

REGIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM (RCM) FOR ARAB STATES

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE WORKING GROUP (WG) ON THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. BACKGROUND

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by world leaders during the United Nations global Summit in New York in September 2015, is a culmination of inclusive global consultations regarding the scope and shape of development over the next decade and a half. Having learned the lessons from the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the new agenda includes a set of sequential interwoven frameworks designed to guide post-2015 decisions and put the global community on a pathway towards achieving sustainable development by 2030. These frameworks include the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai Framework for DRR 2015-2030), the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda), the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit (Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), the UNFCCC COP21 (Paris Agreement) and the Tenth WTO Ministerial Conference (Nairobi Package).

Within these multiple frameworks, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) embody shared principles, aspirations and commitments to tackle a broad spectrum of development challenges. The SDGs are designed to be transformative, universal, applicable in a variety of contexts, and adjustable in scope and scale to national realities. They aspire to achieving the inclusion, empowerment and well-being of all and cover a much broader spectrum of issues than previous agreements. However, the SDGs are also far more complex, their complexity lying mostly in their indivisibility. Operationalizing such an interconnected bundle relies heavily on integrating the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development, while ensuring full alignment with the principles of good governance, rule of law, human rights, access to justice, equality, transparency and accountability.

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT AND THE RCM

Increasingly, regional and sub-regional groupings of countries are identifying solutions to their common development challenges, and regional institutions are called upon to work collectively with member States to help identify and set priorities, develop regional strategies and approaches, not

only on cross-border issues, but also on more traditional issues of economic and social development. In this light, Agenda 2030 recognizes the pivotal role that regional entities can play in achieving sustainable development.

The Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) for the Arab States is one of five regional inter-agency mechanisms established by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to improve coordination among the work programmes of the organizations of the United Nations system. Its objective is to enhance thematic and policy coherence across UN agencies in the Arab region and support the alignment of operational work with analytical and normative work. Membership of the RCM in the Arab region includes all regional bureaus of UN agencies operating in the region, as well as the League of Arab States (LAS). RCM meetings are also open to regional and international financial institutions as well as multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, and ICARDA.

In addition to the annual meeting of Regional Directors, members of the RCM coordinate and maximize collective action through working groups and task forces, on a number of areas. These working groups include representatives from all interested entities and normally collaborate to produce joint outputs and policy positions or to organize joint regional events

2. WORKING GROUP ON THE 2030 AGENDA

The WG on the 2030 Agenda is the successor of the inter-agency MDG Thematic WG established in 2004 to coordinate efforts of the different UN agencies in monitoring and reporting on the Millennium Development Goals. The MDG TWG, chaired by ESCWA since 2004 produced four regional reports on MDG adaptation and implementation, and the challenges towards their achievement in the Arab region. The group also carried out a number of joint activities and workshops to support the attainment of the MDGs.

In 2013, RCM members agreed that the MDG TWG for Arab States would revise its terms of reference to reflect the importance of inter-agency coordination during the transition to the post-2015 agenda and the SDGs. Between 2013 and 2015 a transitional TWG coordinated regional activities including the organization of two meetings of the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development and the production of the first prototype Arab Sustainable Development Report. At the 21st meeting of the RCM in November 2015, members agreed that the TWG on the 2030 Agenda would be established to replace the MDG and Transitional TWGs. They also agreed that the RCM Task Force on Statistics, set up in 2011, would redefine its terms of reference to focus on SDG Data, and would coordinate the implementation of its workplan with the Working Group on the 2030 Agenda¹.

3. PURPOSE

The goal of the Working Group on the 2030 Agenda is to support coordination efforts of regional UN actors and the League of Arab States in their efforts to adapt, implement, monitor and report on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It will seek to harness the collective strength of all the agencies to undertake joint research, consensus building, capacity building, advocacy and knowledge exchange, follow up and review and monitoring of progress on the new global agenda. It will promote an integrated approach in all its activities, in line with the spirit of the new agenda.

