

Regional Coordination Mechanism

UN Thematic Working Group on Climate Change

Briefing Note to the 19th Session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), Cairo, 26-27 November 2013

Prepared by: UNEP Regional Officer for West Asia, 06 November 2013

TWG Members: ESCWA, UNESCO, FAO, UNDP, UNU, WHO, UNIDO, WMO, UN-HABITAT, UN ISDR, the World Bank and the League of Arab States

Introduction

The UN Thematic Working Group on Climate Change (TWG) was established pursuant to the decision of the 12th Session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism which met in ESCWA, Beirut, 13-14 September 2008. The Group has also been established within the context of a broader global UN cooperation mechanism under the CEB-HLCP framework as called for by the UN Secretary General. The UNEP Regional Office for West Asia was tasked to facilitate and be the convener of the Thematic Working Group (TWG). According to its agreed TOR and Work Plan, the objective of the TWG is to strengthen *results* and enhance *impacts* of the UN system operations to support the Arab Region in addressing climate change issues through effective networking and sharing of information and output-oriented collaboration efforts among partner UN agencies in the region. The Group will be a forum for planning joint activities whenever feasible and for the provision of coherent advice and capacity building support to countries on a regional level. In doing so, the Group will seek to identify priority issues and actions on climate change that need to be supported on a regional scale. Over the operation of the TWG since 2008, representatives from ESCWA, UNESCO, FAO, UNDP, UNU, WHO, UNIDO, WMO, UN-HABITAT, UN ISDR, the World Bank and the League of Arab States as an observer have attended one or more of the Group meetings.

Achievements

The TWG witnessed progressive achievements at least during the first *three years* of operations (2008-2011). This has been largely driven by a strong UN and LAS agenda on climate change at the HQs and regional levels. For example, the TWG had to work together to fulfill the anticipated accelerated support to countries of the region in preparation to Copenhagen Conference in 2009. Climate Change was selected as the theme for UN-LAS Sectoral Coordination Meeting held in June 2009 in which priorities for joint work was agreed.

The following are additional results achieved by the TWG:

1. Launching of the Regional Cooperation for Climate Change Impact Assessment on Water Resources in the Arab Region (RICCAR). This has been the flagship of the TWG with six agencies participating (ESCWA, WMO, UNEP, UNU, UN ISDR,

WHO) ESCWA is the lead agency. The RICCAR has mobilized technical and financial resources in support of conducting the assessment itself and building the capacities in the Arab Region. With a US \$4 M donated by SIDA, the RAICCAR is advancing very well towards preparing comprehensive assessment of climate change impacts on water resources. A number of capacity building activities have been implemented. A new sub-Group on Methodology for Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation headed by UNEP was established in 2012.

2. The TWG supported collectively the preparation of the Arab Action Plan on Climate Change approved by CAMRE in 2012.
3. The TWG held a side event in Doha Climate Conference, COP18 in December 2012.
4. Presentations of the TWG were made to global and regional workshops and events. It also contributed to other TWGs (Food Security and MDGs)
5. The TWG held Annual meetings in which common issues were discussed, information exchanged and joint plans were made.

What has worked

1. As stated above the strong drive from the HQs of agencies in 2008 & 2009 made the TWG more active and responsive to the needs of the RCM and the Region. This created visibility at the global level of what the agencies are doing in the region
2. The Group worked well within the framework of a well funded project (the RICCAR project). Funds have been made available for joint work although not necessary that funds transited agencies accounts. ESCWA has been the Fund Manager and the Coordinator for the Initiative but agencies were willing to participate upon coverage of their costs from the project.
3. LAS provided a good political umbrella through being an observer and through the Arab Climate Change Action Plan preparation
4. TWG meetings always took the advantage of gathering of agencies' representatives in attending the RCM or/and the Expert Group Meeting of the RICCAR
5. Regular reports and presentations submitted to RCM meetings.

What did not work and why

1. The time given for the face-to-face meetings of the TWG was never enough to go through the agenda items. Meetings were usually held back to back with other meetings to save costs.
2. Turn-over of focal points or representatives from agencies hindered consistency and progressive achievements of the Group.

3. Focal points may not have the adequate mandate or authority to agree on priorities or programming aspects
4. Support from agencies' HQs has faded by time.
5. More often agencies do not see the need to coordinate with or inform any other agency let alone the TWG lead agency if they have the resources and the abilities to implement an activity or project
6. Agencies are still in the competing mode especially when opportunity for funding arise
7. Follow up, coordination and information sharing requires dedicated staff time from the Lead and Participating Agencies . UNEP as the Lead Agency does not have the human and financial resources dedicated to the TWG.
8. Responses from participated agencies on requests for reporting has not been even or/and consistent.
9. Value-added of the TWG still not yet obvious especially for those activities and projects that are with single agency programme of work.

