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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Report
of the twenty-first meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism
Cairo, 25-26 November 2015

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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-first RCM meeting on 25 and 26 November 2015, at the Headquarters of the League of Arab States in Cairo.
2. The meeting was attended by representatives of United Nations agencies, the League of Arab States and other regional organizations. The purpose of the meeting was the following: (a) to discuss the challenges that Arab countries might face in adapting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the current political and security environment; (b) to determine cooperation mechanisms that would enable RCM members to provide coherent and consistent support to those countries; (c) to examine the issues of migration and forced displacement in the Arab region and their implications for the future programmes of United Nations agencies and partner organizations; (d) to improve cooperation between the League of Arab States and United Nations agencies to provide better responses to current challenges; and (e) to review key achievements of the RCM working groups and ensure they mainstream the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their work.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

3. The recommendations of the twenty-first RCM meeting were as follows:
 - (a) The ESCWA secretariat shall invite RCM members to participate in the preparation of the Arab High-level Forum on Sustainable Development and in the production of the Arab Sustainable Development Report;
 - i. The Forum will be held annually to deliberate on emerging regional priorities and challenges identified in the adaptation, implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
 - ii. The Report will serve to monitor progress in the implementation of the SDGs at the national and regional level; it will be jointly produced by RCM members and will feed into, and be validated by, the Forum; each issue will have a specific thematic focus;
 - (b) RCM members shall undertake coordinated capacity-building activities and disseminate knowledge on issues such as mainstreaming the SDGs into national development plans and fiscal frameworks; bridging humanitarian assistance with long-term development; treating cross-border issues; and determining local indicators to measure progress in the implementation of the SDGs;
 - (c) RCM members shall contribute interventions to the High-level Ministerial Session on SDGs organized by the League of Arab States, to be held in Bahrain on 26 and 27 January 2016;
 - (d) ESCWA shall coordinate the input of United Nations agencies to the United Nations – League of Arab States matrix of activities; that input shall be provided by January 2016, before the coordination meeting to be held in Geneva;
 - (e) The RCM Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region shall continue its work, extend its membership to include interested United Nations agencies and League of Arab States subsidiary bodies, review its Terms of Reference and prepare its 2016-2017 work plan, taking into consideration RCM meeting discussions;
 - (f) A working group on SDGs, whose members will be the directors of regional United Nations offices, shall be established and chaired by ESCWA; the ESCWA secretariat will draft its terms of reference; the working group will coordinate efforts on the Arab Sustainable Development Report and the Arab High-level Forum on Sustainable Development, and identify actions needed regarding the means of implementation of the SDGs, namely in the areas of financing for development, South-South cooperation, and science, technology and innovation;

(g) A working group on climate change shall be established to follow up on implementation of the outcomes of the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 21), and on the draft Arab framework of action on climate change; the terms of reference of the working group will be drafted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);

(h) The RCM Taskforce on Statistics shall work, in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, on developing a regional database of SDG indicators and other relevant data collected in the region;

(i) RCM members shall use e-tools to facilitate coordination and information sharing; the RCM website should be updated; and an RCM calendar of events and activities, combining the work plans of all working groups, as well as thematic contact lists, should be established.

II. PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. SESSION 1 – REGIONAL UNITED NATIONS SUPPORT FOR THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: POLICY ISSUES

4. The purpose of this session was to discuss the needs of the Arab countries and the challenges that they might face in adapting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the current political and security environment, and propose a coordinated regional approach to those challenges, channelling the combined expertise and capacities of all United Nations entities working in the region. Mr. Abdallah Al Dardari, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA, session moderator, opened by suggesting that a certain level of soul searching was required in order to determine the relevance of the RCM in an environment of protracted conflict and in the context of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

1. *Presentations*

5. The keynote speaker, Mr. Ziad Bahaa-Eldin, politician, lawyer and economist, delivered a presentation in which he set out some of the challenges faced by the Arab region, such as the decline of institutions and increase in conflict and foreign interventions. Many of the previous development gains had been reversed as a result of protracted conflicts in Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic. The interconnected nature of the SDGs could make it difficult for member States to measure progress in implementation. The following six measures could help: (a) establishment of a pan-Arab monitoring office to measure progress in the realization of the different goals; (b) establishment of a pan-Arab observatory to specifically deal with the issues of climate and environment; (c) harmonization of the different Arab legal systems; (d) development of an ambitious policy to facilitate the free movement of people and capital and to open the region to Arab investment and inter-Arab trade; (e) protection of refugees and migrants, and of their right and capability to return to their countries of origin; and (f) establishment of common security mechanisms to combat terrorism in the region.

6. Mr. Ghaith Fariz, Director of the Regional Bureau for Sciences at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), delivered a presentation on using technology and science as tools for achieving the SDGs. Future developmental efforts needed to focus on developing knowledge and supporting the advancement of science. He acknowledged the many challenges that could hinder the implementation of the SDGs in the Arab region, such as lack of quality education and of suitable employment for young people. Arab countries needed to be more adaptive and dynamic to address those challenges, and to tackle the issues of occupation, conflict, refugee crisis, youth engagement, and regional integration and openness.

