

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Report

Twenty-fourth meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism Cairo, 22 October 2018

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), acting as the secretariat of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), convened the twenty-fourth RCM meeting at the headquarters of the League of Arab States in Cairo on 22 October 2018, back-to-back with the Regional United Nations Development Group Meeting held on 21 October 2018 at the premises of the World Health Organization in Nasr City, Egypt.

The meeting agenda focused on three key pillars, namely global and regional trends in financing for development and their impact on the Arab region, cooperation between the United Nations system and the League of Arab States, and a review of progress achieved by RCM working groups and task forces. Following deliberations on the importance of sustainable financing, members of RCM agreed on a set of recommendations, including the establishment of a working group on financing for development. The working group will collectively assess financial flows for development in the Arab region, identify priority areas in implementing the Secretary-General's Strategy for Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and coordinate capacity-building support for domestic resource mobilization.

The present report provides an overview of the key issues raised and the recommendations adopted at the meeting.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), acting as the secretariat of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), convened the twenty-fourth RCM meeting on 22 October 2018 at the League of Arab States Headquarters, Cairo, Egypt back-to-back with the Regional United Nations Development Group (R-UNDG) Meeting on 21 October at WHO premises, Nasr City, Egypt.
2. Representatives of United Nations programmes and agencies, the League of Arab States (LAS), Ford Foundation, International Finance Cooperation, Islamic Development Bank, Union of Arab Banks, Union of Arab Chambers and the World Bank attended the meeting. The objectives of the meeting were: (a) to discuss Financing for Development (FfD) focusing on global trends and their regional implications and on regional trends and challenges (b) to follow up on United Nations–LAS cooperation and the preparations for the Fourth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, to take place in Beirut, in January 2019; and (c) to review the progress of work of the RCM Working Groups and Task Forces.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

3. The recommendations of the twenty-fourth RCM meeting were as follows:
 - (a) Set up a working group on Financing for Development to:
 - (i) Assess financial flows for development in the Arab region;
 - (ii) On the basis of such an assessment, identify priority areas for the Arab region in implementing the Secretary-General's Strategy for Financing the 2030 Agenda;
 - (iii) Coordinate capacity-building support for domestic resource mobilization, for example in the digitization of tax systems and the development of integrated national financing frameworks;
 - (iv) Create a network of tax authorities to share experiences and collaborate on cross-border flows;
 - (v) Prepare a joint contribution for the 2019 Financing for Development Forum.
 - (b) Approve the progress reports of the different working groups and task forces reporting to the RCM.

II. OPENING REMARKS

4. On behalf of ESCWA Executive Secretary, Mr. Mounir Tabet, Deputy Executive Secretary for Programme, welcomed Mr. Kamal Hassan Ali, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs, League of Arab States (LAS), Mr. Mourad Wahba, Assistant Secretary-General at the United Nations and Chair of the Regional United Nations Development Group, United Nations Regional Directors and members of LAS to the twenty-fourth RCM meeting. Mr. Tabet expressed his appreciation to LAS for hosting the meeting and raised the following key points in his opening remarks:

- Holding the meeting at the League of Arab States was an opportunity to engage collectively with the member States and its subsidiary organizations to identify joint priorities and key interventions;
- The United Nations Secretary-General's new strategy for financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlighted the need for development financing to be sustainable and called on governments, international financial institutions and private financial markets to reduce the flow of resources directed to unsustainable uses by shifting the structure of incentives, legislation and regulations;
- The three key areas of the Secretary-General's strategy were: (1) aligning global financial and economic policies with the 2030 Agenda; (2) enhancing sustainable financing strategies and

investments at the regional and country levels, and; (3) seizing the potential of financial innovations, new technologies and digitization to provide equitable access to finance;

- According to recent estimates done by ESCWA, the financing gap for achieving sustainable development in the Arab region was widening, not only due to insufficient resources, but also due to the fact that financial flows were not being used for productive investments. He referred to a recent ESCWA estimation of Arab resources, which included domestic as well as Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and Official Development Assistance (ODA) entering the region. Were these resources more effectively channeled to investments in sustainable development – such as developing the private sector, diversifying economies and boosting inclusive growth – they would have a much greater positive impact. This would require the rationalization of ineffective subsidies and improving the taxation system, including making tax collection more progressive and more rational. It would require creating enabling environments to attract FDI flows, since the volume of Arab funds invested in countries outside the region was greater than the volume of funds invested within the region. Private funds were an important opportunity, he noted, but they need to be managed transparently and with accountability to ensure that they support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Remittances were another crucial source of income in the Arab region which outweighed FDI and ODA combined. If remittances were better channeled, they could make a significant dent in the region’s financing gap. Sovereign wealth funds and Islamic finance could also play important roles;
- The United Nations family has a key role in supporting its Member States to develop the necessary incentives, laws and regulations and to direct public as well as private investments to areas that support the achievement of the SDGs;
- Good governance and stable policies created incentives for investors to shift from short-term investments to more sustainable long-term investments. To address this challenge the Deputy Executive Secretary underlined the role of United Nations to help governments put in place national integrated financing frameworks that could serve as a tool not only for setting the sustainable, equitable and inclusive development priorities of the government, but also to provide leadership for the private sector and international development cooperation partners;
- Finally, he welcomed the participation of representatives from Ford Foundation, the World Bank Group, the Islamic Development Bank, the Union of Arab Chambers, the Union of Arab Banks and from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs who would reinforce the commitment of their respective organizations to principles of Financing for Development, as well as underscore the importance of partnerships and collective efforts required to address such a complex and fundamental challenge.

5. On behalf of LAS Secretary-General, Ambassador Kamal Hassan Ali raised the following key issues in his opening remarks:

- While the Arab region continued to confront forces that were obstructing the path to development and sabotaging reconstruction efforts, concurrently there were forces firmly promoting change and adopting a reform agenda that aimed to address development of societies and people. Ambassador Ali commended the Governments that were “boldly, confidently and steadfastly on the path of reform”;
- Development was a long-term project and sustaining development and maintaining a positive trajectory after its launch was the most challenging aspect.

6. Mr. Mourad Wahba raised the following key points in his opening remarks:
- The region was suffering under the combined weight of conflict, climate change and population displacement. The only way for the United Nations Development System (UNDS) to contribute to the region's progress was to reform the system and work more effectively and efficiently together;
 - The United Nations Secretary-General's Report on "Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: ensuring a better future for all" and the integrated and ambitious nature of the SDGs required bold changes, cohesion, leadership and accountability. The message from Member States was clear: the 2030 Agenda was a great opportunity for everyone. At the same time, achieving the 2030 Agenda would require between US\$5 trillion to \$7 trillion in funding. At present, there was an estimated investment gap of \$2.5 trillion. For example, ODA flows alone were only \$146 billion. In order to successfully finance the 2030 Agenda, the following was required: (1) greater reliance on domestic resources, (2) innovative partnerships with business and the financial sector, and (3) greater cooperation among all of partners;
 - He referred to the ESCWA-led Arab Forum on Sustainable Development as an example of a collaborative initiative and noted that working together would be more effective in achieving success;
 - The 2030 Agenda Working Group, co-chaired by ESCWA and the R-UNDG would need to identify new ways of collectively supporting Member States and United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

III. PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. SPECIAL SESSION ON FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT:

GLOBAL TRENDS AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

7. Mr. Navid Hanif, Director of the Financing for Development Office at the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), provided a global picture of the FfD landscape as well as some suggestions for the Arab region. The key points raised in his presentation included the following:

- A DESA analysis of the voluntary national review (VNR) presentations from more than 100 countries found that while all had SDG strategies, only 10 countries had financing strategies;
- While private investment could not be the sole solution to FfD, the 2030 Agenda would not be achievable without it. Each dollar of the \$180 trillion generated globally needed to be spent differently for future generations to have a better future; and 100 per cent of investments would need to be green. For this to happen, it was essential to engage the private sector in FfD. In past years, the private sector had become more interested in FfD for three main reasons: (1) they sought opportunities for investment and safe returns; (2) the millennial generation wanted investments with positive social outcomes, (3) as did 75 per cent of women investors;
- The perception of risk in investing in the Arab region among financiers was far higher than the actual risk. Action was needed to change this perception to attract more private sector financing. Investors from the region also needed to start investing locally in order to attract more investment from abroad;
- Given the biggest challenge to sustainable development was the long time span for investment, the financial industry needed to embrace long-term time horizons for returns. Pension funds were particularly well placed to do this, as were public bond issuers;

- The Director made three recommendations for more effectively integrating public and private funds at the domestic and international levels in the Arab region: 1) create a policy environment that was attractive to financing and investors, including the development of regional financial markets and regional or subregional projects in areas such as infrastructure and energy; 2) develop more investment projects by providing support and advice to potential funders and countries; an effort which would require subregional collaboration among countries; and 3) strengthen domestic financial sectors and explore the potential of the Islamic finance, which has grown 10-12 per cent per year, and was now in the range of \$2 trillion to \$3 trillion per year;
- To increase domestic resource mobilization, the Arab region should explore taxation systems and the digitizing of tax systems which could lead to between three- and tenfold increases in tax revenue. Banks would be willing investors because of the profit potential. Taxing the digital economy was also an area that had not yet been explored in the region;
- Two practical suggestions were raised: (1) effective taxation required regional and global cooperation, sharing of information and collaborating on cross-border flows, and the Arab region should consider establishing a network of tax authorities similar what had been set up in the Africa region; (2) establishing something akin to an SDG “investment fair”, where institutional investors and Governments could engage with each other to develop attractive projects for investment, should be considered.

8. Mr. Ashish Khanna, Programme Leader for Sustainable Development and Infrastructure at the World Bank suggested a framework for addressing key questions related to FfD. The key points raised in his presentation included the following:

- Developing countries were already increasing domestic revenue mobilization, and commercial lending had increased fourfold. The volume of FDI today was much greater than the volume of ODA, but institutional and private sector investors had not been sufficiently mobilized;
- A key part of the World Bank’s approach to maximizing FfD was to consider whether or not a project could be more effectively financed by the private sector instead of the public sector. Where private sector financing was not possible, the World Bank would support regulatory reforms to make private sector financing possible for future projects. The World Bank was working on leveraging private funding pilot programmes in countries like Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, providing private investors with risk insurance and promoting investment in renewable energy. If some of the capital in the region were to be dedicated to risk guarantees for new and innovative projects, it could make a big difference;
- There was a lack of investable projects in the region because of cross-sectoral structural barriers. The World Bank was initiating multisectoral assessments to look at water, energy, transport and agriculture and identify areas that would need to be addressed in an integrated manner. There was a great need for integrators and facilitators for cross-border and cross-sector investment. Innovations had been happening in silos, and international and regional organizations could help mainstream these innovations across sectors and countries;
- In order to be ready to invest, the private sector needed clarity with regard to the many policy and regulatory challenges in the Arab region. A new social contract that would lead to private sector job creation was needed. A key reason governments were unable to prepare development project proposals was weak institutional capacity. Capacity needed to be strengthened, for example in the field of accountability and change management. That said, the lack of trust in the private sector, which persists in many societies, would need to be addressed as well.

9. Mr. Nedzad Ajanovic, Senior Partnership Specialist at the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), explained how the recent IsDB reform intended to situate it more strategically in the global and regional FfD landscape. The key points raised in his presentation included the following:

- The IsDB decentralized its operations and strengthened its office in Morocco to act as a regional hub for North Africa. It recently signed a host country agreement with Egypt, and hoped to have a fully operational regional hub in Cairo to cover much of the Levant. They also planned to set up a regional hub in Dubai to cover the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. IsDB headquarters would continue to be responsible for the programmes in the State of Palestine and Yemen;
- Through its Lives and Livelihoods Fund, started in cooperation with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, IsDB was providing financing under ordinary terms to boost Gates Foundation grants. The fund had already implemented a \$230 million polio eradication programme in Pakistan by leveraging a \$30 million grant. IsDB and the Gates Foundation were currently considering extending the programme to other countries, including Egypt;
- Such blended financing of grant resources and concessional loans could be a good model for increasing FfD in the Arab region. Another model was South-South cooperation. The IsDB already supported South-South cooperation between Morocco, where there was a very low level of child mortality, and Djibouti, where there was a high level of child mortality;
- Islamic financing had grown from \$200 billion worldwide to \$2 trillion in 2015 and was expected to reach \$3.5 trillion in 2019. Islamic financing could contribute to all SDGs and was fully in line with the 2030 Agenda. The IsDB had already cooperated with UNDP in developing a global Islamic impact-financing platform, based in Istanbul. This platform investigates private sector investors interested in investing in socially responsible projects and develops projects for them.

10. Ms. Noha El-Mikawy, Representative for the Middle East and North Africa for the Ford Foundation, highlighted the role of private philanthropy. The key points raised in her presentation included the following:

- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) recent report on blended financing noted that while private philanthropy had less capital than ODA, FDI and private financing, its nimbleness made it influential. There was an increasing number of high-net-worth individuals around the world and their contributions to the 2030 Agenda could be important. Many of them were now establishing foundations, including in the Arab world. The RCM should consider how it could bring private Arab strategic philanthropy on board;
- Private philanthropy played an important role in blended finance together with international financial institutions (IFIs) and private investors. In the United States, for example, the Ford Foundation was in a blended financing arrangement with the Treasury Department and institutional investors to provide affordable housing;
- Private giving could take the form of grants from individuals, funds provided through an individual's businesses or divesting investment from industries that do harm. It could also be programme- or mission-related investments (which were not grants but investments for return). The returns on these investments would go to social impact investment. Improving the regulatory framework around philanthropic organizations would be a key step in achieving this goal;
- Philanthropists had interest in piloting projects and would bring knowledge and flexibility to the effort. The representative noted that the Arab region's risk was overrated partly because the region lacked enough fund managers or risk assessors. Philanthropists could finance the set-up of intermediary risk assessors;

- The United Nations should try to bring Arab philanthropy onboard in sectors areas that had a direct effect on lives on the ground such as health care, education and equitable urban development. While curating the demand side was not an easy task, it was an area where philanthropic organizations could play a role.

11. During the discussion following the presentations, the following key points were raised:

- Without investment in people – their education and their health – there would be no real returns on investments in the longer term;
- When building or rebuilding destroyed areas, changes in policies to ensure more sustainable methods were needed, whether in terms of infrastructure, building or industry;
- The Arab region’s citizens also considered investment in their region high risk, and the tumultuous political situation and ongoing conflicts had contributed to this negative view. Development actors needed to generate hope to attract players to work on the 2030 Agenda;
- The Arab region should bring its concerns and challenges to the 2019 FfD Forum;
- Greater regional integration would have a major positive impact on mobilizing financing for development in the region.

B. SPECIAL SESSION ON FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT:
REGIONAL TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

12. Ambassador Ali, highlighted the main challenges to development and financing for development in the Arab region. The key points raised in his presentation included the following:

- Conflict was a major challenge to development in the region which also created parallel challenges, such as displacement, destruction of infrastructure and the environment;
- LAS had many strategies and projects to support economic integration in the Arab region, which was one of the organization’s primary objectives. Trade among Arab countries remained weak, with intraregional trade at only 12 per cent. Reasons for this were many, including the lack of infrastructure and non-availability of products for export. To counter this trend, LAS was supporting the development of a common Arab electricity market. LAS had also undertaken a comprehensive study for development and food security;
- Regional projects required financing to be successful. The region needed a FfD fund, which would be managed by a board and used for financing projects supporting national plans at the regional level. Such a fund should also have a coordination mechanism involving the private sector and international organizations.

13. Mr. Ali Awdeh, Director of the Research Department of the Union of Arab Banks, highlighted financial inclusion and public-private partnerships (PPPs) as key priorities for the region. The key points raised in his presentation included the following:

- The Arab region suffered from one of the highest financial exclusion rates in the world. According to latest World Bank figures, only 37 per cent of adults had bank accounts, compared to 63 per cent globally. If this figure were disaggregated by gender, the picture was even more bleak: only 26 per cent of adult women have accounts in formal financial institutions, compared to a world average of 64 per cent;

- The high rates of financial exclusion were further exacerbated by low rates of financial literacy: people did not know how to deal with financing and how to set up feasibility studies, etc. This led to another challenge: securing financing for micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Arab MSMEs have the lowest financing from banks compared to other regions of the world: only 8 per cent of bank portfolios were dedicated to MSMEs;
- Islamic financing could be one solution to support green financing and MSMEs;
- The Arab private sector needed to be involved in financing infrastructure and reconstruction in the region. Given the limited presence of pension funds in the Arab region, they were unlikely to participate in such financing. Financial markets in most Arab markets were small and underdeveloped and therefore were unable to make a significant contribution. Similarly, sovereign wealth funds already had set strategic plans and were also unlikely to make significant contributions. This left the banking sector: the Arab banking sector manages about \$3.5 trillion in assets, equal to 145 per cent of the size of all the region's economies/GDPs;
- There should be a formula to allow banks to engage in financing development, especially in financing infrastructure and reconstruction. Without infrastructure, foreign investors would not step in. If key countries boosted infrastructure, they could also significantly boost their GDP growth. A large proportion of banks financed the budget deficits of Arab Governments. About 40 per cent of bank loans in Lebanon, for example, were held by the government – instead of funding budget deficits, this money could go to financing infrastructure through PPP projects. The engagement of banks in such financing required sound and trustworthy legislative frameworks.

14. Mr. Khaled Hanafy, Secretary General of the Union of Arab Chambers of Commerce and Industry, explored the challenges of accessing additional FfD. The key points raised in his presentation included the following:

- In the Arab region, when resources were available, they were often not accessible to those who would most benefit from them. In many countries the private sector contributes 75 per cent of the GDP and a majority of employment, but frequently was not involved in the preparation of development strategies and did not have access to financial resources for development;
- The region needed projects that would attract the engagement of the private sector – not at the level of multinational corporations, but SMEs and MSMEs. The Union of Arab Banks (UAB) was developing a private sector forum for the fourth industrial revolution towards more sustainable and inclusive Arab economies. This forum was seeking to build a collective modeling and bargaining system, linking small entities in a consolidated model, consisting of logistics and supply chains, for example, in the form of a commodity of exchange, which would allow small producers to compete with the global market collectively and reach consumers directly;
- Government had a role to play in creating an enabling environment. Governments needed to work on fiscal policies that were not only about treating imbalances in budgets – which were a symptom, not the cause, of the problems. Public finance should internalize externalities and encourage the private sector to work hand-in-hand with the pace of the SDGs.

15. Ms. Malak Draz, Investment Officer at the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank, discussed the opportunities for mainstreaming sustainability into private sector business models. The key points raised in her presentation included the following:

- Traditionally, there had been dissonance between private sector aims and sustainability – people thought that revenues were at odds with sustainable development – but change had been taking place. In addition to laws that incentivized the private sector to think about sustainability, financial

institutions were also changing their thinking. That said, the private sector would not pursue sustainable development unless they saw some financial gain from it;

- Communities were now expecting the private sector to produce sustainable outcomes, which was driving change. It was easier for some sectors than others – ports and airports were the most interesting for private sector investors, while railroads were less so, and the water sector not at all. Sectors where the private sector had not yet been involved, such as energy and especially renewable energy, needed to be considered;
- For example, the IFC was trying to provide concessional financing to reduce the cost of desalination plants and make the costs acceptable to the private sector. While IFIs cannot target small projects, they did try to combine smaller projects into larger ones to make them feasible. The trend was that once the private sector learned to engage in a particular sector, the costs went down;
- Common standards across countries could reduce hurdles for blended financing and bring costs down as most hurdles emanated from lenders. Attempts to replicate in the education and health sectors had not yet been successful in this region;
- Working with financial institutions and regulators to include economic, social and governance issues and how to deal with project finance should be priority areas for engagement, since most banks had been focused on corporate finance. Incentives can also push developers into the right kind of projects. In the long-term, we needed to look at the operations of private investors and raise the awareness of communities so that they learned what they can accept and what they should not.

16. During the discussion following the presentations, the following key points were raised:

- According to the World Bank Global Competitiveness Report, economic development in the Arab regional average was somewhat above the global average, but it had not translated into prosperity for its citizens;
- The mismatch between funds and needs in the Arab region was a major challenge, particularly as the public has been highly reliant on the State to deliver all services;
- Financial technology could offer investment products that appeal to people who with low incomes or people who lack access to banks due to remoteness;
- Islamic banking could play a role by establishing “partnership” with organizations as partners with the entrepreneur rather than a loan agency.

C. UNITED NATIONS-LAS COOPERATION
*PREPARATION FOR THE FOURTH ARAB ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT,
BEIRUT, JANUARY 2019*

17. The Fourth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit was planned to be held in Beirut, Lebanon, in January 2019. It would address issues such as food security; the development of a guiding charter for an Arab regional economic cooperation and an Arab free-trade zone; energy cooperation and the establishment of a regional energy network in the region; development of a Quds fund through Organization of the Islamic Conference; furthering work on financing for development; the establishment of a common fund for social and economic integration; and the development of an Arab poverty strategy. The Summit would also include a forum for youth, civil society and the private sector.

18. United Nations agencies were invited to engage with the preparatory process and to make suggestions and proposals in support of the Summit agenda and the side forums.

D. UPDATES FROM RCM WORKING GROUPS

19. The Food Security and Nutrition Working Group, co-chaired by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), provided a summary of activities in 2018 in support of the achievement of SDG 2 on ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture. In a meeting held on 30 April 2018, the working group addressed several joint activities, including a regional dialogue on food security and nutrition, development of a tracking report on SDG 2 progress and the development of a conceptual framework on implementation options and modalities of SDG 2 in fragile and protracted crisis contexts. The working group also presented its main activities and planned outputs for 2019, which included joint knowledge products, capacity strengthening activities and continued progress tracking of SDG 2. The RCM approved the working group's plan to develop the "First Arab report on the state of food insecurity and nutrition: status of SDG 2 in the Arab region: challenges and pathways to hunger eradication and improved nutrition".

20. The Water Working Group chaired by ESCWA was formalized in 2018 and planned to hold its first meeting on 26 and 27 November 2018 in Cairo. The meeting would discuss proposals conceived during the United Nations-LAS sector coordination meeting on water in October 2017. Interested United Nations and LAS organizations were requested to designate a member and an alternate member to serve on the working group by 15 November 2018.

21. The Working Group on International Migration co-chaired by LAS, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and ESCWA presented highlights of its main achievements in 2018, including the launch of the 2017 Situation Report on International Migration and an agreed outline of the 2019 Situation Report; a capacity-building workshop on migration and the SDGs; a mapping report on migration-related programmes, projects and activities in the Arab region; and the provision of technical support to the Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration and Refugee Affairs. The working group outlined key activities in 2019 including an Expert Group Meeting on the 2019 Situation Report, a review of national and regional implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, a capacity-building workshop on migration governance in the Arab region and the publication of the 2019 Situation Report on International Migration in the Arab Region. The working group welcomed WFP as the newest member and requested all agencies to confirm their membership.

22. For more detailed information about the progress and plans of the RCM Working Groups, please see the Working Groups' Reports hyperlinked under Annex II-G.

E. UPDATES ON THE JOINT RCM R-UNDG WORKING GROUP ON THE 2030 AGENDA AND ITS TASKFORCES

23. The joint RCM R-UNDG Working Group on the 2030 Agenda and its four taskforces delivered highlights of the key achievements and activities during 2018.

24. The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) Task Force chaired by ESCWA highlighted the outcomes of the 2018 AFSD held in Beirut in April 2018 and the key lessons going forward. The task force would renew membership for the preparation of the 2019 AFSD which was also being planned for April 2019 in Beirut, at ESCWA headquarters, aligned with the broader 2019 High-level Political Forum (HLPF) theme of "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality". Six Arab countries were expected to present their VNRs in 2019. The AFSD would provide a platform for peer learning and sharing experiences. RCM members were requested to submit their nominations for the 2019 AFSD Task Force by 30 November 2018 and to provide a list of all the preparatory events that might feed into the 2019 AFSD.

25. The Arab Sustainable Development Report (ASDR) Task Force chaired by ESCWA presented the progress to date in the preparation of the regional report. The task force had held two meetings, in May and June 2018, to review and endorse the concept note and methodology. The 2019 ASDR would be an analytical

situation report on SDG goals in the Arab region, examining progress at the regional and subregional level and offering a goal-by-goal assessment of achievements and challenges examined both at target level and through a broader qualitative analysis. In 2019, the task force would continue the coordination and review of substantive inputs and would organize an Expert Group Meeting to review the first draft in February. It was hoped that the 2019 AFSD would be ready for launch ahead of the HLPF in September.

26. The SDG Country Support Task Force co-chaired by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) highlighted the key initiatives in 2018 including a UNCT SDG stock-taking exercise to map what support provided or planned by UNCTs in support of the 2030 Agenda; the establishment of task teams to support Libya and Syria; a mapping of tools and resources in line with the common approach outlined in Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support. (MAPS); and a mapping of regional capacities in support of the 2030 Agenda. In 2019, the taskforce will continue its mapping exercises and provide on-going support to UNCTs. A knowledge-sharing event was also under consideration to inform UNCTs of the global/regional tools, guidance and training materials available.

27. The SDG Data Task Force co-chaired by ESCWA and UNFPA reported on a task force meeting in June 2018 which aimed at taking stock of member organizations' activities. Members of the task force agreed to accelerate the establishment and regular updating of the inventory of completed, ongoing and planned statistics-related activities and a mapping of data flows. In 2019, the task force proposed to follow up on the inventory initiative; to undertake capacity-building activities; to develop a policy framework to follow up on related data and indicator issues; to hold a meeting in the first quarter of 2019; and to request ESCWA to continue its verification of metadata with statistical offices and endorse the calculations of SDG indicators.

28. For more detailed information about the progress and plans of the 2030 Agenda working groups and task forces, please see the Progress Reports hyperlinked in Annex II-G.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

DATE AND VENUE

29. The twenty-fourth meeting of the RCM was held at League of Arab States Headquarters, Cairo, Egypt on 22 October 2018.

Annex I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES

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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

- A. Agenda.
- B. Concept note.
- C. Biographies.
- D. Secretary-General's Strategy for Financing the 2030 Agenda.
- E. The state of financing development in the Arab region.
- F. Illicit financial flows in the Arab region.
- G. Working groups and task forces: progress reports 2018-2019.
 - 1. Food security.
 - 2. Water.
 - 3. International migration.
 - 4. Arab Forum on Sustainable Development.
 - 5. Arab Sustainable Development Report.
 - 6. SDG country support.
 - 7. SDG data.