented the case of Latin America in the context of sustainable development and Rio+20. The outcome of the preparatory process in Latin America was striking in that it made no reference to green economy but focused instead on sustainable consumption and production within a new development paradigm. Mr. Samaneigo explained that Latin American countries, despite differences, arrive at Rio+20 in a position of relative strength compared to the first Rio conference and further explained that their concerns and expectations have changed. One concern remains however that energy, agriculture and infrastructure sectors are not exposed to the paradigm of sustainable development. In this regard, it would have been more fruitful for the region to work on the economic pillar of sustainable development rather than focus on promoting the green economy concept.

20. Mr. Adel Abdel Kader, from UNEP, pointed out that greenhouse gas emissions will increase severely by 2030 with negative environmental consequences. Mr. Abdel Kader stressed that green economy is a tool for achieving sustainable development, rather than a replacement for it and outlined good initiatives in the region, namely in Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. He noted that UNEP has developed two strategies in partnership with 20 United Nations agencies.

21. Mr. Peter Poschen from the International Labour Organization (ILO) emphasized that the concept of green economy provides opportunities for jobs and social inclusion. ILO have been cooperating with UNEP on green economy and green jobs and have produced a guide that is already used in Asian countries. In addition, an assessment was conducted in Lebanon to address the relevant skills and qualifications of the population, particularly for youth in terms of green jobs. Mr. Poschen noted specific interventions, such as renewable energy and energy efficiency in buildings, where more support is needed for small and medium enterprises that are not currently able to seize opportunities in the green economy. Mr. Poschen stressed that the United Nations should work together on frameworks for the promotion of inclusive sustainable development, promoting good governance and promotion of national dialogue forums.

2. *Discussion and outcomes*

22. During the discussion, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) provided an overview of various existing and potential investment initiatives in the region that promote sustainable practices, including the use of sustainable fuel and the development of alternative fuel by aviation, which could also generate employment.

23. ECA proposed that more studies and analysis should be recommended by the group to assess the gains of green economy initiatives in various sectors, noting that a number of consultations have been carried out for the North Africa region and a number of practices in green economy exist in different countries, although in an ad-hoc form. ESCWA, ECLAC and other participants also urged better assessment, while the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) pointed out that the issue of internal migration and the deterioration of rural areas must also feed into the development of sustainable development and green economy policies.

24. Discussion focused also on the need for financial studies to assess the needed resources for green economy initiatives noting that the majority of efforts in the region are new activities and not a transformation of existing ones. This is a serious issue to consider in addition to the lack of a strategic approach in the implementation of such activities. ANND cautioned that studies on green economy in the region remain at a theoretical level and discuss only objectives. As yet, no studies have clearly shown the

impact of green economy on social conditions and no concrete measures have been proposed regionally on concrete linkages between the economic, environmental, and social pillars.

25. Participants proposed various ways to contend with the untested development of green economy in the region, especially in terms of the impact on social conditions and job substitution. ECLAC suggested that the focus should be on national innovations at both the social and environmental levels. ILO advised that assessments have been made for Brazil, China and South Africa which revealed the findings of potential net gain in employment opportunities, however further assessments need to be made. UNEP advised that a study is underway in Jordan to assess the scope for green economy and will include a financial assessment component.

26. The Chair, Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, wrapped up the discussion concluding that the green economy does not constitute by itself a sufficient condition for sustainable development and that efforts should critically move to indicators if we want to define an end goal.

D. SESSION 4 – RCM THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS

27. The purpose of this session was to allow representatives of the thematic working groups (TWG) to raise any issues to be resolved or considered by the group.

28. Mr. Mohamed Aw-Dahir of FAO, representing the food security TWG, outlined structural issues that affect food security in the region.

29. At the global level, agricultural commodity market conditions remain fairly tight. The price of commodities, such as wheat and rice remain high and in most cases will increase since the previous year. Most prices are also extremely volatile, moving in tandem with unstable financial and equity markets. Fluctuations in exchange rates and uncertainties in energy markets are also contributing to sharp price instabilities in agricultural markets. Given all these uncertainties, it is difficult to predict how global markets will evolve in the near-term; while there is some room for optimism that prices for most commodities could remain below recent highs, the general picture still points that the cost of food purchases will continue to remain high for poor food-importing countries.

