



23rd Meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM)

20-21 November 2017

The 23rd meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) comes two years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, at a time when Arab countries are facing complex and pressing challenges making it imperative to accelerate the pace of SDG implementation.

In December 2016, Arab countries reaffirmed their commitment to the 2030 Agenda in line with the region's specificities and development priorities. The Doha Declaration¹, the outcome document of ESCWA's 29th Ministerial Session, identified peace and security, human rights, good governance, environmental sustainability, and the fight against poverty, injustice and gender inequality as being among the key development priorities for the region. How to tackle them effectively and coherently remains the focus of the debate between development partners.

The RCM is mandated by ECOSOC to hold "regular interagency meetings in each of the five regions with a view to improving coordination among the work programmes of the organizations of the UN system". Since 1999, ESCWA has organized 22 RCM meetings bringing together regional UN development system organizations, the League of Arab States and other regional partners. The RCM offers a platform for the UN and its regional partners to discuss common support to member States and review coordination and coherence on priority development issues for the Arab region. Through its working groups the RCM has coordinated regional responses to emerging issues, implemented joint projects and produced regional reports.

Meanwhile, the increase in cross-border issues demands the adoption or adaptation of regional approaches in support of national efforts. Practical solutions and mechanisms to avoid duplication and overlap of interventions and resources are required to effectively address regional issues. In June 2017, the UN Secretary-General issued a report entitled: "Repositioning the UN development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda – Ensuring a Better Future for All"². The report reinforces the crucial need for closer collaboration, deeper integration and enhanced policy and programme coherence.

Responding to the SG's call, and to the Statement of Collaboration between the Regional Commissions and the UNDG, the 23rd RCM is being held back-to-back with the Regional UNDG meeting at the UN-House in Beirut, Lebanon. Participation is expected from all regional bureaus of UN organizations, the League of Arab States, and International Financial Institutions. In addition to reviewing ways of engagement with the SG's Reform Agenda, this year's RCM meeting will also discuss the key issue of how to identify entry points for an integrated, cross-sectoral approach to policy making in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

¹ http://www.regionalcommissions.org/Doha_2016.pdf

² <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/sg-report-on-unds-qcpr-june-2017.pdf>

1. Harmonizing UN and LAS efforts

The LAS is a strategic partner to all regional UN Agencies. As the regional inter-governmental body that represents the Arab States, LAS plays a key role in supporting the development needs of member States and in coordinating regional responses. As voiced by both LAS and the UN-system, regional initiatives and events must be well coordinated to avoid duplication and enhance synergy.

A dedicated session at the RCM will review UN support to and coordination with LAS with the aim of:

- 1) ensuring strategic and coordinated support to LAS by UN Agencies in priority areas;
- 2) ensuring coordinated planning of key regional events and initiatives to enhance synergy and avoid duplication.

2. Working Groups: Review of Progress and Joint meeting of 2030 Agenda WG

Working Groups are the operational arm of the RCM. Through these inter-agency groups that collaborate on thematic and technical areas of priority, the RCM produces some of its signature products and services in the form of key regional consultations, expert meetings, flagship reports and policy papers.

In the Arab region, the RCM and the R-UNDG are the two institutional structures that play leading roles in the coordination of UN inter-agency efforts at the regional and national levels respectively. Effective collaboration between the two coordination structures based on clear lines of responsibility and accountability is a precondition for coherent support to member States. To this end, and in line with the Statement of Collaboration between the Regional Commissions and UNDG, and in the spirit of the SG's recommendations for a strengthened UNDS at the regional level, inter-agency teams working on different aspects of the adaptation, implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs have been united under the umbrella of a joint Working Group on the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region, co-chaired by ESCWA and the R-UNDG.

The RCM will dedicate two linked sessions to the review of the progress of the Working Groups:

- 1) On 20 November, the RCM will review the progress reports and future plans of the Working Groups on Food Security and International Migration;
- 2) On 21 November, ESCWA and R-UNDG will convene a meeting of the Joint Working Group on the 2030 Agenda to review ToRs, workplans, and progress of the WG's four taskforces and provide guidance for future work.

3. Entry points for an integrated, cross-sectoral approach to development programming at national and regional levels in the context of the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs demonstrate the acknowledgement of the international community of a deep interdependence in the problems that humanity faces, and that addressing those problems requires integrating policies and programmes across different sectors. What this means is that the achievement of some goals will affect the achievement of others, which is reflected in the way the targets and indicators of SDGs are interlinked – more than half the SDG targets make explicit reference to at least one other goal.

There is a disconnect between the integrated 2030 Agenda and the largely sectoral approach governments continue to apply to the development and implementation of policies. Lack of integration across sectors in terms of strategies, policies and implementation has long been considered as one of the main pitfalls of previous approaches to sustainable development. An insufficient understanding and accounting of trade-offs and synergies across sectors has resulted in incoherent policies, adverse impacts of development policies in one sector on other sectors, and ultimately diverging outcomes and trends across broad objectives.