2. *Discussion*

7. During the ensuing discussion, Mr. Abdessalam OuldAhmed, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and Mr. Jaouad Mahjour, Director of Programme Management at the World Health Organization (WHO), both

emphasized the need to adopt a holistic approach to the implementation of the SDGs. Mr. Iyad Abumoghli, Regional Director and Representative at UNEP, also confirmed the integrated nature of the SDGs: none of the goals or related targets could be achieved unless perceived as a part of the whole set. He highlighted the need for a regional conference on financing for development, which would allow for the establishment of a trust fund similar to the MDG Trust Fund. Indeed, the lack of resources was identified as one of the main challenges to the implementation of SDGs.

8. Ms. Shahira Wahbeh, Chief of Sustainable Development and International Cooperation at the League of Arab States, suggested that there was a need to be more practical and that the implementation process should start with small steps, building on existing achievements.

9. Ms. Carmela Godeau, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), emphasized the need for different United Nations agencies to work together as one entity with national Governments in order to address the problems associated with international migration. Ms. Yamina Chakker, Director of the Regional Support Team for the Middle East and North Africa at the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), underlined that no single policy could apply to all countries as they were not all at the same level of socioeconomic development.

10. Ms. Karen Pillay, Senior Partnership Specialist at the Global Partnership for Education, stressed the need to focus on the impact of conflict on development and on the transition from humanitarian assistance to development in protracted conflicts such as in Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic. Mr. Carlo Scaramella, Deputy Regional Director at the World Food Programme (WFP), suggested that the theoretical SDGs framework and quantitative indicators should be adapted to the reality of the region, while Mr. Fariz urged RCM members to look at the SDGs in relation to regional priorities in order to develop a realistic programme of implementation. Ms. Areti Sianni, Senior Protection Officer at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), also stressed the importance of contextualizing the SDGs and highlighted the magnitude of displacement in the Arab region due to conflict.

11. Mr. Frank Hagemann, Deputy Regional Director at the International Labour Organization (ILO), emphasized the need for proper collection and dissemination of data. The capacity of Arab States to measure progress using SDG indicators and produce accurate data should be enhanced. Mr. Tarek el-Nabulsi, Head of the Coordination and Follow-up Unit at the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Social Affairs, League of Arab States, emphasized the need for training on the use of international indicators. The issues of harmonizing the collection and recording of national statistical data should also be addressed. Mr. Amjad Abbashar, Head of the Regional Office for Arab States at the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), mentioned the need to gather different data from different processes into a single database. Ms. Nada Darwazeh, Regional Gender Advisor at the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), referred to the fact that most Arab countries regularly provided reports with statistical information covering several human rights issues and that OHCHR could benefit from its partnership with the League of Arab States to collect such data.

12. Mr. Mohamed Aw-Dahir, Regional Food Security Officer at FAO, stressed the need to help Arab States identify key national development priorities and to involve other stakeholders in the process. Mr. Ebrahim Al Haddad, Regional Director at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), also highlighted the benefits of greater participation of the private sector in development efforts.

B. SESSION 2 – REGIONAL UNITED NATIONS SUPPORT FOR THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE WAY FORWARD

13. The objective of this session was to determine the modalities of cooperation which would allow RCM members to provide coherent and consistent support to member States in adapting and implementing the SDGs. Mr. OuldAhmed, session moderator, opened by asking RCM members to consider what the Mechanism could

do to support the region in adapting, implementing, and monitoring progress towards the SDGs, in the following four cooperation areas: regional consultations; technical assistance; joint knowledge products; and regional monitoring tools and mechanisms.

1. *Presentations*

14. Ms. Majdalani made a presentation on regional consultations, stressing the importance of cooperation and coordination for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. She referred to the Arab High-level Forum on Sustainable Development as one of the main platforms for regional consultation, in which RCM members already played an active role. There had not been enough consultations with different stakeholders in the past, and the multi-stakeholder character of the Forum could help to remedy that. Other similar mechanisms of cooperation in Africa or Asia could serve as learning experiences. The difficulty lay in ensuring the needed resources to effectively organize the next Forum session, an issue that RCM members could help to address. The structure of the Forum could also be reconsidered and its scope broadened to cover means of SDG implementation, such as financing for development. The Forum could also be linked to other regional consultation processes.

15. Ms. May Ali, from the Women, Family and Childhood Department of the League of Arab States, then made a presentation on the Cairo Declaration on “The Post-2015 Development Agenda for Women: Opportunities and Challenges” and the Arab Strategy for Combating Violence against Women 2011-2020, both of which had been elaborated in coordination with relevant United Nations organizations and after multiple consultations among Arab States. She also referred to a draft Arab strategy for children in the post-2015 era, which would be submitted to the upcoming Arab League Summit.

