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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

**OF THE NINETEENTH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM
CAIRO, 26-27 NOVEMBER 2013**

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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 nineteenth meeting of the RCM on 26-27 November 2013, for the first time at the Headquarters of the League of Arab States in Cairo. During the eighteenth meeting of the RCM, the League of Arab States had extended an invitation to hold the nineteenth meeting at its Headquarters. This is in line with RCM efforts to strengthen coordination between the United Nations and the League of Arab States.

2. The meeting was held for one full day on 26 November and one half day on 27 November. It was attended by representatives of regional United Nations agencies, the League of Arab States and other regional organizations. Subsidiary bodies of the League of Arab States attended the first day of the meeting as observers. The purpose of the meeting was: (a) to discuss ways of coordinating United Nations support to the League of Arab States, particularly in the preparation for the fourth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit (referred to in short as the Summit) and its three related fora;¹ (b) to discuss issues brought to the attention of RCM members by the Thematic Working Groups and endorse any proposed activities and outcomes; and (c) to clarify the process and timeline of the preparation of the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda and discuss an RCM-coordinated plan of action to support the inter-governmental regional preparations led by the League of Arab States. This report is a summary of the key discussions and outcomes of the meeting.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

3. The recommendations of the first session focused on formulating a coordinated United Nations-wide action plan to support the League of Arab States in the preparation for the upcoming Summit, including through accelerating the implementation of the activities included in the Matrix of Activities of the joint United Nations and League of Arab States General Cooperation Meeting in Vienna in 2012. Specific recommendations included the following:

(a) RCM members to develop a unified United Nations programme of support to member countries to facilitate the preparatory work for the Arab customs union, including an action plan for 2014-2015 and the following activities:

- (i) Use of modeling tools to assess such elements as a unified customs tariffs, products to be included, and more;
- (ii) Analysis of the socioeconomic impact of different policy options related to the establishment of the customs union;
- (iii) Capacity-building activities, including the training of customs officers in member countries;
- (iv) Support in negotiations with the World Trade Organization (WTO) in light of the establishment of a customs union, namely, accession support to non-members and capacity-building support to members.

ESCWA will initiate consultations with RCM members to determine the scope and outline of the programme. This will include possible contributions by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (on agricultural and animal products), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (on chemicals and bio-hazardous materials), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (on

¹ See: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201301221036.html>.

strengthening regional value chains in industry in North Africa), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (on trade facilitation).

ESCWA will join the Aid for Trade Project jointly undertaken by UNDP and the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC) in order to ensure regional synergy and coordination.

(b) Concerned United Nations agencies and the League of Arab States were called upon by ESCWA to contribute to the “Arab Economic Integration Report” with a focus on the Arab customs union to be produced during the second half of 2014. ESCWA will initiate contacts with concerned United Nations agencies to determine modality of contributions;

(c) Concerned United Nations agencies and the League of Arab States are also requested to contribute to an ESCWA-led series of normative papers on the socioeconomic impact of infrastructure connectivity in the region, with a focus on issues of transport and energy, with a view to do the following:

(i) Establish a legislative framework and guidelines;

(ii) Develop project proposals to promote interconnectivity.

(d) The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) will coordinate efforts with the Regional United Nations Development Group (R/UNDG) and RCM members on regional consultations in partnership with the League of Arab States, also with a view to the World Humanitarian Summit to be held in Istanbul in 2016;²

(e) Concerned United Nations Agencies committed their support to the League of Arab States in the preparation of the three side fora of the Fourth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, Tunisia 2015 on youth, civil society and the private sector;

(f) RCM members agreed to accelerate the implementation of the activities included in the matrix of activities of the United Nations and League of Arab States General Cooperation Meeting in Vienna in 2012 and to use the matrix as a tool to monitor implementation before the next coordination meeting in Geneva, tentatively scheduled for 17-19 June 2014, taking into consideration the importance of the post-2015 agenda. Furthermore, they agreed on the following:

(i) To maintain two versions of the matrix: one comprehensive matrix managed by the United Nations Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and the League of Arab States; and one focused on RCM collaborative actions, but not including single-agency activities;

(ii) Cluster leaders (DPA, ESCWA, UNDP and OCHA) to circulate the RCM collaborative matrix relevant to their cluster before the end of 2013;

(iii) RCM members to include qualitative assessments of implementation in the status column of the matrix.