30. The report from the recent Multi-stakeholder Workshop on Food Security was shared in the meeting. The summary of some of the key recommendations from the workshop include:

- (a) Establish a regional coordination mechanism to promote regional cooperation and enhance food security;
- (b) Provision of accurate and timely information on agricultural production and markets;
- (c) Target subsidies to reduce market distortion and fiscal burden;
- (d) Strengthen the cooperative system to support small holding farmers;
- (e) Develop a better understanding of the purpose and costs of different food reserve schemes at regional, national and household levels;
- (f) Promote small holder sensitive investment in agriculture;
- (g) Strengthen capacities to collect gender disaggregated data, ensuring standardization of methodologies in order to collect comparable data.

31. Mr. Abdullah Dardari, of ESCWA, representing the MDGs TWG, proposed three options for the focus of the next Arab MDG report:

Option 1: To devote the third and final part of the report to proposals and suggestions for an amended MDG framework beyond 2015.

Option 2: To focus the third part of the report on MDG8 (Develop a Global Partnership for Development), taking into account the changing role of some Arab countries in international economic governance platforms, the role of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRICs), and the impact of the slow recovery in developed countries on national strategies for poverty reduction.

Option 3: To focus the third part of the report on the impact of the current economic situation and changing geo-policy on official development assistance (ODA).

32. TWG on climate change gave an overview of its workplan for 2011-2012. Representing the TWG, Mr. Adel Abdel Kader of UNEP also gave a short analysis of the challenges the group faces and the need to reaffirm the mandate of the TWG within the context of climate negotiations, including stronger linkages to the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and the United Nations Secretary-General's Climate Change Support Team.

33. Noting that this was the first time the Statistics Task Force reports to the RCM, Mr. Juraj Riecan of ESCWA reiterated the mission of the group to "actively contribute to the development of a coordinated regional statistical system for Arab States". In addition, the group reviewed its key outputs for 2012:

- (a) Database/statistical profile of the region;
- (b) Integrated presentation of the statistical work programmes of participating agencies;
- (c) Specific outputs in five priority areas (population, migration and labour; social statistics; environment statistics; national accounts; food and agriculture statistics).

Discussion and outcomes

34. Discussions focused on coordination opportunities between the various groups and attendees expressed a strong interest in the work of the TWGs, noting that a more thorough overview of TWG activities at the RCM could be beneficial for agencies that are not members of a specific working group or unable to join. In this context, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) explained various activities that are undertaken in coordination with the League of Arab States, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and United Nations agencies working on disaster risk reduction. In particular, this includes current work on a comprehensive Programme for Action to implement the Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction adopted by the Council of Ministers responsible for the Environment in 2011. UNISDR invited United Nations agencies and other participants not yet involved to contact UNISDR and to contribute to this process and the implementation of the Programme of Action, in line with their respective mandate and agency policies on disaster risk reduction. Similarly, UNV, UNFPA, UNESCO, ESCWA, ECA, UNICEF and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) proposed various ways to boost the work of the various groups, especially as this work contributes to a post-2015 agenda.

35. UNISDR explained a joint UNISDR/World Bank/UNDP/SDC initiative which has so far resulted in the compilation of national disaster loss databases in seven Arab States, with Tunisia likely to join in 2012. UNISDR suggested that this data should be used and included in regional statistical analyses and reports, including the next regional Human Development Report.

36. The RCM group recommended Option 2 for the next Arab Regional MDGs Report, whereby the third section of the report will focus on MDG8.

E. SESSION 5 – RIO+20 AND THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

37. The purpose of the session was to agree on the practical tools necessary to support the region in putting into practice an integrated approach to sustainable development.

38. Mr. Paolo Lembo of UNDP presented various UNDP initiatives that contribute to innovative thinking on a development paradigm for the region, including an emphasis on bringing non-State actors into the process and ensuring that environmental issues are central to the debate. UNDP is in the process of developing a new index to capture human well being. Mr. Lembo concluded by explaining the various challenges faced in developing a new paradigm on sustainable development. He emphasized a need for new alliances, the involvement of new actors and new policies.

39. Representing the World Bank, Mr. Chadi Bou Habib's presentation, "Assessing and Measuring Development: does GDP still have a say?" began by acknowledging the limitation of using gross domestic product (GDP) per capita as the key indicator for an overall level of development. However, he also underlined the limitation of social indicators, as witnessed through the Arab uprisings. The presentation then focused on GDP and similar measurements, such as gross national income (GNI) and Gross National Disposable Income (GNDI). He concluded that concerns of domestic economic and social management imply a preference to GDP since it measures wealth generated in the domestic economy. He further explained that the next stage would be to assess the GDP decomposition where cross-cuttings between sector decomposition, regional decomposition and primary distribution of GDP (between remunerations of labour, of employment generating capital and of rent generating capital) can provide a wealth of information on sustainable and broad-based inclusive growth. From there, choices of secondary distribution policies become a major political economy issue to be addressed within the frame of a social contract that requires: (a) agreeing on major strategic developmental choices (jobs creation for example); (b) specifying the role of the government in reaching these objectives; (c) defining the rights and duties of citizens and their interaction with the overall strategic objective and with the role of the government and; (d) agreeing on the modalities of socio-economic management and on choices in terms of fiscal spending and tax system. At this stage, indicators of equity (Gini coefficient), poverty and of the efficiency and effectiveness of social spending provide crucial information for the implementation of policies that would enhance the developmental outcome of the domestic economy. Finally, the presentation concluded by advocating an integrative approach where social and developmental outcomes are endogenous to economic activity and where economic management and social management are complementary. This approach is particularly relevant when employment and job creation are considered as key for a sustainable, broad-based and inclusive growth and development.