What is needed to address these challenges is **a way to translate the concept of an integrated agenda into guidance that helps policymakers understand the trade-offs and synergies between policies in different sectors, in concrete terms**. Several UN entities, research institutions and think tanks are actively working to clarify the issue of SDG interactions and integration in support of policy coherence, and different methodologies are being tested to address this question³.

RCM members play a key role in supporting countries in the Arab region in adapting and implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and would greatly benefit from establishing a common understanding on how to operationalize an integrated approach to the SDGs. In addition to allowing for the identification of possible cross-sectoral and therefore interagency initiatives at the national level, it would also allow for the exploration of the **positive and negative spillover or dependency of different SDGs and targets for neighbouring countries, identifying challenges that are shared among a number of countries in the region or transboundary by nature, and eventually entry points for regional dialogue on joint priority challenges and possible joint mechanisms or processes for addressing those priorities**. It could also inform the process of **designing regional indicators for the SDGs in a way that captures the interdependencies between sectors and countries**, which in turn could feed into **Regional Follow-up and Review**.

The RCM will dedicate a session to discuss the issue of operationalizing an integrated approach to the SDGs, with the aim of identifying:

- 1) possible opportunities for intersectoral and interagency collaboration, consequently leading to possible joint interventions with specific outputs;
- 2) possible shared or transboundary dimensions of the SDGs that can only be meaningfully addressed through regional cooperation interventions;
- 3) possible entry points for capturing the integrated nature of the SDGs through regional Follow-up and Review, which could lead to more targeted policy advice in the future.

³ See for example *ESCWA Water Development Report 6: The Water, Energy and Food Security Nexus in the Arab Region, 2015* (https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/e_escwa_sdpd_15_2_e_0.pdf), *A Guide to SDG Interactions: From Science to Implementation, 2017* (<https://www.icsu.org/cms/2017/05/SDGs-Guide-to-Interactions.pdf>), *Sustainable Development Goals Interlinkages and Network Analysis: A practical tool for SDG integration and policy coherence, 2017* (<https://pub.iqes.or.jp/pub/sustainable-development-goals-interlinkages>), *SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2017* (<http://www.sdgindex.org/assets/files/2017/2017-SDG-Index-and-Dashboards-Report--full.pdf>)

4. Review of the implications of the QCPR on regional level work and programmes

The UN Secretary-General's June report on repositioning the UN Development System incorporates the mandates of the 2016 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) and aims to point the UN system at the national, regional and global levels in a new direction to deliver on the promises of the 2030 Agenda. The report, the first by the SG on the topic, has triggered intensive consultations with member States and UN Principals. In-depth reviews and surveys by external experts are expected to result in the issuance of a series of reports by December 2017.

Recognizing the importance of bold change, one of the key recommendations of the SG's report is the need to reinvigorate the Resident Coordinator System in order to respond to the integrated and ambitious nature of the SDGs. Related to this are specific proposals to configure UN Country Teams to more effectively support member States on delivering on the 2030 Agenda based on objective criteria and by adopting a modular approach. Furthermore, the SG is also proposing to present to member States a system-wide strategic document for the system's collective support to the 2030 Agenda, and is further putting forward options to strengthen the oversight of member States over the UNDS through principal organs such as ECOSOC and governing bodies of individual entities.

Of particular relevance to the RCM are the SG's findings and recommendations on the UN Development System's regional functions, policy and data management capacities. In his report, the SG identifies challenges regarding regional-level work of the UN system: the need for better coordination and cooperation, including in the production of knowledge products; the need for a clearer division of roles and responsibilities of UN entities at regional and sub-regional levels, as well as between Regional Commissions, DESA and UN operational entities, with the possibility of co-locating or pooling resources; and the need for a united policy voice at the regional level to meet the critical demands of the new agenda, including in the area of financing for development. In addition, the Secretary-General recommends a strengthened interface between Regional Commissions and UN Country Teams to enhance effective programme delivery and policy coherence. Finally, the existing UN regional coordination structures, in particular the R-UNDG, and the linkages to the RCM will also be reviewed. An on-going review of UN Development System Regional Functions is expected to be completed in October and to feed into the SG's report in December.

The RCM will dedicate a session to review the latest updates emerging from the system wide review, with an emphasis on the findings and recommendations regarding regional functions, aiming to:

- 1) Explore the practical implications of the SG's proposed reform to the UNDS at the regional level on the work of the RCM;
- 2) Identify concrete reforms and actions that the region can adopt to respond to the recommendations, and create greater policy coherence in service of member States and UN Country Teams.