4. The outcomes of the second session focused on modalities of operation and reporting of the RCM Thematic Working Groups (TWGs). The meeting resulted in the following recommendations:

(a) All TWGs will prepare clear annual work plans linked to deliverables and a timeline for implementation to be pre-approved by members. Updates by RCM TWGs should also be shared well ahead of time of the next meeting;

² See: <http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/>.

(b) The terms of reference (TOR) and scope of the TWG on Climate Change should be reformulated with a narrower focus and rotational leadership of the group by different agencies. UNEP will organize consultations early in 2014;

(c) The TOR of the TWG on Food Security and Nutrition will be reviewed and adjusted by February 2014. FAO will lead consultations.

5. The third session focused on coordinating regional engagement within the post-2015 development agenda process, through, among others, providing support to the League of Arab States in the upcoming Arab Summit. The outlined plan of action contains the following recommendations:

(a) United Nations agencies will ensure that any proposals to the 2015 Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, including the Sustainable Development Strategic Framework for the Arab Region, are presented to the relevant ministerial councils by no later than April 2014, so that they are considered in the July 2014 Meeting of the Special Committee for the preparation of the 2015 Summit in Tunis. The League of Arab States will provide RCM members with the master list of all upcoming ministerial council meetings in 2014;

(b) United Nations agencies were requested to follow up on national consultations, including youth consultations, on the Post- 2015 Development Agenda that were initiated in 2012, and to place results at the service of upcoming regional intergovernmental consultations;³

(c) United Nations entities should continue and enhance support for the follow-up on the implementation of decisions and resolutions of past Arab Economic and Social Development Summits, and recommendations of side fora made since 2009. The League of Arab States will propose modalities of interventions and support;

(d) RCM members were urged to coordinate stronger linkages between the global disaster risk reduction framework to be developed by 2015 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in order to ensure that the Post- 2015 Development Agenda will reflect the risks of disasters and the need to build resilience;

(e) RCM members agreed that the Inter-agency MDG Thematic Working Group for Arab States will revise its TOR to reflect the transition to the Post-2015 Agenda SDGs. Among the TWGs, new tasks will be acting as a repository of information and documentation, maintaining coordinated timelines of regional events, and initiating joint activities. The Group would also be the coordination interface with the League of Arab States;

(f) Members agreed on the importance of supporting a regional annual ministerial review back-to-back with the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in order to enhance the linkages between the regional and the global processes. UNEP will share a “white paper” on embedding the environment in the SDGs in the context of the Arab region.

³ See: http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/index.shtml.

II. PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. SESSION 1 – ENGAGING WITH REGIONAL AND GLOBAL PROCESSES – REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND THE ARAB SUMMIT

6. The purpose of this session was to discuss ways for the RCM to work more closely with the League of Arab States, to generate concrete ideas on how the RCM can support the upcoming Arab Economic and Social Development Summit and the related fora and other side events, and to briefly review with RCM members progress updates with respect to the activities agreed upon and outlined in the United Nations and League of Arab States General Cooperation Meeting in Vienna.

7. Ambassador Ms. Faeqa Saeed al-Saleh, League of Arab States Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs, in her capacity as moderator, opened by session by providing an overview of the Arab Economic and Social Development Summits, the outcomes of the latest Summit held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in January 2013, current on-going consultations and preparations for the next Summit which will be held in 2015 in Tunis, and League of Arab States expectations from United Nations agencies in terms of coordinated support.⁴

1. *Presentations*

8. Mr. Abdallah al-Dardari, Chief Economist and Director of the Economic Development and Globalization Division at ESCWA, delivered a presentation outlining the role of the United Nations in assisting the Arab region in the fields of economic integration and intraregional trade, with focus on the following: (a) the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA); (b) the Arab Customs Union; and (c) integrated transport schemes. Mr. Al-Dardari called for using modeling tools to assess the impact of regional policies and programmes and proposed a coordinated United Nations programme of support to member countries and the League of Arab States to facilitate the preparatory work for the Arab customs union.

