

### First Meeting of the Task Force on Statistical Coordination 30 May 2011

#### Draft Report

#### Executive Summary

The establishment of the Task Force on Statistical Coordination was the key recommendation arising from the 15th meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) for the Arab States, in November 2010<sup>1</sup>. The Task Force held its first meeting on 30 May 2011 via teleconference (with audio and video links), with the participation of 18 offices of regional and international organizations undertaking statistical activities in the Arab region (hereafter organizations).

The meeting focused on the Terms of Reference of the Task Force and identifying core priorities for the harmonisation of data, and data collection. Particular issues included the fundamental purpose and expected achievement of the Task Force, the variations between data sources (between national and international, as well as between difference international sources), needs for sharing the data between organizations and creating a common pool of data for the Arab region, the level of geographical granularity of data (applicable to sub-national data), as well as a need to support efficient and effective capacity building with a view of improving the quality of statistical data.

#### Participation

The meeting was convened by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) in its capacity as the Secretariat for the RCM Arab States and it was attended by representatives of:

- Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS);
- Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) – offices in Rome, Cairo and Beirut;
- International Labour Organization (ILO);
- Islamic Development Bank (IsDB);
- League of Arab States (LAS);
- Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA);
- Pan-Arab Family Health Survey (PAPFAM);
- Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC);
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- United Nations Development Fund (UNDP);
- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UN-ECA);
- United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO);

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the RCM Arab States, 11-12 November 2011 E/ESCWA/OES/2010/RCM.14/13

- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);
- United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); and
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

In addition, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) provided inputs on agenda items prior to the meeting.

### Key Issues Discussed

#### 1. Terms of Reference

ESCWA outlined the purpose of the Taskforce, as requested by the RCM members, as twofold:

1. *Providing statistical coordination, directors of statistics functions in national statistical offices, United Nations organisations, and other international organisations to identify key aspects of the capacity building challenge; and*
2. *Addressing the priorities of the RCM in identifying data gaps and harmonising collection processes.*<sup>2</sup>

Great emphasis was placed by participants in ensuring close linkages between Arab States and Africa offices to ensure harmonisation between the reporting of member countries serviced by different regional offices. ECA highlighted its experience in the establishment of a formal and long term African Statistical Coordination Committee, with working groups on thematic areas, where organisations work together to identify data sources and build capacity of national organisations. It was agreed that this approach was useful and a sustainable mechanism for addressing the capacity building challenge for national statistical offices. ECA and ESCWA will liaise on the experience of ECA in order to share with Task Force members.

The Chair clarified that the immediate objective of the Task Force is to identify and address key priority areas of data discrepancies to ensure UN and other partners are able to develop evidenced based policy decisions, and to facilitate the harmonisation of key data for various reports, products and advocacy efforts.

Task Force members were requested to make any additional changes or amendments in tracked changes to the terms of reference **before 12 June 2011** so that it can be finalised.

#### 2. Membership

LAS requested that the Task Force be open to additional members. The Chair clarified that international organisations were initially invited to join the Task Force to discuss the TORs and clarify priorities of the RCM members, of which the Task Force represents. From there, members agreed that the Task Force is open to the invitation to and participation of all organisations with statistical capacity in the region.

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<sup>2</sup> Report of the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the RCM Arab States, 11-12 November 2011 E/ESCWA/OES/2010/RCM.14/13

### 3. Tasks and Outputs

Members requested clarification on the tasks and outputs expected of the Task Force, and suggested that the TORs outline these tasks more concretely. The Chair clarified that these specific outputs would be defined by the Task Force once the TORs are agreed upon. It is envisaged that these tasks will form a work plan of between 1-3 years, and will be based around the thematic priorities identified for the Task Force by the RCM members. Suggestions included the production of a Regional Statistical Report, data sharing between members, and establishing a regional database.