40. ESCWA presented the regional perspectives on a new paradigm, emphasizing the institutional approach, coordination and the need to strengthen the existing institutional structures. Speakers stressed the need for a post-Rio approach with a sequenced economic agenda, as well as sustainable development goals. Presenters further discussed alternatives to GDP, including new indicators that take into account all pillars of sustainable development. The presentation also referred to the existing UNEP/ESCWA/League of Arab States initiative under the auspices of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment as a sign of the political will in the region for a core set of sustainable development indicators and as a first step towards bridging existing statistical gaps.

41. Mr. Fateh Azzam of OHCHR explained that the United Nations emphasis on human rights has addressed sustainable development concerns. Mr. Azzam further explained that technology offers solutions for wider participation. He argued that there is a need to emphasize the right to development, which is linked to self determination and sovereignty. Specifically, there is a need for the United Nations to target the legislative frameworks in order to ensure participatory access to data and information on the environment,

and for national human rights institutions to broaden their mandate in areas of capacity-building. Mr. Azzam also addressed the issue of sustainable development goals and indicators, noting that human rights indicators must be included.

42. Mr. Hussein Gezairy of the World Health Organization (WHO) focused on the links between health and education as key elements of sustainable development. He argued that numerous health challenges prevail in the Arab world mainly due to rapid urbanization and both man-made and natural disasters, in addition to the economic recession and the prevalence of a poor quality of life. He concluded that sustainable development needs to place health at the centre of the development agenda.

Discussion and outcomes

43. Discussions focused on the specific tools necessary for the measurement of sustainable development. Under consideration were the Human Development Index, the Environmental Sustainability Index, the Environmental Performance Index and the Multidimensional Poverty Index, among others, in addition to the experiences of various agencies. Ms. Rima Khalaf, Executive Secretary of ESCWA, cautioned against the proliferation of measures and posited that both practically and in terms of relevance, the region now is in need of composite indices. For example, the Human Development Index does not incorporate freedom and human right indicators, which are crucial at this historical moment. Ms. Khalaf further argued that while the United Nations has its limitations, for example, an inability to ensure that people enjoy their full human rights, it also has a duty to highlight violations of those rights and their negative impacts, hence the importance of composite indices.

44. UNV, UNFPA and OHCHR agreed upon drawing from the various dimensions of a people-centered approach to measure sustainable development. UNFPA shared the results of a survey conducted among young people through social media, where the results overwhelmingly revealed the link between political systems and economic development. UNISDR urged the United Nations to support institution building in the region.

45. In reference to the linkages between economic development and a rights based approach to development, Ms. Rima Khalaf noted the proliferation of articles recently on the economic “cost” of the Arab Spring. Ms. Khalaf urged that the RCM considers the long-term implications of the transitions taking place in the region. In this regard, Ms. Khalaf committed ESCWA to the production of a study on the Impact of the Arab Spring on the Economy, to be shared with the RCM.

F. SESSION 6 – PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION

46. The purpose of the session was to examine the possible strategies and partnerships needed to support the region in a shifting geopolitical context.

47. Mr. Ahmad Zubair of the Islamic Development Bank Group (IDB) reviewed the Bank’s total lending to the Arab region, as well as the main priority areas the bank is interested in financing, including infrastructure development, trade, investment and capacity-building. Mr. Zubair further outlined a number of existing and future sustainable development initiatives the Bank is working on in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and proposed ways in which the IDB could have a more active role within the RCM.

48. Mr. Abdallah Dardari of ESCWA analysed inter-Arab trade patterns and the various existing opportunities for financing the fiscal deficit in the region through regional partnerships. Mr. Dardari also outlined a proposal for an Arab Development Bank for regional integration.