16. Mr. Adel Abdellatif, Chief of the Regional Programme Division at the Regional Bureau for Arab States of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), made a presentation on coordinating regional capacity-building and policy efforts for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. He mentioned the elements of a future common approach for effective and coherent implementation support identified by the United Nations Development Group under the acronym MAPS (mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support); and pointed out that UNDP had, in turn, identified three stages for the process of implementation at the national level: planning, doing and checking. He stressed the role that the RCM could play in identifying areas of policy coherence. RCM members also needed to consider how lessons learned would be shared within the region.

17. Mr. Frank Hagemann made a presentation on the subject of knowledge production. He underlined the link between knowledge production, data collection, and capacity-building. He emphasized the need for monitoring reports such as those published by ESCWA, namely the Arab Sustainable Development Report, which should be recurrent. He said that the RCM was well positioned to produce reports that reflected the integrated and multidimensional nature of the SDGs. The *2015 Situation Report on International Migration*, produced by the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region, was an example of such reports, the methodology of which could be applied for issues such as conflict, resilience and stability. Each RCM Working Group, functioning in an efficient and target-oriented manner, could produce such a tangible output.

18. Mr. Ahmad Abdel-Moneim, Manager of the Pan-Arab Project for Family Health (PAPFAM), made a presentation about monitoring and data gaps. He suggested that the region needed to contribute to the global list of indicators while developing a specific set for its own use. He emphasized the importance of strengthening coordination between national statistical offices on the one hand, and between data producers and data users, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, on the other hand. He concluded by underlining the necessity of disaggregating all data by age and sex.

2. Discussion

19. In the ensuing discussion, Mr. Luay Shabaneh, Regional Technical Advisor for Population at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), agreeing on the importance of contributing to the global list of SDG indicators while establishing a taskforce to develop a specific list of indicators for the Arab region, highlighted the need to establish national commissions that would include representatives from relevant ministries, civil society organizations, the private sector and national statistics offices. Ms. Rayana Bou-Haka, Manager, Country Focus Support at WHO, suggested conducting a mapping of existing forums, mechanisms for supporting decision makers and data products, in order to identify and fill data gaps. She also suggested that all future knowledge products should use harmonized data.

20. Mr. Al Dardari, underlining that work on data at the regional level was part of the mandate of ESCWA, stressed the need to develop targets and indicators at that level, and suggested the establishment of links between the Arab region and other regions on that subject. On the subject of the Arab High-level Forum on Sustainable Development, he mentioned that the regional commissions, including ESCWA, were mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to organize the Forum, requesting suggestions for maximizing its impact. He also noted that ESCWA was considering holding the next Forum session back-to-back with its Ministerial Session in 2016. About the Arab Sustainable Development Report, he mentioned that it could not only deal with regional data but it should also aim to synthesize national data and analyses.

21. On the subject of regional indicators and targets, Mr. Juraj Riecan, Director of the Statistics Division at ESCWA, underlined the importance of consultations in order to determine the best methods of monitoring progress at the regional level. Regional indicators should not be a cumulative list of what the region could offer but rather a coherent set of indicators centered on regional priorities.

22. Mr. El-Nabulsi explained that the League of Arab States was already working on a regional set of indicators and reiterated that all parties should cooperate more closely to better serve the Arab States. Mr. Abumoghli echoed this call for greater coordination between United Nations agencies and the League and its subsidiary bodies with regard to all conferences and forums.

23. Finally, Mr. Hagemann suggested that the RCM organize a high-level meeting to determine strategic development and investment priorities over the next 15 years, in an effort to influence decision-making at the political level at the inception phase.

C. SESSION 3 – MIGRATION, DISPLACEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN A CHANGING ARAB REGION

24. The purpose of this session was to explore migration and forced displacement in the context of the Arab region and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the challenges and opportunities that arise from migration; and implications for the future programmes of United Nations agencies and partner organizations. Updates on the efforts of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region were also provided. Ms. Karima El Korri, Chief of the Population and Social Development Section at ESCWA, moderated the session.

1. Presentations

25. Ms. Lubna Azzam, Migration and Arab Expatriates Department at the League of Arab States, made a presentation on the establishment of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region and the issuing of the *2015 Situation Report on International Migration: Migration, Displacement and Development in a Changing Arab Region* (launched in the United Nations House in Beirut on 14 January 2016). She said that past work on migration was often ad hoc and fragmented, which limited the impact of responses. One of the key aims of the Working Group, established during the first quarter of 2015, was to address this fragmentation. She listed key outputs of the Working Group, which included the *Mapping Report*

on Programmes and Projects on International Migration in the Arab Region; a training workshop on international migration and development; and the *2015 Situation Report*.