9. Mr. Adel Abdellatif, Chief of the Regional Programme Division at the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, presented the Aid for Trade Initiative for Arab States, which aims to accelerate the pace of trade reforms and regional economic integration in order to strengthen job creation and enhance competitiveness. This initiative was endorsed in the Riyadh Declaration emanating from the Third Arab Economic and Social Development Summit held in Riyadh in January 2013.⁵

10. Ms. Nada al-Nashif, Assistant Director-General and Regional Director of the Regional Office for Arab States of the International Labour Organization (ILO) presented the employment challenges and opportunities in the region, focusing on youth, gender equality, informal economy, and skills development. Ms. Al-Nashif noted the vulnerability of youth and women in the Arab region, pointing to their potential if the right policies are in place. According to ILO, the Arab region has the world's highest rates of youth and adult unemployment. Moreover, while progress has been achieved in some of the MDG targets related to increasing women's primary education, the region still exhibits the lowest rate of female labour force participation (17 per cent versus 46 per cent for men). Ms. Al-Nashif called for well-structured entrepreneurship programmes, empowered unions and representative bodies, and strengthened institutional mechanisms.

11. Next, Mr. Ivo Freijsen, Head of Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa at OCHA, presented the progress achieved against the Joint Plan of Action on Humanitarian Affairs that was signed between the League of Arab States and OCHA in May 2013, and which will be reviewed in January 2014 at

⁴ See: <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/LAS-statement-WHS-HL-event-26-Sept-2013.pdf>.

⁵ See: <http://www.lasportal.org/wps/wcm/connect/c9935e004e4618d782b5aa5cbcbea77a/22-1-2013.pdf?MOD=AJPERES> (Arabic only).

a workshop hosted by the League of Arab States.⁶ In partnership with the League of Arab States Division of Health and Humanitarian Systems, OCHA will support regional consultation and dialogue in preparation for the World Humanitarian Summit, to be held in 2016 in Istanbul. Mr. Freijesen saw the involvement of the relevant ministerial councils of the League of Arab States in the process as a welcome sign of commitment.

12. The final intervention in Session 1 was by Mr. Walid Fahmy from the DPA Middle East and West Asia Division (MEWAD). Mr. Fahmy presented an overview of the United Nations and League of Arab States global cooperation process, which includes the following: (a) the general coordination meetings and resulting outcome document and matrix of activities; and (b) the DPA-led clusters review process and resulting regional priorities paper, where the economic, social and environmental clusters are jointly conveyed by ESCWA, UNDP and UNEP. His key observations included the possibility for the United Nations and the League of Arab States to increase their cooperation in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, and to support participation and civil society action. MEWAD, together with the League of Arab States, will coordinate efforts in the preparation for the next United Nations and League of Arab States general cooperation meeting in Geneva in June 2014.

2. Discussion

13. During discussions, the League of Arab States reiterated its intention to participate in the preparations for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. ECA stressed the importance of viewing issues from a policy dimension and not as stand-alone projects. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) emphasized the need to understand and capitalize on the demographic window available now in the Arab region, taking lessons from the Asian Tigers.⁷ Currently, youth represent 20 per cent of the Arab population, yet, they suffer from unemployment and low participation rates. UNFPA pointed out the priority to formulate comprehensive youth policies, adding that they have been working with the League of Arab States, ESCWA and other United Nations agencies on promoting such evidence-based policies. In response, the League of Arab States suggested that the focus of the youth side forum to the 2015 Summit be centred on youth employment. UNDP stated that due importance should also be given to quality education. Another area of concern is access to finance, and this should also be considered in the agenda of the Summit. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) expressed its willingness to work with the League of Arab States on the preparations for the civil society forum of the Summit.