Recommendations from UNEP as the Convener

In the four RCM meetings held since 2009, UNEP as the lead agency, submitted progress reports on the TWG, challenges and opportunities as well as recommendations for the consideration of the RCM. Two such meetings are of significance:

16th RCM: Beirut, 25-26 November 2011 in which the TWG submitted a revised TOR and Work Plan (Annex I)

17th RCM: Beirut, 10 December 2012, in which the TWG submitted a new strategic approach to take the work of the TWG into a new paradigm/

In the 17th RCM, UNEP suggested the alignment of the TWG work along the following streams

- More focus on upstream support to countries in terms of policies and strategies to combat climate change (mitigation, adaptation, technology and finance)
- Ensuring stronger inputs to the on-going process of negotiation of new climate treaty by 2015
- Substantive contribution towards Rio+20, post 2015 Development Agenda and SDGs
- Better linkages to the Food Security and Nutrition TWG

However, the recommendations of the 17th RCM stated that:

"Food Security and Climate Change: The RCM recommends further discussion between both groups to consider possibility of a merger of mandates and functions. The RCM to consider the possibility of establishing an Arab Food Security and Nutrition Forum with LAS"

Unfortunately, there has not been an opportunity where the two TWGs (food security & climate change) could meet and discuss the merger, functions and mandates. Moreover, the turnover of the agencies' focal points and lack of resources for attending face-to-face meeting made it difficult to initiate the process and reach an agreement.

Therefore, UNEP recommends to the RCM taking decision on one of the following three options:

Option 1: Decides to mandate the *lead agency* of each TWG (FAO & UNEP) to discuss merger, propose TOR, circulate to agencies and RCM members virtually for approval. The Co-Chairs can alternate. However, the RCM to take note that the FSN TWG has preference for keeping each TWG separate because of the importance of the two issues (FSN & CC) to the region. More coordination and linkages still needed between the two TWGs.

Option 2: Keep Climate Change TWG but give clear tasks and deliverables while obligating agencies to set-a-side resources for implementation or provide seed money as incentive for agencies to work on joint activities. Such tasks could be aligned with the climate negotiation process leading up to the new climate treaty by COP21 in 2015. It is expected that countries will demand more support from the UN System during tentative period of negotiations in 2014 and 2015. In 2014, the UN SG called for Climate Change Summit.

In this option, the RCM may consider opening a change of chairmanship (on yearly basis) through *rotating* the Lead Agency.

Option 3: Abolish the Climate Change TWG altogether without merger with any other groups

ANNEX 1 - Revised TOR – Thematic Working Group on Climate Change in the Arab Region

As agreed by the TWG & RCM in November 2011.

Background and rationale

Climate Change is becoming a global environmental challenge that may impede sustainable development and achievement of MDGs for developing countries. Under the leadership of the UN Secretary General himself, efforts of the UN System has been geared towards assisting developing countries addressing those climate change challenges but emphasized that in order to achieve meaningful results, such efforts should be well-coordinated and targeted at the global, regional and national level. At the global level, the UN Chief Executive Board for Coordination – High Level Committee on Programmes (CEB-HLCP) established a framework of coordination of UN System activities in climate change¹ and assigned conveners for following main areas of focus:

No.	Areas of Focus	Convening Agencies
1	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation & Forest Degradation (REDD)	FAO, UNDP, UNEP
2	Technology Transfer	UNIDO, UNDESA World
3	Finance (Mitigation, Adaptation)	Bank, UNDP
4	Capacity Building	UNDP, UNEP
5	Adaptation	HLCP WG CC
6	Science, Assessment, Monitoring and Early Warning	WMO, UNESCO
7	Supporting Global, Regional and National Action	UNDP, UNDESA, UN Regional Commissions
8	Public Awareness	UNEP, UN Communications Group
9	Climate Neutral UN	UNEP

The UN SG is convening regular meetings for the head of agencies and the climate change group to assess progress towards on-going climate negotiations and to jointly prepare policy statements for the UN family and coherent technical assistance programme to developing countries. It is expected that demand for UN support will increase considerably as we approach the UNFCCC COP in Copenhagen in 2009 and as developing countries are becoming more aware of challenges of climate change to their national development and the potential additional development assistance a future global climate change legal regime may bring.