26. Ms. El Korri gave a presentation on the contents of the 2015 Situation Report, aimed at addressing the knowledge deficit on international migration in the Arab region. The report identified three main migration patterns in the region, provided an overview of international migration trends, highlighted developments in migration governance since 2012, and tackled forced migration, displacement and development. Key findings were as follows: (a) labour migration, followed by forced displacement and mixed migration flows, were the most distinctive patterns of population movements in the Arab region; (b) the number of international migrants to and from the region had increased significantly; (c) important reforms of migration governance had been implemented to address the issues of nationality and expatriate engagement, labour and irregular migration; (d) promising responses in situations of forced displacement were made in certain areas, such as health and education; and (e) emphasis should be placed on long-term solutions that would build on the synergies between forced population movements and development initiatives.

27. Ms. Karoline Popp, Regional Liaison and Policy Officer at the IOM, presented the migration-related goals and targets in the SDG framework. She indicated that target 10.7, “Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”, was the main target on international migration but that SDG 4 (on quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 16 (peace and justice) and SDG 17 (partnership) all made reference to international migration in one or more of their targets; while SDG1 (poverty), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 13 (action on climate change) included targets which indirectly affected international migration. She then presented work in progress on migration-related indicators for a number of targets, and underlined that the Working Group should consider incorporating the 2030 Agenda into its work programme and determine its role in the implementation of, and follow-up on, the SDGs.

28. Mr. Kishan Khoday, Regional Team Leader at the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, gave an update on the work of UNDP in the field of international migration, stressing the centrality of resilience. UNDP had started approximately 192 migration-related initiatives around the world, and 25 were ongoing. He stressed that a one-size-fits-all approach to international migration would not work, and that three elements needed to be considered at the national level: policy support, long-term development impacts, and resilience to crises, both conflict- and climate-related.

29. Ms. Sianni gave an update on the work of UNHCR. Partnering with Governments, UNHCR aimed to ensure migrants’ safety and the application of the non-refoulement principle; support national protection systems and provision of integrated services; and strengthen specialized protection responses to refugees with special needs or at particular risk. Acknowledging the role of refugees in ensuring their own safety, UNHCR also sought to engage closely with them and their host communities in the design, implementation, monitoring and improvement of all protection initiatives. Coordination was well in place with other United Nations agencies and civil society organizations from the region and beyond. On the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, the speaker underlined that UNHCR worked with a broad range of partners under the framework of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan to deliver an integrated, multi-sector response to the needs of Syrian refugees, and most affected communities and countries. In the case of Yemen, she noted that there were approximately 2.6 million displaced persons, 2.3 million of whom were internally displaced, and that UNHCR was working with IOM on a strategic response to mixed population movements from and to the country. She finally mentioned the situation in Libya and the work of UNHCR on the Special Mediterranean Initiative.

30. Ms. Godeau presented the current work of IOM. She highlighted the growing importance of migration flows via the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean, and the reduction of flows to the Central Mediterranean. More than 3,400 migrants had lost their lives in 2015. In Iraq only, there were more than 3 million internally displaced persons since 2014. She underlined the growing concern regarding the migration

of unaccompanied children. She also pointed out that there had been an increased demand by Governments of Arab countries for technical assistance in areas such as labour migration, border management and diaspora involvement in development. IOM, together with partners, had set up data collection and research systems on specific migration issues and supported the development of rights-based policies on migration, in line with international standards on human trafficking, migrant smuggling and domestic labour. Finally, she announced the publication by IOM of the 2015 World Migration Report on Migrants and Cities, which would be available in Arabic in 2016.

31. Lastly, Mr. Hagemann presented an update on the work of ILO. He noted that much of the migration in the region was labour-related, and that forced migration also had a strong labour component, with refugees engaging in illegal and low-waged work. He underlined the predominance of labour migration in the Gulf countries and the need to focus on the issues of working conditions, recruitment, the *Kafala* system and domestic workers, who were among the worst off as national laws often did not apply to them. He indicated that ILO had become very active on the issue of forced labour in the framework of the Resilience Plan. He finally underlined that the Organization had taken part in inter-agency alliances and stressed the benefits of such alliances.

2. Discussion

32. In the ensuing discussion, Ms. Chakker expressed her approval of the fact that the HIV issue featured prominently in the 2015 Situation Report. She stressed that interregional dialogue was key and that the Report constituted a good basis for such an endeavour. Partnership with the League of Arab States, for instance, was very important, especially through the Arab AIDS Strategy 2014-2020, which made reference to mobile populations.

33. Mr. Aw-Dahir appreciated the reference to the issue of rural livelihoods and migration in the 2015 Situation Report and underlined its relevance for the dynamics of internal migration and displacement. He expressed interest in greater involvement in the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region and suggested that research be done on social protection schemes at the rural level.

34. Ms. Schaefer indicated that the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) had secured funding for analysis of the impact of migration at the city level, where local governments struggled with the integration of refugees. She also mentioned that a guide for city leaders dealing with displaced communities was being developed. Ms. Melanie Hutchinson, Regional Development Coordinator at the UNEP Regional Office for West Asia, said that UNEP was assessing the impact of migrants on ecosystems through the Jordan Resilience Plan, stressing that climate-induced migration was an important phenomenon.