14. The League of Arab States stressed the importance of monitoring the implementation of the priorities and activities agreed upon in the Vienna General Coordination Meeting in July 2012, and called for a special session to assess progress at the upcoming meeting in Geneva in 2014. Mr. Nadim Khoury, Deputy Executive-Secretary of ESCWA, confirmed the importance of the matrix review and reiterated the opportunity to use the RCM as platform for this purpose.

15. Mr. Djamel Djaballah, Head of the Environment, Water Resources and Sustainable Development Department at the League of Arab States stressed the importance of coordination between League of Arab States subsidiary bodies and relevant United Nations agencies, rather than following stand-alone activities. OHCHR concurred, stating that they have been working on building the capacity of League of Arab States counterparts in the areas of human rights and the rule of law.

B. SESSION 2 – ENHANCING COORDINATION AMONG RCM MEMBERS ON PRIORITY ISSUES

16. The objective of this session was to update RCM members on the activities of the different thematic working groups, namely: TWG on Food Security, which was changed to Food Security and Nutrition; TWG on MDGs; TWG on International Migration; and TWG on Climate Change. Discussion

⁶ See: <http://reliefweb.int/report/world/secretariat-general-league-arab-states-and-united-nations-sign-humanitarian-plan-action>.

⁷ The Asian Tigers are the highly free and developed economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan.

focused on the modus operandi of the groups and suggested modifications to their mandates, outputs and structures. The session was chaired by Mr. Carlo Scaramella, Deputy Regional Director of the World Food Programme (WFP).

1. *Presentations*

17. Mr. Mohamed Aw-Dahir, Food Systems Economist and TWG Focal Point, highlighted challenges to food security in the region, including dependency on food imports, vulnerability to market fluctuations, water scarcity, high population growth, access to credit facilities, and lack of social safety nets. Mr. Aw-Dahir also updated the RCM members on the latest activities of the group, namely, the two meetings held in May and November 2013. He highlighted the regional priorities that have emerged from the two meetings, namely: (a) the need to focus on resource and funding for humanitarian support in view of the continuous conflicts and protracted crises in the region; (b) the urgent need to provide support to countries in the region in establishing/strengthening food security and nutrition information systems for enhanced evidence-based policymaking; and (c) the need for strong advocacy of improved access to diversified food at household level in the post-MDG framework, as the region suffers from a high malnutrition rate. Mr. Aw-Dahir also pointed to the challenges of agriculture and food trade, land reform, social safety nets, community resilience, right to food in the constitution, and reducing food loss and waste.

18. Mr. Al-Dardari's intervention on the MDG TWG focused on the launch of the fourth and last Arab MDGs Report⁸ during a special event at the General Assembly in New York on 23 September 2013.⁹ The report was also launched in Beirut in cooperation with the Carnegie Middle East Centre,¹⁰ and is planned for launch in Rabat, Morocco. Mr. Al-Dardari highlighted findings of the report as well as results of assessments of such additional parameters as participation and accountability in relation to growth, describing the negative correlation between economic growth in countries of the region and participation and accountability. Mr. Al-Dardari also indicated that the TWG will continue to coordinate interagency activities on the MDGs, and will explore ways to continue to coordinate regional United Nations interventions related to the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

19. The third intervention of the Session was by Ms. Enas el Fergany, Director of Migration and Arab Expatriates Department at the League of Arab States. Her presentation focused on the establishment of the TWG on International Migration, its TOR, proposed 2014 action plan, and the results of its first meeting in Cairo on 25 November 2013. The group was established at the eighteenth meeting of the RCM in March 2013, is co-led by ESCWA, the League of Arab States and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and comprises 14 agencies. The group will focus on promoting joint work on international migration and development, ensuring systematic production of quality migration data, sharing lessons and good practices, supporting governments in policy formulation and implementation, and promoting regional dialogue on migration issues. The TWG has so far contributed to the Regional Consultative Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region in Cairo on 4-5 June 2013,¹¹ in preparation for the second High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, which was held at the United Nations General Assembly on 3-4 October 2013.¹² The TWG conveyed to the High-level Dialogue a final declaration on international migration and development in the region adopted during the regional consultations.¹³ Work has started on mapping the initiatives taken by United Nations agencies and the

⁸ See: <http://www.escwa.un.org/sites/arabmdg13/>.

