



Operational Framework for Collaboration between the Regional Coordination Mechanism and the Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group for the Arab States

March 2019

Introduction

This framework responds to General Assembly resolution (A/72/L.52) on the “Repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system”, adopted in May 2018, which requested the Secretary-General to implement, as part of the first phase, “the proposed measures to optimize functions and enhance collaboration at the regional and sub-regional levels”, as defined in the Secretary-General’s December 2017 report on repositioning the UN development system.

It builds on the Statement of Collaboration between the Regional Commissions (RegComs) and the UNDG (2016)¹, and will inform the second phase², which will provide options on a region-by-region basis, for longer-term re-profiling and restructuring of the regional assets of the United Nations at the 2019 ECOSOC Segment on Operational Activities for Development.

Objectives and Principles

This framework seeks to operationalize the commitments of the RCM and R-UNSDG to pursue greater coordination and alignment in response to the Secretary-General’s vision for a revised UN Development System at the regional level.

The framework builds on past collaboration between the RCM and R-UNSDG and seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To enhance regional coordination through the closer alignment and integration of the RCM and R-UNSDG meetings and secretariats;
- 2) To ensure more effective analysis and action on regional and transboundary issues;
- 3) To improve the capacity of the regional UNDS to deliver integrated policy advice in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to Member States and UN Country Teams;
- 4) To enhance leadership and coordination in the area of data;
- 5) To reduce duplication and enhance cooperation in the production of regional knowledge products.

The principles guiding the collaboration between the RCM and R-UNSDG in the Arab region include:

¹ Signed by the UNDG Chair and the Coordinator of the UN Regional Commissions, acting on behalf of the Executive Secretaries of the UN Regional Commissions.

² It is expected that the Phase II regional review will supersede the Statement of Collaboration (2016).

- 1) Ensuring clear roles and responsibilities by building on the comparative strengths of the RCM and R-UNSDG.
- 2) Maximizing value-added to Member States, regional organizations and UN entities in the region.
- 3) Ensuring that the outcomes of regional policy coordination translate into concrete action on the ground.
- 4) Establishing light and flexible coordination structures, within existing resources and building on existing structures.
- 5) Mutual accountability between the RCM and R-UNSDG for joint deliverables and objectives.

Scope

This operational framework provides the overarching direction for collaboration between the RCM and R-UNSDG. It serves as the basis for ensuring coordinated and coherent regional efforts and support to country teams, as well as distilling global priorities into a common vision for the UNDS at the regional and country levels.

A Joint Secretariat will be established to support the operationalization of the framework. The Joint Secretariat will be composed of ESCWA (based in Beirut) and the R-UNSDG Secretariat (based in Amman). A draft Terms of Reference for the Joint Secretariat is provided in Annex B.

In 2019, the RCM and R-UNSDG have decided to operationalize this framework through five specific, interrelated and mutually reinforcing initiatives, endorsed at the October 2018 R-UNSDG and RCM meetings:

- 1) **Establishing Joint RCM R-UNSDG Meetings and Secretariat** – RCM and R-UNSDG meetings have been held back to back since 2017. Going forward, the RCM R-UNSDG would have joint meetings (supported by a Joint Secretariat) with a segment for UN entities and a segment including other actors, such as LAS and IFIs.
- 2) **Developing a Regional Strategic Framework** – develop a regional strategic framework as a collective vision for the UNDS in the Arab states to promote collective analysis of regional priorities, identify themes for future regional coordination meetings, rationalize Working Groups and provide guidance on mainstreaming transboundary and cross-cutting issues for CCAs and UNDAFs.
- 3) **Establishing Joint Regional Working Groups** – RCM and R-UNSDG currently have a total of 11 Working Groups. These would be consolidated under a single coordination architecture to allow for regular strategic review and promote alignment with other inter-agency groups.
- 4) **Strengthening Coordination on SDG Data** – all UN agencies working at the regional level would have access to a common set of regional data that is reviewed and validated, to allow for coherent regional analysis and reports and to design evidence-based policies and programmes.
- 5) **Coordinating Regional Publications and Knowledge Products** – strengthen coordination among regional UNDS and strengthen synergies in research and analysis efforts, reducing duplication. An incremental and iterative approach is proposed, starting with collecting and sharing information about plans for major regional reports.

A draft action plan is attached as Annex A.

2019 Regional Initiatives

1. Joint RCM R-UNSDG Meetings

“To enhance regional coordination [...] and ensure that regional teams of the UNDG and the RCM hold meetings jointly or back to back, with agendas informing one another” (Para 100 – SG Report 2018/7)

Building on successful back-to-back meetings in November 2017 and October 2018, the RCM and R-UNSDG will establish joint meetings as common practice from 2019. The joint meeting, with two distinct segments, will provide a forum to discuss regional development priorities and ensure greater coherence and efficiency, with one invite, one agenda and one report. It will also ensure that both regional and country level issues, and the linkages between them, are discussed within the same forum.

The joint meeting will take place twice a year, ideally in March/April and October/November each year and will normally be one or two days in duration. To account for the different membership of the two coordination mechanisms, the meeting will be divided into two segments, with the first segment being open to traditional RCM members and regional partners and the second segment being limited to UN entities. Additional regional and national partners may also be invited as required. The participation of UN DESA in the joint meeting will be formalised and UN DESA will be included in all relevant mailing lists³.

The agenda for meetings will be developed by the Joint Secretariat through consultation with the Regional Directors. While the agendas will be developed based on emerging needs and priorities, it is envisaged that the first segment would focus on regional, sub-regional and transboundary issues while the second segment would focus on issues related to country support. This will ensure that global macro concerns discussed in the first segment are considered in the discussions on country level support and engagement. At least one of the meetings will be focused on pre-defined regional thematic priorities around which Regional Directors would like to coordinate efforts. Likewise, one of the meetings will have a session on updates from regional working groups and taskforces as well as to agree on future plans and working arrangements. Where feasible, Working Groups may hold their meetings on the margins of the RCM R-UNSDG meeting in order to engage directly with the Regional Directors on issues of common concern.

In line with ECOSOC mandate, a joint report of every meeting would be issued and submitted to the DSG.

³ Ideally, there would be one focal point from UN DESA who is a member of the RCM R-UNSDG and who would attend all meetings and receive all communication. In addition, relevant thematic experts from UN DESA could be invited to participate as relevant to specific themes/agenda items. This will be discussed and agreed with UN DESA in early 2019.

2. Regional Strategic Framework

“To ensure more effective UN action on challenges and opportunities that know no borders [by ensuring] that the process of the development and review of UNDAFs includes more thorough analysis of regional and transboundary issues, with regional economic and social commissions as an integral part of the process.” (Para 100 – SG Report 2018/7)

The RCM R-UNSDG will develop a regional strategic framework, covering the period 2020–2023. The regional strategic framework will serve as a collective vision for the UN Development System in the Arab States with a view to promoting policy coherence and harmonized approaches on relevant regional topics and priority areas in support of the 2030 Agenda.

The utility of the regional strategic framework will be many fold, including but not limited to:

1. A collective analysis of regional development challenges and their root causes;
2. A reference for prioritizing themes of future RCM and R-UNSDG meetings;
3. A reference for rationalizing regional Working Groups and Taskforces;
4. A reference for identifying strategic actions to be implemented jointly at the regional level and an indicator of possible areas for future joint research and reports or complementary and reinforcing interventions across organizations;
5. A precursor to the development of a practical guide for UNCTs to mainstream the regional dimension of development into their CCA and UNDAF;
6. A reference for UN discussions with the League of Arab States on priority clusters of intervention.

Building on agencies’ existing analysis and strategies/frameworks, the regional strategic framework will articulate a limited number of strategic issues, define a common analytical framework and propose entry points for joint, complementary or harmonized interventions in the short-, medium- and long-term. Priority will be given to issues that are regional/sub-regional and transboundary in nature, that require support of multiple UN and regional entities, and that can’t be effectively addressed at the country level alone. This includes issues such as international migration, shared water, climate change, energy security, structural transformation and trade, among others.

The regional strategic framework will be developed in a consultative manner. A separate concept note for the development of the regional strategic framework will be developed by the joint secretariat, for endorsement by the Regional Directors.

3. Joint Regional Working Groups

“To move progressively towards the integration of the regional teams and the regional coordination mechanisms to bring about the integrated policy advice that the 2030 Agenda demands”. (Para 101(a) – SG Report 2018/7)

To enhance cooperation and reduce duplication, RCM and R-UNSDG Working Groups and Taskforces will be merged under a single coordination architecture that reports to the joint RCM R-UNSDG meeting. It was also agreed to establish a Regional Operations Management Team (OMT)/Business Operations Strategies (BOS) Working Group.

Currently, there are seven Thematic Working Groups⁴ and four Taskforces⁵ (under the Joint Working Group on the 2030 Agenda), as well as the UNDAF Peer Support Group and the proposed Regional OMT/BOS Working Group. To ensure that the structure is light and manageable, it is proposed to undertake a review of existing Working Groups and their ToRs, and present a proposal for final review and endorsement at the first RCM R-UNSDG meeting of 2019, with a view to rationalising existing Working Groups and agreeing on the proposed architecture for 2019.

Within this revised architecture, it is proposed to establish two categories of groups, namely Working Groups and Networks, as follows:

- **Working Groups** are **formal mechanisms** to support UNDS coordination around a specific identified issue and could be either thematic and/or functional/operational in nature. Each Working Group would have a **specifically defined Terms of Reference**, would **meet 2-4 times a year** and would be required to identify a **limited number of key deliverables** at the start of each year, and report back on progress to the RCM R-UNSDG joint meeting on an annual basis, or as required. The Chair/Co-Chairs of Working Groups will be agreed on by the Regional Directors based on mandate and capacity as relevant to the focus of the Working Group. Membership will be open to all UN entities on an opt-in basis. Regional partners may also be included as Chairs/Co-Chairs or members of Working Groups as required. Secretariat support to the Working Group should be provided by the Chairing agency. Working Groups can either be standing or temporary, i.e. set up for a specific period of time or to produce a specific set of deliverables.
- **Networks** would be **informal groups**, established to **facilitate information sharing** on a specific area or issue. Networks would not have specific tasks/deliverables for the year and would not be required to report back to the RCM R-UNSDG. A Network Coordinator would be agreed on by the Regional Directors based on mandate and capacity as relevant to the focus of the Network. Membership would be open to all UN entities on an opt-in basis. Regional partners may also be included as Network Coordinators or members of Networks as required.

The establishment and/or termination of Working Groups and Networks would be based on joint RCM R-UNSDG agreement. In addition, UN entities are encouraged to explore and identify additional areas of

⁴ RCM: 1) Food and Nutrition Security, 2) Migration, and 3) Water

R-UNSDG: 1) Gender, 2) Youth, 3) Prevention of Violent Extremism, and 4) Social Protection

⁵ 1) Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, 2) Arab Sustainable Development Report, 3) SDG Country Support, and 4) SDG Data

collaboration, either bi-laterally or multi-laterally, outside of the focus of the established Working Groups and Networks. Such joint initiatives can be shared with the RCM R-UNSDG, either for consultation or information sharing, and can be included as an agenda item for RCM R-UNSDG meetings, where relevant.

4. SDG Data

To address the challenge that “[i]n the area of data, no clear leadership exists, with multiple data centres coexisting with limited coordination.” (Para 94 – SG Report 2018/7)

In the Arab States region, and under the Joint WG on the 2030 Agenda, an SDG Data TF has been established and co-Chaired by ESCWA and UNFPA. The SDG Data TF is a successor of the RCM Statistical TF, and its goal, according to its Terms of Reference is to “*strategize reporting on SDGs through coordinating and harmonizing data generated by all parties reporting on SDGs and other relevant internationally endorsed frameworks*”. Membership in the Taskforce is limited to statisticians in RCM R-UNSDG entities or staff who work directly in the collection and production of SDG data.

In order to strengthen coordination and reduce overlaps/duplication with regard to the production, analysis and management of data, it has been agreed to reinforce the role of the SDG Data Taskforce through a commitment of all regional UNDS entities to engage with and support the Taskforce. This reinforced role of the Taskforce includes:

- **Customizing and Tailoring** global guidance tools including the UN Statistical Division’s E-Handbook on SDG indicators to the needs of the region.
- **Explore technological innovations** in data collection, and developing proxy indicators and estimations to remedy the lack of data for countries in conflict and crisis.
- **Streamline and coordinate the technical support** provided to national statistical offices by UN agencies in the region
- **Develop a regional UN portal** to consolidate most recent comparable SDG data on the 22 Arab countries.
- **Establish a regional data collection calendar** modelled after the global calendar.