35. Mr. Shabaneh highlighted the importance of collaboration in the framework of the Working Group. There were many deficiencies in the way data on migration were collected and in the understanding of the impact of migration on such issues as labour mobility, demographic patterns and changes, and return migration. However the Report could serve as a knowledge base on these issues.

36. Mr. Scaramella expressed the interest of WFP in becoming a member of the Working Group. He stressed that migration issues required political interventions, noting that humanitarian assistance to migrants in need could not bring long-term solutions. He also underlined the lack of funding for humanitarian projects and stressed that this was a major push factor for instability. He finally suggested that the mandate of the Working Group be broadened to work on the internally displaced persons.

37. Ms. Hind Mustafa, Researcher at the Arab Women Organization, and Mr. Reda Mhamad Kaisomah, Director of the Arab Labour Organization, also both confirmed their willingness to cooperate on the subject of international migration.

38. Ms. Darwazeh drew attention to the detailed action plan that the United Nations Development Group had developed, which highlighted the need for profound knowledge on how the human rights of migrants were respected. She suggested that this plan could help in advocating for the ratification of international conventions by Arab States.

39. Mr. El-Nabulsi spoke of competition between migrants for employment opportunities, underlining the political nature of the problem to which a political solution should be found. He requested the Working Group to coordinate with the League of Arab States in the production of a memo on the benefits that Arab States could reap by ratifying international instruments on migration.

40. Mr. Mahjour mentioned a recent meeting between WHO and the European Union, which resulted in the production of a white paper that dispelled the myth that migrants and refugees brought with them infectious diseases and suggested a set of services that host countries could offer to meet the physical and psychological health needs of migrants. Developing such a tool for host communities in the Arab region should be considered.

41. Ms. Sianni suggested that the RCM could work on mapping the various actors involved in dealing with forced migration to ensure synergies. She underlined the risks associated with the adoption of quick solutions to complex challenges, such as those currently posed by the situation in the Mediterranean.

42. Referring to the current situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Al Dardari stressed that urgent action by the international community was needed to decrease the flows of refugees. The Syrian population was paying the price of political instability and its sufferance needed to be addressed inside the country, without waiting for the political situation to change. Ms. Godeau suggested that a way to preserve neutrality in the Syrian Arab Republic could be to work with the local communities to relieve suffering, as there was still some type of formal authority at that level.

43. Ms. El Korri confirmed that the Working Group welcomed individual agency outputs and expressed her willingness to cooperate on the production of those. She said that the Working Group was also going to continue addressing migration push factors such as climate change and natural disasters, and pursue its mapping of relevant actions on the ground, identifying possible synergies between the relevant actors. She commended the League of Arab States for creating a platform for dialogue on migration and stressed the importance of strengthening such regional processes.

D. SESSION 4 – UNITED NATIONS – LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES COOPERATION

44. The purpose of this session was to discuss ways to improve cooperation between the RCM and the League of Arab States. It specifically aimed to identify concrete ways to support the organization of the upcoming Arab Economic and Social Development Summit and High-level Ministerial Session on SDGs. The status of joint initiatives agreed at the United Nations – League of Arab States General Coordination Meeting in Geneva in June 2014 was also reviewed. H.E. Ambassador Badr El Din Al Alali, Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Social Affairs Sector at the League of Arab States, session moderator, opened by highlighting the privileged and strategic relationship between the United Nations and the League. He said that enhanced cooperation could target many areas, especially economic and social development, and suggested that United Nations agencies regularly report on their planned activities and identify coordination mechanisms, including through the various RCM thematic working groups.

1. *Presentations*

45. H.E. Ambassador Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary-General for Media and Communication at the League, delivered a presentation on key forums and consultations organized in coordination with United Nations agencies in order to declare a decade for Arab civil society organizations (2016-2026). She said it was important to link that decade to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, inviting United Nations agencies to participate in the initiative.

46. Ms. Dina Kamel, Head of the Coordination and Follow-up Unit at the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Economic Affairs at the League, highlighted the necessity of building on outcomes and recommendations of previous summits regarding issues such as food security, infrastructure, and ICTs in the Arab region. She mentioned important forums that would be held on the sidelines of the Economic and Social Development Summit, such as the Arab Private Sector Forum, the Arab Civil Society Forum and the Youth Forum.

47. Mr. Tarek el-Nabulsi emphasized that items submitted for discussion at the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit must first be tackled by the relevant Arab ministerial councils, underlining the issues of house demolitions in Palestine, youth empowerment, innovative research and extensive research on HIV/AIDS as social priority areas in the region. He then presented the High-level Ministerial Session on SDGs, to be held on 26 and 27 January in Bahrain, during which resolutions of several Arab councils would be discussed, as well as ways to enhance coordination between United Nations agencies and civil society organizations in support of the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

2. Discussion

48. During the ensuing discussion, the League representatives requested that interventions during the High-level Ministerial Session in Bahrain be focused on the support that United Nations agencies could offer to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Arab countries. The League itself would present a proposal on national mechanisms to facilitate implementation, and was ready to meet with the different agencies to discuss their contributions.

49. Mr. Abdellatif proposed that a coordination meeting be convened before the Session to ensure that interventions would be harmonized. While the focus of the Session would be on the country level, regional mechanisms and data gaps could also be tackled by ESCWA.

50. Mr. Al Alali requested different League departments to provide RCM members with updates to the United Nations-League of Arab States matrix of activities in the light of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Ms. Kamel proposed including activities of the Economic and Social Council within the matrix, as the Council had adopted a resolution on cooperation with United Nations agencies. The updated version of the matrix, which would be presented to the Council during its June 2016 session, should also be communicated to national focal points to enhance coordination.

51. Mr. El-Nabulsi briefed RCM members about some of the activities that had been added to the matrix and urged agencies to provide their input in order to further update it.

52. Ms. Elham al-Shajali, Head of the Human Rights Department at the League, underlined that activities should be implemented more effectively and that a broader range of stakeholders from civil society and human rights organizations should be involved to ensure ownership. She mentioned that drafting an Arab human rights strategy would constitute an important participatory activity, to be accomplished through a series of workshops in the region.

53. Mr. Reda Mhamad Kaisomah reviewed the different activities and success stories of cooperation between the Arab Labour Organization and the different United Nations agencies working in the region. The Arab Energy Organization representative also emphasized the need for cooperation on all matters relating to agriculture and water, and invited RCM members to an upcoming conference on nuclear energy use in the Arab region.

54. The League representatives finally stressed the importance of monitoring implementation of priorities and activities agreed upon at the Geneva General Coordination Meeting of July 2014, and requested the ESCWA secretariat to consolidate inputs from United Nations agencies to update the matrix of activities.

ESCWA suggested to use the RCM as a monitoring platform and suggested revising the matrix template to determine areas of cooperation in line with the new 2030 Agenda.

E. SESSION 5 – UPCOMING GLOBAL AND REGIONAL EVENTS
AND WORKING GROUP UPDATES

55. The purpose of this session was to present five upcoming events and review the progress reports of the Working Group on Food and Security, the Working Group on MDGs/SDGs and the Taskforce on Statistics. Mr. Abumoghli, session moderator, underlined the need to integrate the 2030 Agenda in the work plans of all RCM thematic working groups. The knowledge and expertise of RCM members should be translated into actions and policy advice that would build the capacity of Arab States for SDG implementation.

1. *Presentations*

56. Ms. Louise Barbar, Head of the Partnerships, Policy and Analysis Unit at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), presented the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit, to be held on 23 May 2016 in Istanbul, as a major reform initiative for humanitarian assistance. She said that global multi-stakeholder consultations had led to a synthesis report on the subject, and that the next milestone would be the Secretary-General's report which would include concrete recommendations on humanitarian actions. Two expected Summit outcomes were a pledge from world leaders adhering to the Secretary-General's vision and key recommendations, and the identification of new actions to be undertaken on the basis of the recommendations.

57. Ms. Katja Schaefer, UN-Habitat, made a presentation on the Habitat III Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, to be held in Quito, Ecuador, from 17 to 20 October 2016. She said that the Arab region was one of the most urbanized and that the purpose of Habitat III was to address some of the challenges brought about by urbanization. Constructing fairer and better functioning cities would be discussed, as well as the financing of urbanization processes.

58. Mr. Abul-Mejid Haddad, Regional Climate Change Coordinator, Regional Office for West Asia at UNEP, made a presentation on COP 21 (Paris, 30 November – 11 December 2015). He confirmed that the negotiation text was published but a number of points could delay agreement: (a) determination of the global goal; (b) determination of what the Common But Differentiated Responsibility would be; (c) form of the compliance procedure; (d) legal nature of the new agreement; (e) balance among the issues of mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage; (f) financing sources; and (g) mechanisms and procedures of the review process. He added that expectations were high and there was some optimism as to the success of COP 21.

59. Ms. Hutchinson made a presentation on the Second United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), to be held from 23 to 27 May 2016, under the theme "Implementing the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". The Assembly would include a ministerial policy review on "Healthy Environment-Healthy People", which would be based on a global thematic report, a symposium on "Mobilizing Resources for Sustainable Development" and various side events, which would offer many opportunities for stakeholder engagement.

60. Ms. May Ali, League of Arab States representative, made a presentation on upcoming regional events, especially highlighting the Fifth Arab High-level Conference on the Rights of the Child, to be held in 2016, to ameliorate the living conditions of children in the Arab region and the enforcement of their rights.

61. Mr. Aw-Dahir, in his capacity of focal point for the Thematic Working Group on Food Security, presented the activities of the Working Group, noting that only a small number of agencies had been actively participating and contributing resources. He said that the Working Group would like to engage with higher-level political committees on issues of food security and produce joint knowledge products with these

committees. He suggested that a meeting of all Working Group members be convened prior to the next RCM and that different working groups discuss nexus issues together.