⁹ See: <http://www.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/MDGs/arab-states/>.

¹⁰ See: http://www.escwa.un.org/information/pressescwaprint.asp?id_code=598.

¹¹ See: <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=3173E>.

¹² See: <https://www.iom.int/cms/hld2013>.

¹³ See: <https://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/What-We-Do/docs/Regional-Consultative-Meeting-on-International-Migration-Final-Declaration-EN.pdf>.

League of Arab States on the subject. Based on those and the results of the TWG meeting on 25 November, an action plan is being adopted with clear outcomes and objectives, which will be presented at the twentieth RCM meeting.

20. Mr. Iyad Abumoghli, Director of the UNEP Regional Office for West Asia, gave a presentation on the TWG on Climate Change. The group was established at the twelfth RCM in 2008, and has been successful in mobilizing substantial amounts of resources, namely, US\$4 million in direct contributions and almost US\$6 million in parallel contributions, for its Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socioeconomic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR), managed by ESCWA. The group also contributed to the formulation of the Arab Action Plan for Climate Change,¹⁴ and supported the eighteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC),¹⁵ and the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP18/CMP8) held in Doha, Qatar, at the end of 2012.¹⁶ Mr. Abumoghli listed some key observations from the experience the TWG has gained so far: (a) There was an international as well as national drive to address issues of climate change in preparation for the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Copenhagen in December 2009;¹⁷ (b) the League of Arab States provided an excellent framework to work as a convening power; (c) meetings were always held back-to-back with other such meetings as RCM, due to lack of resources; (d) capacities within United Nations agencies to contribute to the work have been diminishing due to high staff turnover; (e) participants in the TWG meetings are almost never key decision-makers, which complicates the process of reaching with decisions; (f) responses to conveners with regards to reporting have been few; and (g) priorities for funding are changing within United Nations agencies with unilateral projects taking a large bulk of the funding. As a result, Mr. Abumoghli put forward three options for discussion: (i) to merge the TWG on Climate Change with that on Food Security (this recommendation was rejected at the TWG meeting); (ii) to rethink the priorities of the TWG and its TOR by focusing more on such specific areas as technology transfer, capacity-building, disaster and resilience; and (iii) to wrap up the work of the TWG and disband it. Due to capacity considerations, UNEP expressed its desire to step down as conveners of this TWG.

2. Discussion

21. The subsequent discussion focused on the future goals of the TWGs and their work modalities. ECA requested more frequent updates, and a better flow of information among RCM members, while ILO recommended sharing of TWG reports ahead of time to allow for more strategic discussions. Mr. Scaramella, acting as moderator of the session, highlighted the importance of preparing annual work plans for all the TWGs, with clear activities, resource commitments and timelines that are pre-approved for all groups. With specific reference to the TWG on MDGs, ESCWA announced that the Fourth Arab MDG Report is the last one to be jointly produced. However, data will continue to be updated and could be shared in discussions and technical papers. According to Mr. Al-Dardari, the TWG on MDGs has accumulated a wealth of knowledge and lessons learned that will be important in the post-2015 discussions. Therefore, it was suggested that the group continues to be a forum and “conduit” to Post-2015 Development Agenda discussions. Whether the post-2015 framework will focus on the off-track MDGs specifically is not clear; however, regional discussions have stressed the need to accelerate the implementation of the remaining MDGs and convey a strong message from the region making use of League of Arab States bodies and mechanisms. Mr. Al-Dardari noted that the Arab MDG Report made original contributions to the discussion by including data on governance. On the TWG on Food Security, it was recommended to adjust the TOR and prepare a joint work plan by February 2014. With regard to the TWG on Climate Change, Mr. Abumoghli stressed that

¹⁴ See: <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/projects/climatechange/index.asp>.

¹⁵ See: http://unfccc.int/meetings/doha_nov_2012/session/7049.php.

¹⁶ See: <http://www.cop18.qa/en-us/aboutcop18cmp8/cop18cmp8.aspx>.