Discussion and outcomes

49. Participants actively discussed the possibilities for an Arab Development Bank for regional integration within UNDP, ECA and the Regional Commission New York Office (RCNYO), among others, further exploring the possibilities and implications. IDB proposed as an alternative a stronger partnership between the United Nations and IDB through the RCM and more strategic cooperation within existing mechanisms.

50. Mr. Dardari stressed that the region lacks well-coordinated development banking initiatives similar to other regions. ESCWA is committed to improving dialogue and welcomes the opportunity to join the Arab Coordination Group, while maintaining the focus on long-term mechanisms to bridge the gap between supply and demand, and to finance sustainable development.

51. The Chair noted that the Integrated Implementation Framework led by DESA, in partnership with multiple United Nations entities, will be ready to track commitments to the MDGs by early 2012. In addition, many member States continue to have issues with MDG8 and the RCM needs to strengthen the focus on MDG8. Ms. Migiro tasked Mr. Amr Nour, Director of RCNYO, to coordinate with the Office of the Deputy Secretary-General and DESA to assess how further interlinkages could be established between the regional and global levels, especially considering the concerns and proposals raised throughout the session.

52. The RCM will consider the different possibilities in the months to come.

G. SESSION 7 – WRAP UP: REGIONAL CONSENSUS AND NEXT STEPS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION

53. The purpose of the session was to capture agreed action points on the way forward with regards to the sustainable development and green concepts.

54. Mr. Roberto Laurenti, representing the RCM Secretariat, summarized the main outcomes of the RCM in follow up of the preparatory process for Rio+20.

55. The RCM tasks the Regional Rio+20 Secretariat (ESCWA/UNEP/League of Arab States) to:

(a) Solicit input and compile a regional document outlining regional best practice by RCM members on the themes of Rio+20 to be submitted to the Conference Secretariat; the Secretariat will liaise with DESA for this purpose;

(b) Organize an RCM Task Force on sustainable development with the aim of developing a guidance note that takes into account the concerns and expertise of the various RCM members to be delivered at the November 2012 RCM with the aim of producing a more harmonious approach to sustainable development, as well as more unified advocacy message.

56. Noting that there was agreement from the attendees on the recommendations, the Session was closed by the Chair.

II. CLOSING REMARKS

57. Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, Chair of the RCM, summarized the discussions and the outcomes. She noted that the meeting of the RCM took place over two substantive working days filled with very rich discussions, which has allowed participants to learn and also to consolidate their knowledge. In addition, the sessions have revealed an advanced level of work on substantive development at the regional level, with room to further link regional and global initiatives, and for greater information sharing. The Chair explained that issues discussed have been both timely and topical,

and stressed the importance of a common regional position as an effective way for the Arab region to contribute to a global movement. She added that speaking with one voice on green issues is also critical for translating these ideas into action. The meeting also provided an excellent opportunity for a clear update on regional efforts regarding what the United Nations and sister agencies are doing in the face of development challenges. The RCM has shown that great work is being carried out in terms of promoting sustainable development and tools and indicators, which must be commended.

58. The RCM meeting has been a huge success and should be regarded as a qualitative move thanks to the leadership of ESCWA Executive Secretary Ms. Rima Khalaf and her team. The meeting is relevant to the work of the region, and to how sustainable development should feed into national strategies of countries in the region. Ms. Migiro concluded by quoting the Secretary-General in his insistence that “what is important is to really connect the dots”. In this regard the RCM organizers have brought us together to do just that, to link international strategies to the work of the region and to connect the dots. Ms. Migiro then declared the meeting closed.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

59. The sixteenth meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) was held at United Nations House, Beirut, on 25-26 November 2011. It convened seven sessions for the discussion of agenda items.

B. OPENING OF THE SESSION

60. United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, Ms. Rima Khalaf, opened the meeting, noting its objectives. Ms. Khalaf stated the clarity with which the region has articulated what it does not want from Rio+20: regional governments do not want to renegotiate what was already agreed in Rio in 1992; they do not want a new institutional framework for sustainable development to place additional burden on the countries in the region; the concept of green economy should not be used to impose trade barriers or protectionist policies that may impede economic progress in the region; and the principle of common but differentiated responsibility should be respected. Ms. Khalaf, while stressing the importance of an integrated approach to sustainable development, urged that the Arab region must complement the three pillars of social, economic and environmental with a fourth political pillar. Noting that while the people of the region took to the streets in protest over rising food prices and dwindling job opportunities, they were reclaiming their political rights, and that they saw political change as the path to social and economic development. Sustainable development is possible, therefore, only if we work towards more democratic, participatory, inclusive and transparent political structures. Ms. Khalaf also urged RCM members to seize this historical window of opportunity to push against the limitations of our own work, that we may have previously accepted and to ensure, especially, that human rights are once more placed at the heart of the work that we do in the region: the right for freedom of expression, for justice, for food and clean water, for jobs, for education and health care. In short, the right to sustainable development.