62. Ms. Majdalani presented the work of the Thematic Working Group on MDGs/SDGs, noting that new terms of reference should be drafted, focusing on the 2030 Agenda and particularly on the Arab Sustainable Development Report and the Arab High-level Forum on Sustainable Development. She confirmed that all RCM members were welcome to contribute to both outputs. The new mandate of the Working Group should include closer cooperation with the Taskforce on Statistics, so that data are better collected and correct indicators of achievement are identified. She also suggested that the working group be set up at the level of regional directors of agencies to ensure its success.

63. Mr. Riecan, presenting the work of the Taskforce on Statistics, underlined that a new work plan would have to be set for the Taskforce to respond to the data needs in the context of the SDGs and the 2030 Development Agenda.

64. Mr. Haddad made a presentation on the Thematic Working Group on Climate Change, noting that it was no longer active but that United Nations agencies were still cooperating on a bilateral and trilateral basis. He highlighted that the League of Arab States was facilitating many of these collaborations and was a key driver for coordination. He finally stressed the need of Arab countries for considerable support to implement COP 21 outcomes and suggested that the Working Group be reinstated to that end.

2. Discussion

65. Mr. Al Dardari suggested that the Thematic Working Group on SDGs should have two main functions: to coordinate and prepare the Arab Sustainable Development Report and the Arab High-level Forum on Sustainable Development, and to tackle the question of substantive integration between the SDGs, identifying clusters and/or nexuses. The Working Group should be a platform to collectively address regional challenges and agree on the thematic focus of the Report and Forum. It should have its own communication network. The terms of reference should be developed without delay and all members should be ready to commit financial resources, personnel and time. The Taskforce on Statistics could become a subgroup of the SDGs Working Group, but maybe membership should remain different. Finally, the new Statistics Taskforce for SDGs should focus on producing indicators at the regional and country levels, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Group.

66. Mr. OuldAhmed suggested that in order to ensure an integrated approach to implementing the SDGs, there should be a discussion with the League of Arab States on regional priorities. The outcomes of the High-level Ministerial Session on SDGs, to be convened in Bahrain by the League, would be important in that regard. He finally suggested that both ESCWA and the United Nations Development Group lead discussions with the League without delay to determine regional priorities.

67. Mr. Mahjour stressed that the work of the Taskforce on Statistics should not be limited to supporting member States in the production of statistical data; it should also undertake capacity-building activities on using the data for monitoring SDG implementation. On the subject of the Working Group on Food Security, he said that it should focus more on nutrition, and that the title should be changed to include food safety, because that would better reflect its link to water issues.

68. Mr. Abumoghli confirmed the commitment of UNEP in terms of human and other resources to the Thematic Working Group on SDGs. He invited RCM members to ponder global and regional changes and their repercussions on the work of the different groups.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

69. The twenty-first meeting of the RCM was held at the Secretariat of the League of Arab States in Cairo, on 25 and 26 November 2015.

B. OPENING OF THE MEETING

70. Mr. Abdallah Al Dardari, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA, representing Ms. Rima Khalaf, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, opened the meeting, highlighting the importance of the year 2016 that would mark the adoption of the ambitious new global development agenda and its 17 goals. He said that the Agenda for Sustainable Development would set targets and priorities to guide national efforts and United Nations work until 2030, and called on Arab States to articulate clear joint priorities in that context, and take the RCM as an opportunity to elaborate a regional perspective on that Agenda.

71. The speaker stressed the urgency of supporting countries such as Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, underlining the challenge of pursuing development in the context of conflict. Ending occupation, achieving peace and stability, devoting attention to the needs of youth and women, and addressing the challenge of water, energy and food security were to remain among the region's utmost priorities. He thought that the situation was not without hope: the internationally recognized contribution of the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, progress in reducing poverty in Morocco, and education and health achievements in Palestine were some of the important realizations of the region. The RCM should constitute a platform to draw lessons from these visions of hope in a time of crisis and change. Finally, the speaker touched on the history of joint work between the United Nations and the League of Arab States in areas of political, economic, social and environmental development, emphasizing the importance of further combining efforts at the national and regional levels.

72. Mr. Fadel Jawad, Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the International Political Affairs Sector at the League of Arab States, representing Mr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League, welcomed the meeting participants and highlighted the importance of the event in the new era of sustainable development. He stressed the urgency of linking the new agenda to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in several countries of the region. The tidal wave of terrorism in the region should be confronted through a comprehensive approach including security, economic and social measures. This would require regional cooperation and a common vision on implementing the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region. He finally underlined the importance of events that were central to the RCM meeting discussions, namely the twenty-sixth Arab Summit, held in Sharm El Sheikh on 28 and 29 March 2015, and the upcoming High-level Ministerial Session on SDGs, to be held in January 2016 in Bahrain.