### Summary of main conclusions

The Task Force reached the following conclusions at its first meeting:

Terms of Reference: Members suggested that the Task Force should focus on three pillars: Coordination, Standardization and Harmonization. The mandate of the Task Force should be clarified: (1) Should the Task Force tackle only the immediate data needs of RCM members in the course of the coming 1-3 years, or should the Task Force pave a way to a more sustainable and long term coordination of statistical activities in the Arab region? (2) The deliverables of the Task Force should be specified in detail (e.g. a regional database, data sharing agreement, report, etc.). (3) There should be a timeline attached to each deliverable with verifiable milestones. The RCM may wish to provide additional guidance to the Task Force with respect to time lines, sunset clause and expected follow up.

Variations between data sources: Drawing lessons from negative experience learned in relation to MDG reports and Human Development Reports, the organizations should energetically step into resolving variations between data published at national and international level, as well as by different organizations. No discrepancies should be in data released by official statistics in public domain. ECA reiterated the need for coordination and exchange of information with ESCWA as far publications are concerned to avoid potential discrepancies that could emanate from dual membership of a number of African countries.

National data sources: Several organizations stressed that national data should be used and considered to the maximum extent possible. Some participants recommended addressing the issue of population statistics. Population data produced by member countries differ significantly from population projections produced by the UN Population Division. The Task Force members recognised that the main purpose of regional and international statistics is to provide data comparable across countries. This may necessitate adjustments to national data. National statistical offices should be the main source of statistical data, if data on the country level doesn't meet international standards; the statistical task force will recommend capacity building.

Data sharing: Data sharing is a necessary condition for avoiding variations between data used and published by different organizations. For each particular subject matter area, organization with an international mandate for collection and dissemination of data in the area concerned should lead the collection and sharing of data. In addition to higher

consistency, the sharing of data shall minimize duplication and reporting burden. As a first step the Task Force should create an inventory of statistics that each of the participating organizations can contribute to a regional pool of data. An integrated database for the Arab region was mentioned as an ultimate goal. A web portal linked to harmonized databases was suggested as the ultimate goal. This would enable the participating organizations to share metadata/data register, actual statistical data, standards, methodologies, best practices, discussion forum and useful contacts/links.

Capacity development: The Task Force members pointed out that statistical data do not become available without significant efforts. In order to collect relevant data of good quality that are comparable across countries, statisticians should resolve a number of methodological, organizations and legal issues. Therefore, statistical capacity building is a necessary pre-condition for satisfying the needs of data users. Hence, participants recommended that the Task Force should provide modalities and guidance for cross-organizational cooperation in statistical capacity development.

Statistics for small areas: The representative of the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) brought up an issue of data for small areas (at the sub-national level). Such data are important for anticipating needs for humanitarian interventions, but may be also important for studying various socio-economic phenomena. More investment should be devoted into data with smaller geographic footprints (admin 1, 2, 3). This will allow specialised agencies working on Disaster Risk Reduction, emergency response, early recovery and development to better target pockets of vulnerabilities and affected population.

Sectoral priorities: The Task Force analysed priorities of individual organizations on the basis of a questionnaire distributed and summarised prior to the meeting. A draft summary is available in Annex A, and this has to be further adjusted by the Task Force. The Task Force recommended focusing for a short time on few statistical subject-matter areas with respect to overall regional priorities. Some members emphasized the importance of agriculture and rural development as a sector of its own in the Arab States, and hence asked not to group agricultural statistics with the other sectors.

#### **4. Next Meeting**

The RCM Secretariat advised that the RCM agreed to convene a meeting in July in Cairo for all 3 Thematic Working Groups (Climate Change, Food Security and MDGs) to enhance the synergies between the groups. The dates will be advised. It was suggested that the Task Force members consider also participating in this meeting, and taking the opportunity to meet prior to make physical connections. An overview of upcoming RCM events is provided in Annex B to this report.

It was also agreed to convene again by remote in one month to confirm the revision of the TORs by email. The Task Force should use this virtual meeting also to complete the agenda for (and determine the duration of) the first face-to-face meeting in July 2011, and whether such a meeting should be held before or after the RCM.

## Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) for Arab States

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Provisional date for the next (virtual) meeting proposed as **27 June 2011**.