61. As the Chair of the RCM, the Deputy Secretary-General Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro emphasized the importance of sustainable development in relation to global commitments and concerns, including the MDGs, climate change and food security. Ms. Migiro commended the role of ESCWA in documenting major socio-economic trends in the region well before the start of the uprisings. She urged the United Nations to link its efforts to achieve sustainable development and stated that Rio+20 provides a great opportunity to place equity at the centre of development once more. Ms. Migiro stated that each region needs to clarify the concept of Green Economy, adding that green economy must be linked to job creation in the Arab region. Ms. Migiro urged all to look forward to the next generation of development targets and emphasized the role of the regional commissions and the RCM in forging an integrated agenda and in ensuring that the voice of the region is heard. She also urged the United Nations Development Group

(UNDG) to carry forward this approach at the country level. Finally, the Deputy Secretary-General concluded that changes in the region are huge and so are the possibilities and potential.

C. PARTICIPANTS

62. The meeting was attended by representatives of regional United Nations agencies, other regional organizations, regional banks, and international financial institutions. A list of participants can be found in annex I to this report.

D. DOCUMENTS

63. The list of documents submitted to the RCM at its sixteenth meeting is contained in annex II of this report.

Annex I*

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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Title	Details
OPENING	
Speech by Ms. Rima Khalaf	Under Secretary-General, Executive Secretary of ESCWA
Speech by Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro	United Nations Deputy Secretary-General
SESSION 1	
Statement by Mr. Thomas Stelzer	Assistant Secretary-General, DESA
The Preparatory Process for Rio+20	Presentation by Mr. Adel Abdel Kader, OIC, UNEP/ROWA
The Regional Preparatory Process for Rio: The Arab CSO Position	Presentation by Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad, Director, ANND
The Outcome of the Arab Preparatory Process for Rio+20	Presentation by Ms. Roula Majdalani, Director, Sustainable Development and Productivity Division, ESCWA
Key Note Address by Mr. Achim Steiner	Chair of the HLCP and Executive Director of UNEP
SESSION 2	
On Sustainable Development in the Arab region	Address by Ms. Razan Zuayter, Director, The Arab Group for the Protection of Nature
On the Geopolitics of Energy in the Arab region	Address by Mr. Walid Khadduri, MEES
SESSION 3	
Latin America and the Caribbean: Regional Preparatory Process for Rio+20	Presentation by Mr. Joseluis Samaniego, Director, Sustainable Development and Human Settlement Division, ECLAC
Green Economy – from Global Initiative to Regional Implementation	Presentation by Mr. Adel Abdel Kader, OIC, UNEP ROWA
ILO presentation on Sustainable Development	Presentation by Mr. Peter Poschen, Director, Job Creation and Enterprise Development Division, ILO
SESSION 4	
RCM Thematic Working Group on Food Security Report of the Multi Stake Holder Workshop on Food Security in the RNE	Presentation by Mr. Mohamed Aw Dahir, Regional Food Security Officer , FAO
Progress of the Thematic Working Group on MDGs	Presentation by Mr. Abdallah Al Dardari, Director, Economic Development and Globalization Division, ESCWA
Climate Change TWG: Way Forward 2011-2012	Presentation by Mr. Adel Abdel Kader, OIC, UNEP/ROWA

Title	Details
RCM Task Force on Statistical Coordination: Work Plan 2011-2012	Presentation by Mr. Juraj Riecan, Director, Statistics Division, ESCWA
SESSION 5	
New Development Paradigm	Presentation by Mr. Paolo Lembo, OIC, UNDP Regional Office for Arab States
Assessing and Measuring Development: Does GDP Still Have a Say?	Presentation by Mr. Chadi Bou Habib, Senior Economist, World Bank
Rio+20 and the UN System: Regional Perspective on Measures for Advancing Rio+20	Presentation by Ms. Roula Majdalani and Mr. Abdallah Al Dardari, ESCWA
On The Right to Development	Presentation by Mr. Fateh Azzam, Regional Representative, UNHCR
Sustainable Development, Health, and Community	Presentation by Mr. Hussein Gezairy, Regional Director, WHO
SESSION 6	
The Islamic Development Bank Group: Together We Build a Better Future	Presentation by Mr. Mohammed Ahmad Zubair, Lead Economist, IDB
Partnerships for Sustainable Development in the Arab region	Presentation by Mr. Abdallah Al Dardari, ESCWA
SESSION 7	
Closing Statement	Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro