

### I. INTRODUCTION

The work of the RCM Task Force on Statistical Coordination focuses on two key areas. The first one concerns statistical capacity development, in recognition of the fact that the regional statistical system of the Arab region needs to be strengthened, data should be made more comparable and consistent with internationally agreed methodologies. This also recognizes the fact that only real improvement of the quality of statistics comes from the improvement of data at the source, meaning at the national level. Therefore, member of the RCM Task Force paid attention to collaborative efforts towards improving quality of national statistics in selected areas.

The second area of cooperation concerns sharing of statistical data and potentially also joint data collection. This responds to the needs of RCM Task Force member organization that need relevant and reliable statistical data for their work related to policy analysis and assistance to countries in the region in policy formulation. The importance of this area will grow with the launch of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. There will be a growing demand for statistical data at higher frequency and more detailed thematic and geographical breakdown – this process is known as Data Revolution.

### II. 2013 – 2014 Achievements: Highlights of Key Activities since 19<sup>th</sup> RCM

#### A. TECHNICAL COOPERATION & SUPPORT TO STATISTICAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

##### i. Joint Statistical Capacity Development Activities

The statistical capacity development addressed topics of importance to national statistical systems in the Arab region, specifically in the areas of population and vital statistics, social statistics, economic statistics and national accounting, environment statistics, energy statistics. The following paragraphs outline the most important streams of work.

##### Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS)

Under the leadership of the World Health Organizations' (WHO) regional office in Cairo, the partner organizations developed a programme of work on improving CRVS in Arab countries. The main goal is to improve statistics on birth, deaths, marriages and divorces. WHO regional office works in collaboration with the UNFPA regional office and with ESCWA.

The importance of this topic is confirmed by the fact that other organizations, such as the League of Arab States (LAS), also included in their work programme activities aimed at improving CRVS in their respective member states. In order to better utilize resources collectively available for CRVS related work at various member organizations of the Task Force, it is important that the CRVS related activities are consolidated into one coordinated project under the leadership of the WHO.

### Improving population statistics in the Arab region

The United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) project undertaken in cooperation with ESCWA has focused on ICPD@20. The statistical component continues with series of training workshops aimed at improving population statistics in the Arab region.

### Agriculture and rural development statistic

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has developed and currently implements the Global Strategy for Improvement Agriculture and Rural Development Statistics. Its regional component is led by the FAO Near East office in Cairo. FAO cooperates with ESCWA, and the work has so far resulted in an outline for the regional implementation strategy, and in establishment of the Regional Steering Committee involving selected member countries in addition to ESCWA, FAO and LAS. The participating organizations are currently in the process of finalizing the regional implementation strategy and launching a fundraising effort, since the Near East regional component did not receive funding from the global donors of this FAO led project. The completion of the regional strategy and fundraising are the main priorities for the coming period.

### Improving economic statistics and implementation of the System of National Accounts 2008

This is wide and long-term area of work of a number of international organizations active in the region. ESCWA and LAS cooperate with the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS)<sup>1</sup> on the overall implementation, based on the strategy agreed by national statistical offices in the region. This work is tightly coordinated with the regional office of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) at Headquarters.

Related to this area of work are particular activities, such as training on industrial statistics classification organized in cooperation with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the Arab Industrial Development Organization (AIDMO, a specialized agency of LAS), AITRS and ESCWA. Activities also included development of statistical capacity in measuring international trade in goods and in services (DESA, WTO, ESCWA), measuring asymmetries in bilateral remittances data (IMF-METAC, ESCWA) and other related topics.

### Capacity development in environment and energy statistics

A cooperation in this area should be further developed, involving the UN Environment Programme UNEP, LAS, International Energy Agency (IEA) and ESCWA.

#### **ii. Specific Issues of Interest to Gulf Countries**

The statistical capacity development in the Gulf countries brings up certain specific issues common to this group of countries. While these countries turn with demands for technical cooperation to the UN

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<sup>1</sup> While AITRS is not a member of the RCM, it was invited to join the Task Force on Statistical Coordination at the early stage of inception of the Task Force along with statistical functions of some other non-RCM organizations, notably Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Institute for Islamic Countries (SESERIC).

agencies, LAS and other organizations undertaking statistics related activities in the region, they have established a sub-regional institution known as The Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Gulf (GCC-Stat) with headquarters in Muscat, Oman. A competitive advantage of the GCC-Stat Secretariat is in their in-depth knowledge of the needs of GCC countries, their awareness of the level of statistical development. On the other hand, the GCC stat seeks expertise that may be brought in by other organizations. Statistical Capacity Development is the main priority of the GCC-Stat.

It is therefore desirable that the GCC-Stat is invited to join the RCM Task Force on Statistical Coordination, with a view of coordinating statistical capacity development in the GCC region.

### **iii. Steering Mechanism for Statistical Capacity Development**

All members of the RCM, as well as organizations that were invited to join the RCM Task Force on Statistical Coordination, have their full right to have their needs and mandates reflected in the statistical work in the region. The coordination of the statistical capacity development shall be based, in the future, on sharing the information on work programmes, calendars of events, and looking for potential synergies through these work programmes.