## Annex A

### Task Force on Statistical Coordination

#### Draft Summary of priorities of member organizations

30 May 2011

#### I. Data collection (joint questionnaires, data sharing, ...)

##### Demographic and social statistics:

1.1 Population and migration	Priority A
1.2 Labour	Priority A
1.3 Education	Priority A
1.5 Income and consumption	Priority A
1.6 Social protection	Priority A
1.4 Health	Priority B
1.10 Political and other community activities	Priority D

##### Economic statistics

2.1 Macroeconomic statistics	Priority A
2.2 Economic accounts	Priority B
2.4 Sectoral statistics <sup>3</sup>	Priority B
2.5 Government finance fiscal and public sector statistics	Priority B
2.7 Prices	Priority C
2.8 Labour cost	Priority C
2.9 Science and technology	Priority C

##### Environment and multi-domain statistics

3.1 Environment	Priority A
3.3 Multi-domain statistics and indicators (e.g. MDG indicators, etc.)	Priority B/C
3.2 Regional and small area statistics	Priority D

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<sup>3</sup> Sectoral statistics includes the following subjects: Agriculture forestry fisheries, Energy, Mining manufacturing construction, Transport, Tourism, Banking insurance financial statistics. The Task Force should determine which of these are a priority. For example Statistics on agriculture and rural development may have a Priority A on its own.

### II. Statistical capacity building (workshops and training, advisory services, institutional set-up, legal framework, ...)

#### Demographic and social statistics

1.1 Population and migration	Priority A
1.2 Labour	Priority A
1.5 Income and consumption	Priority A
1.6 Social protection	Priority A
1.3 Education	Priority B
1.4 Health	Priority B
1.7 Human settlements and housing	Priority D

#### Economic Statistics

2.1 Macroeconomic statistics	Priority B
2.2 Economic accounts	Priority B
2.6 International trade and balance of payments	Priority C
2.7 Prices	Priority C
2.8 Labour cost	Priority C
2.4 Sectoral statistics <sup>4</sup>	Priority D
2.5 Government finance fiscal and public sector statistics	Priority D
2.9 Science and technology	Priority D

#### Environment and multi-domain statistics

3.1 Environment	Priority A
3.2 Regional and small area statistics	Priority C
3.3 Multi-domain statistics and indicators (e.g. MDG indicators, etc.)	Priority D

#### Methodology of data collection processing dissemination and analysis

4.1 Metadata	Priority A
4.2 Classifications	Priority A
4.3 Data sources	Priority A
4.5 Dissemination data warehousing	Priority A
4.7 Data analysis	Priority A
4.4 Data editing and data linkage	Priority D

#### Strategic and managerial issues of official statistics

5.3 Quality frameworks and performance Measures	Priority A
5.1 Institutional frameworks and principles	Priority B
5.2 Statistical programmes	Priority C

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<sup>4</sup> Sectoral statistics includes the following subjects: Agriculture forestry fisheries, Energy, Mining manufacturing construction, Transport, Tourism, Banking insurance financial statistics. The Task Force should determine which of these are a priority. For example Statistics on agriculture and rural development may have a Priority A on its own.

**Annex B**

**RCM Meetings & Related Events  
2011-2012**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Theme</b>
1 June 2011	Beirut	<b>15<sup>th</sup> RCM Meeting</b>	Transition to Democracy
July 2011	Cairo	<b>Joint Meeting of the 3 TWGs</b>	First Joint Meeting
17-18 November 2011	Beirut	<b>16<sup>th</sup> RCM Meeting</b> (Chair: Deputy Secretary General Ms Asha Rose Migiro)	Preparations for Rio+20
June 2012	TBA	<b>17<sup>th</sup> RCM Meeting</b>	Financing for Development
July 2012	Cairo	<b>Joint Meeting of the 3 TWGs</b>	Annual Meeting
November 2012	TBA	<b>18<sup>th</sup> RCM Meeting</b> (Chair: Deputy Secretary General Ms Asha Rose Migiro)	Public Sector Reform