¹⁷ See: http://unfccc.int/meetings/copenhagen_dec_2009/meeting/6295.php.

there is a need for strong commitment from the United Nations agencies to contribute to re-drafting its TOR, which should include clear items on accountability measures and leadership on a rotational basis.

C. SESSION 3 – ENGAGING WITH REGIONAL AND GLOBAL PROCESSES – THE POST-2015
DEVELOPMENT AGENDA AND THE ARAB SUMMIT

22. The purpose of this session was to provide greater clarity on the post-2015 deliberations thus far and on key dates and landmarks ahead, as well as on the potential role of the RCM in facilitating regional input into the discussions. The session, which was chaired by Mr. Nadim Khouri, Deputy Executive-Secretary of ESCWA, also aimed at reaching consensus on elements for a plan of action to support intergovernmental preparations led by the League of Arab States for the region on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, based on the combined expertise and capacities of the RCM members.

1. *Presentations*

23. Ms. Amina Mohammed, Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning, delivered the opening statement for the session via a pre-recorded video message. She noted that, based on the General Assembly's outcome document produced on 25 September 2013, which clarifies the timeline leading to the adoption of a Post-2015 Development Agenda in September 2015, member countries will begin the intergovernmental deliberations and negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda at the sixty-seventh General Assembly session in September 2014. By the end of 2014, the Secretary-General will have produced a synthesis report of the results of all processes leading up to 2015, including the processes mandated by Rio+20 and the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. Ms. Mohammed welcomed the efforts of the regional commissions in conveying regional voices, especially through the RCM and the partnership with the League of Arab States and stressed that the Open Working Group remains the political forum for member States and inputs must feed into it.

24. Mr. Tarek el-Nabulsi, speaking on behalf of Ms. al-Saleh, explained the contributions of the League of Arab States to the regional discussions through its ministerial council meetings, the outcomes of the third Arab Economic and Social Development Summit held in Riyadh in January 2013, and the participation in the high-level committee on the post-2015 discussions. Among the regional priorities highlighted are the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, and the importance of investing in poverty measurement tools. Mr. el-Nabulsi announced that the League of Arab States has created a tripartite committee to prepare for the fourth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit in Tunis in January 2015, and indicated that inputs provided by the United Nations must be vetted by the relevant ministerial council and received by the tripartite committee by July 2014.

25. Ms. Sameera al-Tuwaijri, Regional Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) presented the status on discussions pertaining to a stand-alone goal on gender in the new development framework. She indicated that a consensus has not yet been reached, and more advocacy work was needed. Ms. al-Tuwaijri presented statistics demonstrating the catalytic effect of the participation of women on accelerating development, and proposed a goal based on the following three pillars: (a) freedom from violence; (b) provision of resources; and (c) increased participation. She noted that the goal must be based on the understanding that the structural basis of gender inequality lies in policies rooted in discrimination. She also announced that UN-Women is working to promote mainstreaming gender-sensitive indicators and gender-disaggregated statistics under the new framework.

26. Mr. Adel Abdellatif briefed the meeting on the UNDP national consultations organized by the United Nations country teams and the UNDG network, which resulted in a document launched in April 2013 in Amman, Jordan. He also highlighted the outcomes of the "My World" survey, a global online survey asking people to choose their priorities for a better world.¹⁸ The main priorities emerging from these consultations

¹⁸ See: <http://www.myworld2015.org/>.

include: (a) governance and participation; (b) conflict prevention, peace and increased human security; (c) inclusive growth and employment; (d) access to good quality education; (e) access to good quality health services; (f) empowering women; (g) addressing the food security-water-energy nexus,¹⁹ with its relation to social justice; and (h) addressing culture and development. UNDP further iterated the importance of localizing the Post-2015 Development Agenda, especially with regard to implementation mechanisms, by building national capacities, participatory monitoring and partnerships with the private sector.

27. Mr. Amjad Abbashar, Head of the Regional Office for Arab States of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), highlighted their work to mainstream disaster risk reduction (DRR) in the new development framework. He pointed out the necessity to think about DRR in terms of sustainable development, as susceptibility to disasters, whether man-made or natural, leads to vulnerability and risk, and erodes development gains. He indicated that Rio+20 galvanized international commitment and alerted parties involved to the importance of developing comprehensive strategies, linking DRR to climate change, governance, urbanization, and financing.

28. Ms. Reem Nejdawi, Chief of the Production Sectors Section at ESCWA, briefed RCM members on the regional deliberations facilitated by ESCWA, including the Arab Consultative Meeting on Sustainable Development Goals, held in Tunisia in November 2013 in partnership with UNEP and the League of Arab States.²⁰ The Tunisia meeting provided a platform to inform Arab regional stakeholders of the international processes, and in particular the outcomes of the sixty-eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly and the meetings of the Intergovernmental Open Working Group (OWG) on the SDGs, and to discuss a regional perspective on the SDGs in line with the Arab regional priorities and progress made on the MDGs. Ms. Nejdawi noted that the SDGs must be universal in nature but take into account national specificities, and must focus on creating a global partnership for development.

2. Discussion

29. Mr. Mostafa Madbouly, Director of the United Nations Habitat Regional Office for Arab States expressed his desire for more United Nations-wide coordination, and suggested the circulation of information on dates and details on all upcoming events in preparation for the League of Arab States Summit and other post-2015 consultations. He informed the RCM members of the work of UN-Habitat together with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development on a regional report on sustainable urban development, and highlighted the general absence of urban considerations in the ongoing deliberations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Furthermore, he pointed out the ongoing debate on whether a stand-alone goal on cities would be preferable or whether components should be mainstreamed through the various goals.

30. Mr. Abumoghli noted that UNEP has prepared a white paper containing the organization's vision of the SDGs, and indicated that the paper would be presented regionally. Among other things, the white paper calls for embedding environment into the SDGs.

31. ILO, supported by ESCWA and UN-Women, suggested reconstituting the MDG TWG into an inter-agency task force on post-2015, with new TOR and leadership by ESCWA. The task force should work as a repository of documents, reports, timelines, and events, and act as a counterpart to the Arab States through the League of Arab States. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) highlighted the need to work with the League of Arab States on the rule of law as a window to good governance. The Regional Commissions New York Office (RCNYO) brought up the issue of meeting the deadlines of events while ensuring inclusion of all necessary processes in the final outcome. It was suggested to include the Arab Summit in the global process and clearly define how the regional will fit into the global.

¹⁹ See: <http://www.water-energy-food.org/>.

²⁰ See: <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=3248E>.

32. Other United Nations agencies commented on suggested priorities or modalities. IOM underscored that migration should be part of the Post-2015 Agenda, and noted that the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development could serve as a forum for consultations. UN-Women joined in pointing out Beijing +20,²¹ the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, is planned for March 2015. FAO supported a standalone goal on gender and noted the empowerment of women in the agricultural sector as a priority. OCHA joined UNISDR in calling for greater attention to DRR. UNDP emphasized that the region needs greater focus on the quality, and not just quantity, of development. UNFPA mentioned that they would be building on the positive experience of the International Conference on Population and Development to support the Arab Youth Summit with new initiatives in cooperation with ILO and UNDP. The World Health Organization (WHO) discussed the need to link humanitarian issues to development.

33. The League of Arab States described the process of the preparations for the Tunis Summit and emphasized that the processes of the United Nations and the League of Arab States should go in parallel and be interlinked. Mr. Nabulsi, on behalf of the League of Arab States, asked for simplifying the process and including the Arab milestones in the global timelines. He further suggested to create a standing joint United Nations and League of Arab States working group, which could include external experts who can bring their inputs on regional goals for post-2015. He announced that a meeting of the ministers of social affairs will be organized in June 2014, which will provide a chance to crystallize social priorities for the region. The League of Arab States will work with ESCWA and UNDP to prepare documents and will invite RCM members to contribute. ESCWA clarified that the deadline to submit Arab positions on the SDGs has to be February 2014 to ensure their effective use to negotiators as the intergovernmental processes will begin in March.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

34. The nineteenth meeting of the RCM was held at the Headquarters of the League of Arab States in Tahrir Square in Cairo, on 26-27 November 2013. It convened three sessions for the discussion of agenda items.

B. OPENING OF THE MEETING

35. United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive-Secretary of ESCWA, Dr. Rima Khalaf, opened the meeting, highlighting its objectives. While noting the history of joint work between the United Nations and the League of Arab States in areas of political, economic, social, and environmental development, Dr. Khalaf emphasized ESCWA's commitment to augmenting and strengthening this relationship. She highlighted the necessity of regional integration that has been mandated more than once in the Arab Economic and Social Development summits, in the face of such common challenges in the Arab region as climate change and food insecurity. She stressed that Arab countries have many strengths to capitalize on, including common language, culture, history, and geography, which enhance the chances of success of integration. She argued that integration can assist Arab countries economically, increase their competitiveness, promote employment, and combat poverty. She called on Arab countries to articulate clear joint priorities for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, and indicated that the RCM is in a perfect position to facilitate this process. Priorities must not neglect the right to be free from occupation, peace and stability, attention to youth and women's needs, and addressing water, energy and food security challenges, in addition to good and democratic governance.

36. Mr. Adel Abdellatif, UNDP, representing Ms. Sima Bahous, Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, highlighted three priorities: (a) the need to urgently address

²¹ See: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw59-2015>.

the Syrian crisis; (b) supporting youth development; and (c) consultations for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. He emphasized the need to cooperate in order to face current and impending challenges in the region and to build resilience. He reviewed existing work with the League of Arab States and called for building on lessons learned to support the Tunis Summit.

37. Mr. Nabil al-Arabi, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, welcomed the participants of the RCM meeting and listed issues central to the agenda of the meeting, namely, the preparation for the forthcoming Tunis Summit and strengthening cooperation, through the RCM, to prepare for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Three issues were prominent in his speech: (a) the failure of the United Nations Security Council to resolve the issue of Palestine and hold the Israeli occupation responsible for its atrocities and violations of human rights; (b) the need to accelerate diplomatic and humanitarian efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis; and (c) the increasing need in the Arab region for development efforts and good governance.

C. PARTICIPANTS

38. The meeting was attended by representatives of regional United Nations agencies, other regional organizations, the League of Arab States Secretariat, and some subsidiary bodies. A list of participants can be found in annex I to this report.

D. DOCUMENTS

39. The list of documents submitted to the nineteenth RCM is contained in annex II of this report.

Annex I*

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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS (N.A)

Title	Details
	OPENING
Speech of Mr. Nabil al-Arabi	Secretary-General, League of Arab States
Speech of Ms. Rima Khalaf	Under-Secretary-General, Executive-Secretary of ESCWA
Speech of Ms. Sima Bahous	Assistant Secretary-General, R/UNDG
	SESSION 1
UN-LAS Strategic Priorities (Arabic and English)	UN-LAS Strategic Priorities for the Economic, Social and Environmental Clusters 2013-2017
Matrix of Activities within the Framework of the UN-LAS Collaboration	Matrix of Activities agreed at United Nations-League of Arab States General Meeting in Vienna in July 2012 with updates on progress
Riyadh Outcome Document (Arabic)	
Aid for Trade Initiative for Arab Countries	Presentation by UNDP
Update on Partnership between OCHA and LAS Health and Humanitarian Division	Talking points by OCHA
	SESSION 2
Working Group on International Migration	Update on the achievements of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region.
Update on the Activities of the Thematic Working Group on Food Security (by FAO)	Presentation on TWG Food Security by FAO
TWG on Climate Change	Briefing Note by UNEP
TWG on MDGs	Presentation by ESCWA
TWG on Migration	Briefing Note by LAS
	SESSION 3
Outcome Document of PGA Special Event at the Sixty-eighth Session	President of the General Assembly's Special Event towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, 25 September 2013
Post-2015 Global DRR Framework	Presentation on Post-2015 Global DRR Framework by UNISDR
Update on SDGs process	Presentation on SDGs process by ESCWA
Text of the Video Message by Ms. Amina Mohamad	Under-Secretary-General