Key areas of work should be identified, and it is proposed that a steering group of lead agencies, that accumulates the knowledge of the needs of national statistical systems, plays a leading role. These agencies are:

- Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS)
- UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)
- Leagues of Arab States (LAS)
- The Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Gulf (GCC-Stat)

These agencies cover statistical capacity development in the most general form, including the institutional development, legal frameworks, strategies for development in statistics and organization of statistical services in addition to technical and sectoral issues of official statistics.

### **iv. New Areas of Official Statistics in a Need of Development**

The area of development indicators, in connection with the Post-2015 Development Agenda, will require attention of all organizations and national statistical systems involved. Given the variability, different level of development and enlarged scope, as compared to the MDG process, will require more data with more detailed breakdown at a higher time frequency. The needs at the local, national, regional and global level will have to be reflected, and the role of the RCM Task Force will be to ensure the right link between the global, regional and national level. Data in the Post-2015 process will not only serve international reporting, but they will have to serve also needs of countries in formulation of policies. Therefore, the needs of capacity development will not only involve training on internationally agreed methodologies, but also helping countries in the region in localizing the framework for their particular needs.

Related to this is a greater use of alternative sources, such as administrative registers and records, introduction of statistical registers and exploiting the power of technology in accessing the wealth of potential data available from various sources on the internet, and known as Big Data.

In looking to gaps and disparities the data will also have to reflect geographical aspects of small areas at the sub-national level. Therefore, integrating statistical and geospatial information will become a necessity in the Post-2015 process.

These aspects of the statistical capacity development the Post-2015 process will have to be taken into account by organizations participating the RCM Task Force on Statistical Coordination.

## **B. COORDINATED COLLECTION AND SHARING OF STATISTICAL DATA**

### **i. Development Indicators**

Sharing of statistical data was one of the major concerns and interest of participating organizations at the time of establishing the RCM Task Force on Statistical Coordination. Diversity of interests and a lack of a common platform led to rather slow development of cooperation in this area. However, participating organizations have shared a common set of data on MDG indicators in their work on the Arab MDG Report. Focusing primarily on harmonized data based on international sources, this ensured that the report was based on a coherent set of data that were comparable across countries and allowed for credible results of analysis and recommendations.

### **ii. Statistics on Industrial Development**

An example when two organizations adopted a common approach in statistical data collection was the cooperation between the LAS/AIDMO and ESCWA on annual collection and dissemination of data on industrial statistics. A common questionnaire is addressed to member states and data are being shared, as well as attribution of authorship between the organizations.

### **iii. Cooperation Between UN Regional Commissions**

The RCM region covers countries belonging to the two regional commissions, and therefore, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and ESCWA have agreed on a common approach and sharing of statistical data.

## **III. Main Activities and Outputs Planned for 2015**

As a step towards a wider sharing of statistical data ESCWA, as the convener of the Task Force, proposes to share data collection calendars, information on data that are being collected by individual member organizations of the Task Force and preparing a consolidated presentation of the data collection calendars. This will allow the Task Force and the participating organizations to identify potential for future data sharing.

ESCWA, as the convener of the Task Force, also proposes to consider its data warehousing system as a potential technological platform for future data sharing. The new data warehousing system is planned to be implemented in the first half of 2015. The initial content of the platform described in the Annex will be loaded into the data warehouse in the course of 2015.

## IV. Annex

<b>1. NATIONAL ACCOUNTS</b>	Selected indicators Country tables Gross domestic product at constant prices (base year 2000) in USD Expenditure on gross domestic product Gross domestic product by kind of economic activity
<b>2. EXTERNAL TRADE STATISTICS</b>	Summary of the external trade statistics Intraregional trade of ESCWA member countries Direction of external trade of ESCWA member countries
<b>3. INDUSTRIAL STATISTICS</b>	Main indicators The Industrial Statistics for Arab Countries
<b>4. FINANCIAL STATISTICS AND PRICES</b>	Financial statistics Prices
<b>5. ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology Indicators
<b>6. POPULATION STATISTICS</b>	Population of ESCWA countries according to latest census and UN estimates Births and deaths Marriages and divorces
<b>7. EMPLOYMENT</b>	Employment and unemployment
<b>8. HOUSEHOLDS</b>	Household conditions
<b>9. EDUCATION STATISTICS</b>	Education Illiteracy and literacy
<b>10. HEALTH STATISTICS</b>	Health professionals Health Resources Major infectious diseases Health indicators
<b>11. CULTURE STATISTICS</b>	Culture
<b>12. INCOME &amp; POVERTY</b>	Income and poverty
<b>13. ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS</b>	Fresh Water Resources Fisheries Biodiversity Air Pollution Energy consumption Waste management MDG 7: Ensuring Environmental Sustainability
<b>14. ENERGY STATISTICS</b>	Energy production Energy consumption
<b>15. GENDER IN FIGURES</b>	Human rights Population demographics Poverty and inequality Education and learning Power, influence and decision making Violence against women Health Refugees Paid and unpaid work Research and development