The Arab region is thought to be more impacted by climate change not because of its climate characteristics but also because of high vulnerabilities of water resources, ecosystems, public health, food security, etc. which requires multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach where all agencies are engaged. With the help of the UN System and other partners, countries in the

¹ CEB 2007: UN System Action Plan on Climate Change

region have already initiated a number of projects and activities related to climate change. At the regional level, the League for Arab States, in collaboration with regional UN and non-UN organizations, has launched the process of developing an Arab Framework of Action on Climate Change (AFACC). Preliminary conclusions of the AFACC indicate that there is a long list of priorities and needs in the region ranging from provision of basic capacity building support to climate-proofing of infrastructure to the need for more investment flow to build resilience and to have meaningful economic opportunities in the mitigation side of climate change. The UN system is and will be responding to these needs and priorities through development and implementation of climate change related programmes, projects and activities. There are risks of duplication and overlaps of the work of the UN agencies in the region resulting in cost-inefficiencies, redundancies and less impact.

The Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), convened by the UN Regional Commissions, is set up to promote a coordinated approach by the UN agencies to address development issues of concerns to the respective region. The RCM for the West Asia region is convened by UN ESCWA, meets every two years, and attended by almost all UN organization operating in the region. The last RCM meeting was held under the auspices of the UN Deputy Secretary General in Beirut 13-14 September 2008. Around 22 UN agencies attended this meeting. The RCM agreed that more effective inter-agency coordination and collaboration at the operational level can be achieved through establishing small and functional working group organized around priority themes identified by RCM of the region. For the Arab region, RCM agreed to establish three Thematic Working Groups with their convening agencies as follows:

MDG Working Group: ESCWA
Food Crisis Working Group: FAO
Climate Change: UNEP

Participants to the session on the Climate Change WG recommended that the convening agencies initiate as soon as possible the process of developing TOR for the TWG, drafting a work plan and organize the first technical meeting for the Group. This draft TOR will be tabled at the first meeting of the Group and will be subject to members comments and advise.

Objective of the Climate Change WG

The objective of the Working Group (TWG CC) is to strengthen *results* and enhance *impacts* of the UN system operations through effective networking, sharing of information and coherent programming at the regional level.

Scope of Work and Elements of Collaboration

In line with the regional and national priorities identified in relevant regional and national sustainable development initiatives, plans and programmes and especially those related to climate change, the Working Group will be a forum for:

- Agreeing on collaborative framework to further strengthen the work of the Climate Change Working Group
- Briefing member agencies on current and planned climate change related activities in the region, preparing inventories of climate change related activities

- Providing an overview and reflecting on the state of global knowledge about climate change trends from the scientific, research, programmes, funding and international cooperation regimes.
- Sharing of reports, research and policy notes, analytical studies and guiding tools conducted or developed by the agency specifically for the region
- Based on the UN agency inventory referred to above and reviewing the regional climate change activity plans by agencies, analyzing gaps in the regional programmes/activities of the UN system entities as they relate to selected focus area and assess how these gaps will be addressed
- Reviewing and identifying joint projects to be undertaken under the auspices of the TWG. Joint projects and activities should be based on priority needs of the region
- Mapping of agency expertise, pooling them when necessary to support inter-agency collaborative efforts
- Providing technical support to the League for Arab States and to its established subsidiary bodies in implementing the Arab Framework of Action on Climate Change and other key regional initiatives and processes
- Supporting the establishment of regional networks for dealing with various dimension of the climate change; e.g national focal point system, research institutions, adaptation, technology transfer, etc.

Membership and Mode of Operation

The Working Group will be constituted from representative of member agencies of the UN System working in the region. Each agency will nominate a focal point at the technical and operational level in the agency's climate change programme.

Meetings of the WG will be held regularly and when necessary, but at least once a year. UNEP, as the convening agency, will call for the meeting and will help develop the agenda and meeting logistics. Hosting of the meeting will be open to other agencies as well. Each agency will cover its own participation.

Meetings can also be held via tele/video conferences, Skype or other IT means.

The Group may invite experts or officials as the need arise for policy brief or specialized technical advisory services.

Reports of the WG will be submitted to the RCM convener, ESCWA, who will be responsible to ensure wider dissemination of the reports to other stakeholders at the regional and the global UN inter-agency bodies such as CEB/HLPC and the UN SG Climate Change Team.

The following table summarizes priority areas of focus of the TWG

Focus Area	Priority Activities
Adaptation	Impacts and Vulnerability Assessment of Climate Change on Water Resources of the Region Methodologies & Tools for Impacts and Vulnerability Assessments Impacts of Climate Change on Public Health Regional Climate Modeling (Global-Regional Downscaling) Adaptation Strategies
Mitigation	Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Assessment of Mitigation Potential
Networking and Knowledge Management	Regional Inter-agency e-Platform for Information Sharing
Technology Transfer & Financing	Technology Needs Assessments & TT Projects Climate Financing