

I. 2018 Achievements: Highlights of Key Activities since 23rd RCM:

Mandated to organize the annual high-level forum for follow-up and review of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region, ESCWA, as chair of the AFSD Task Force, led the organization of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2018¹ (AFSD-2018) in partnership with the League of Arab States and RCM member organizations. AFSD-2018 took place in Beirut from April 24th to 26th and was chaired by the Lebanese Republic and organized under the patronage of the President of the Council of Ministers, His Excellency Mr. Saad Hariri.

In line with the AFSD Task Force ToR, a dedicated AFSD-2018 TF² was established to oversee and contribute to the preparations the forum. Virtual and face-to-face meetings of the Task Force were convened in January and February 2018 to finalize the conceptualization and kick start the implementation. Taskforce members were involved in conceptualizing and designing plenary and special sessions, identifying resources persons, speakers, moderators and preparing the substantive input.

The first segment of the AFSD-2018 was dedicated to national experiences with a focus on voluntary national reviews (VNRs) and lessons learned from countries' responses to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in terms of alignment and integration of policies, measurement systems, multi-stakeholder engagement and means of implementation. The second segment of the AFSD-2018 included plenary sessions focusing on the theme of "*Natural Resources, Future Generations and the Common Good*", which was aligned with the broader theme of the High-Level Political Forum-2018 (HLPF-2018), "*Transformation towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies*". It provided a regional focus on SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 and 17, the Goals which were reviewed during HLPF-2018.

AFSD-2018 also included special sessions, organized collaboratively by members of the AFSD-2018 TF, ESCWA substantive divisions, DESA and civil society organizations, which focused on Arab regional priorities such as gender equality, energy, water, the environment, leaving no one behind, VNRs, youth, localizing the SDGs as well as a special session on the role of civil society in the implementation and follow-up and review and prospects for an Arab regional CSOs Platform.

¹ <https://www.unescwa.org/events/arab-forum-sustainable-development-2018>

² AFSD-2018 TF members : ILO, UN Women, UNDP, UN Environment, UN Habitat, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNV, WHO, LAS and ESCWA.

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Arab Forum for Sustainable Development Taskforce

Chair: ESCWA

The Arab Forum was also an opportunity to take stock of the outcomes of a series of preparatory regional meetings including of the Arab Forum on the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the Regional Seminar for Parliamentarians in the Arab Region on the 2030 Agenda; the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Energy-related Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF; the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF; the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Environmental and Natural Resources Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF; and the Regional Meeting of Civil Society on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region.

The AFSD-2018 was attended by 300 participants from 18 Arab countries and brought together high-level representatives from ministries and bodies responsible for planning and following up implementation of the 2030 Agenda together with representatives from Arab parliaments, a wide range of regional and international institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, academic and research centres, and the media, among others, in addition to other regional and international experts. Resident coordinators from across the region were invited and seven were able to attend (Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, KSA, Kuwait, Libya and Palestine).

Key messages ³from the AFSD-2018 were presented at the HLPF-2018 by the Government of Lebanon as the AFSD-2018 chair.

The ESCWA Unit on 2030 Agenda carried out the coordination role throughout the preparation process for the AFSD-2018 and subsequent activities related to the HLPF-2018.

Overall, AFSD-2018 consolidated the role and importance of this regional forum to mobilize efforts to accelerate implementation especially on key regional priorities and cross-border issues, increase interest in follow-up and review processes among member countries, and offer a more inclusive and analytical platform for multiple stakeholders from across the region to share experiences, pose challenges, and learn together.

This was evident in the two plenary sessions of Day 1 where Arab policy makers were asked to reflect critically on their country experiences in aligning development plans with the 2030 Agenda as well as the VNR process. AFSD-2018 advocated for an approach to the VNR as a process rather than a product and future forums will continue to push that message in our region. Plenaries and special sessions were all designed to emphasize a multi-stakeholder approach, also insisting on the importance of a participatory approach to transformative change. Future forums will continue to do so.

³ Full AFSD-2018 Report : <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/arab-forum-sustainable-development-2018-final-report-en.pdf>

II. Main Activities and Outputs Planned for 2019:

The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2019 will take place in April 2019 at ESCWA headquarters in Beirut. The AFSD-2019 will be aligned with the broader 2019 HLPF theme of *“Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”* and provide an overview on the Arab region’s progress towards the SDGs under global review in 2019, namely SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17.

Under this broad thematic framework, the AFSD-2019 will seek to fulfill the AFSD’s overall main mandate as a regional platform for follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It will build on the structure and modality of last years’ forum and dedicate plenary and special sessions to engage in multi-stakeholder dialogue on key achievements to date and challenges to implementation and follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region. Given that the 2019 HLPF will also be convened at summit level under the auspices of the GA, the regional fora for sustainable development, including AFSD-2019, will seek to build the regional consensual narratives demonstrating the continuing strong commitment of the international community to reach the SDGs by 2030.

Given that 6 Arab countries will present VNRs in 2019 (Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Mauritania, Oman, and Tunisia), more knowledge will be provided for peer learning and experience sharing among countries, including those that prepared and presented VNRs in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

ESCWA will take the lead in the planning and organization of the AFSD-2019. Upon finalization of the AFSD TF membership, a virtual meeting will be convened in December 2018 to take stock of the AFSD-2018 and discuss the 2019 work-plan, as a guiding document for the implementation of the AFSD. A face-to-face meeting will be convened in early 2019 to initiate implementation.

III. Decisions Requested from the Members of the RCM (if any):

- Finalization of the AFSD-2019 TF membership: Nomination by RCM members (Regional Directors) of their respective representatives in the AFSD-2019 TF and their alternates, where applicable. All agencies interested and committed to contributing to the AFSD-2019 shall identify a principal representative no later than 30 November 2018.
- Finalization of the preparatory events list: provision by RCM members of key regional events, thematic or cross-sectoral, that would eventually feed into the AFSD-2019 and be mentioned in the final report submitted to the 2019 HLPF.