As a first step, the SDG Data Taskforce will prepare a paper on how data is collected, shared and used as well as what are the major data gaps in the region. This paper should be completed by March 2019 and presented at the next joint RCM R-UNSDG meeting.

5. Coordinating Regional Publications and Knowledge Products

“To reduce duplication in terms of knowledge products [by establishing a] joint Publications Committee.” (Para 100 – SG Report 2018/7)

In line with the Secretary General’s December report and subsequent UNSDG Concept Note on UNDS Regional Level Optimisation, it is has been agreed to strengthen coordination and enhance inter-agency collaboration with respect to publications and knowledge products.

In the first quarter of 2019, the Joint Secretariat will undertake a mapping of major regional reports planned by each UN entity to identify potential overlaps and opportunities for collaboration. This will be presented at the first RCM R-UNSDG meeting of 2019.

In addition, the Joint Secretariat will explore opportunities for establishing a central knowledge repository/inventory, linking to individual agencies’ existing platforms. This repository/inventory would be accessible to the general public and would help increase accessibility and visibility of regional publications.

Annex A: Action Plan (Updated)

Actions	Timeframe	Responsible
1. Joint RCM R-UNSDG Meetings		
Organise first RCM R-UNSDG meeting	Mar/Apr	Joint Secretariat
Organise second RCM R-UNSDG meeting	Oct/Nov	Joint Secretariat
Set up common on-line platform and knowledge repository for RCM R-UNSDG, including regional Working Groups/Taskforces/Networks, and publications/knowledge products	Dec	Joint Secretariat
2. Regional Strategic Framework		
Develop and endorse Concept Note for development of regional strategic framework	Jan	Joint Secretariat/ Regional Directors
Conduct a workshop on the sidelines of the next RCM – R-UNSDG meeting to agree on regional framework	Mar/Apr	Joint Secretariat
3. Regional Working Groups		
Agreement on regional Working Groups and Networks for 2019 (including Chairs)	Mar/Apr	Regional Directors
4. SDG Data		
Prepare a paper on how data is collected, shared and used as well as what are the major data gaps in the region	Mar	SDG Data WG/TF
5. Joint Publications Committee		
Undertake a mapping of major regional 2019 publications, planned or under preparation, with a view to coordinated release and media campaigns with the support of Public Information Officers	Feb/Mar	Joint Secretariat or Joint Publications Committee

Annex B: Draft Terms of Reference for Joint Secretariat

Purpose/Objective

The role of the Joint Secretariat is to provide operational and technical support to the RCM R-UNSDG in its role to coordinate regional efforts and support to country teams.

Responsibilities

The key roles and responsibilities of the Joint Secretariat include:

- develop an annual work plan for the RCM R-UNSDG
- lead the organisation of the joint RCM R-UNSDG meetings including identifying suitable dates, developing the meeting agenda, identifying and confirming presenters/speakers, organising logistics, and preparing the meeting report.
- facilitate the development, implementation, monitoring and reporting of the regional strategic framework
- monitor and coordinate reporting of regional working groups, as required
- support the coordination of regional publications and knowledge products
- facilitate alignment and linkages between global, regional and country levels through information sharing and development of relevant knowledge products
- development and management of an online platform for the RCM R-UNSDG (including Working Groups and Networks)
- maintain a mailing list of all RCM R-UNSDG members

Composition of Joint Secretariat

The Joint Secretariat will consist of ESCWA (Strategy Evaluation and Partnerships Section) based in Beirut and the R-UNSDG Secretariat (or future UN DOCO Regional Desk) based in Amman⁶

Administrative and Funding Arrangements

- The Joint Secretariat will meet on a regular basis, both virtually and in-person, as required.
- Any decisions and actions related to the work of Joint Secretariat will be taken jointly on a consensus basis.
- The cost of organising the joint RCM R-UNSDG meeting will be shared between the ESCWA and the R-UNSDG Secretariat, in line with current practice.
- Additional needs/activities (if any) of the RCM R-UNSDG will be funded through contributions from the RCM R-UNSDG members, as required.

⁶ As of 1st January 2019, the Joint Secretariat consists of the Chief, Strategy Evaluation and Partnerships Section, ESCWA, the Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Officer, ESCWA and the Regional Coordination Specialist, R-UNSDG.