¹ For more information about the RCM and its Working Groups, visit: www.unescwa.org/about-escwa/regional-coordination-mechanism

4. FUNCTIONS AND SCOPE

The functions and scope of work of the WG on the 2030 Agenda include:

- I. **Regional Consultations** are an important mechanism for debate and exchange of lessons learnt and good practices among the different actors in the region, and are critical to ensure that the voice of the Arab region is consolidated and projected to the global arena. ESCWA, like all Regional Commissions, has the mandate to organize annual regional multi-stakeholder forums, known as Regional Forums for Sustainable Development (RFSO), in order to collect views and report to the global High Level Political Forum. ESCWA will invite members of the WG on 2030 Agenda to contribute to the substantive and organizational preparations of the annual RFSO (also known as the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development – AFSD). The WG may also consider the organization of other regional meetings and consultations as needed.
- II. **Knowledge Production** in the form of reports, working level papers and policy briefs will be useful to ensure a common understanding of the priorities and challenges of the region in the achievement of the new agenda. The Working Group will be invited to contribute to the Arab Sustainable Development Report, a regional report that provides an analytical lens on the achievements in the adaptation, implementation, follow-up and review and monitoring of the SDGs in the region. Following the inaugural report published in 2016, the WG will seek to prepare a report in time for submission to the High-Level Political Forum at the level of Heads of State and Government (2019, 2023, etc). The Working Group will also put forward a plan for other joint knowledge products, with a particular focus on the integration aspects of the SDGs.
- III. **Follow-up and review, monitoring and data collection** are central tenets of the 2030 Agenda. The WG on the 2030 Agenda will oversee the work of the RCM SDG Data Working Group, through regular consultations and coordination activities. The WG on the 2030 Agenda will rely on the efforts and outputs of the Working Group on SDG Data to generate reports and propose regional and sub-regional monitoring and accountability frameworks.
- IV. **Capacity building and Advocacy** activities aimed at governments of Member States and major groups may be streamlined and coordinated through the WG on the 2030 Agenda. The WG will consider the possibility of maintaining a common platform for all capacity building material, guidelines and modules as well as a common calendar of regional and sub-regional training activities to ensure coherence and avoid duplication. Members will also seek to harmonize public and private advocacy efforts on the 2030 Agenda.

5. MEMBERSHIP, GOVERNANCE & ORGANIZATION

All members of the RCM will be invited to express their interest in participating in the WG on the 2030 Agenda. Membership in the WG will be at the level of the Regional Directors of UN agencies, represented by focal points to facilitate working-level communication and coordination.

The WG is chaired by ESCWA represented by the Deputy Executive Secretary for Programme, who will have the authority to convene meetings (either in-person or virtual). The Chair will be supported by a Secretariat from ESCWA working in coordination with the ESCWA Unit on Agenda 2030.. The Chair, with support from the secretariat of the WG, will develop biennial workplans and budgets, and organize regular meetings with WG members. In consultation with other WG members, the Chair may also establish task teams to support the preparation of specific events or other major outputs.

Members of the task teams will be selected by each entity according to set criteria. Member entities may participate in all or some selected activities.

The Chair will organize at least one meeting of the WG every year. Meetings may also be organized on the sidelines of other regional events, including the annual RCM meeting or the Arab Regional Forum for Sustainable Development.

6. ADVOCACY

The WG will also explore opportunities for developing joint advocacy and awareness raising materials and campaigns on the 2030 Agenda. The WG may consider building on the different joint activities, such as meetings, reports and workshops to articulate common regional messages.

7. FINANCIAL AND IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS

All members of the WG on the 2030 Agenda are expected to make contributions to the WG based on the established biennial work plan and budget. Contributions may be made in-cash or in-kind, such as through covering participant and staff travel, supporting consultancy costs, contributing to meeting costs, or providing staff time and resources. The amount of contribution and the modality of disbursement will be determined on an individual basis with each entity.

8. MONITORING AND REPORTING

The WG will regularly assess its progress against the biennial work plan through consultations with members on lessons learned. The WG will prepare and submit to the RCM an annual progress report, describing its successes, challenges and future plans. Individual activities and outputs of the WG will be assessed through surveys, questionnaires and on-line monitoring tools.