73. Mr. Abdessalam OuldAhmed, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative at the FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa, representing Ms. Sima Bahous, Assistant Secretary-General and Chair of the Regional United Nations Development Group for the Arab States, highlighted the importance of developing an integrated strategy to address key challenges in areas including hunger and poverty, conflict, water deprivation, oil dependency and food insecurity.

74. H.E. Ambassador Mervat Tallawy, Director General of the Arab Women Organization, urged RCM members to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to start a new phase of planning for development in the Arab region. This comprehensive agenda required regional cooperation among United Nations and Arab organizations. Its implementation needed to include all segments of society, especially women and children who were suffering disproportionately from the repercussions of conflict and insecurity in the region.

Annex I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES

H. E. Ambassador Fadel Jawad
Assistant Secretary-General, Head
of the International Political Affairs Sector
Cairo, Egypt

H. E. Ambassador Badr El Din Al Alali
Assistant Secretary-General, Head
of the Social Affairs Sector
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: badreldin.alali@las.int

H.E. Ambassador Haifa Abu Ghazaleh
Assistant Secretary-General, Head of the Media
and Communication Sector
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: Haifa.nhdra@gmail.com

Mr. Tarek el-Nabulsi
Head of the Coordination and Follow-up Unit
Office of the Under-Secretary-General
for Social Affairs
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: tarek.nabulsi@las.int

Ms. Shahira Wahbi
Chief of Sustainable Development
and International Cooperation
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: shuhryar@yahoo.com

Ms. Dina Kamel
Head of the Coordination and Follow-up Unit
Economic Affairs Department
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: f_ellmallah@hotmail.com

Ms. Elham al-Shajali
Head of Human Rights Department
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: elham.al-shajni@las.int

Ms. Lubna Azzam
Migration and Arab Expatriates Department
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: aemigrant.dept@las.int

Ms. May Ali
Women, Family and Childhood Department
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: may.ali@las.int

B. SPECIAL INVITEES

Mr. Ziad Bahaa-Eldin
Politician, Lawyer and Economist
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: ziad.bahaa@thebesconsult.com

Ms. Karen Pillay
Senior Partnership Specialist at the Global
Partnership for Education Secretariat
World Bank Group
Brussels, Belgium
E-mail: kpillay@globalpartnership.org

C. UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMMES AND FUNDS

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
(UNAIDS)

Ms. Yamina Chakker
Director of the Regional Support Team
for the Middle East and North Africa Region
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: chakary@unaid.org

United Nations Development Programme
(UNDP)

Mr. Adel Abdellatif
Chief, Regional Programme Division
Regional Bureau of Arab States
New York, United States
E-mail: adel.abdellatif@undp.org

United Nations Development Programme
(UNDP) (*continued*)

Mr. Kishan Khoday
Regional Team Leader
Climate Change, Disaster Risk Reduction
and Resilience
Regional Bureau of Arab States
Regional Centre in Cairo
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: kishan.khoday@undp.org

United Nations Human Settlements Programme
(UN-Habitat)

Ms. Katja Schaefer
Officer in Charge, Regional Office for Arab States
(ROAS)
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: katja.schaefer@unhabitat.org

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

Mr. Luay Shabaneh
Regional Technical Advisor for Population
Data/Policy
Arab States Regional Office
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: shabaneh@unfpa.org

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Mr. Iyad Abumoghli
Director and Regional Representative
Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA)
Manama, Bahrain
E-mail: Iyad.abumoghli@unep.org

World Food Programme (WFP)

Mr. Carlo Scaramella
Deputy Regional Director
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: carlo.scaramella@wfp.org

Ms. Melanie Hutchinson
Regional Development Coordinator
ROWA
Manama, Bahrain
E-mail: Melanie.hutchinson@unep.org

Mr. Tarneem Fahmi
Programme Officer
Tel.: +202 25281730 Ext 2420
E-mail: tarneem.fahmi@wfp.org

Mr. Abul-Mejid Haddad
Regional Climate Change Coordinator
ROWA
Manama, Bahrain
E-mail: majeid.haddad@unep.org

D. UNITED NATIONS SPECIALIZED AGENCIES

Food and Agriculture Organization of the
United Nations (FAO)

Mr. Abdessalam OuldAhmed
Assistant Director-General and Regional
Representative
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: abdessalam.ouldahmed@fao.org

International Labour Organization (ILO)

Mr. Frank Hagemann
Deputy Regional Director
Regional Office for Arab States
Beirut, Lebanon
E-mail: hagemann@ilo.org

Mr. Abdelaziz Zaki
Science National Professional Officer
Regional Bureau for Sciences
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: aa.zaki@unesco.org

Ms. Shaza Ghaleb al-Jondi
Regional United Nations Coherence
and Resource Mobilization Officer
Regional Office for Arab States
Beirut, Lebanon
E-mail: jondi@ilo.org

Ms. Cherine Khallaf
Education Professional Officer
Regional Bureau for Sciences
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: c.khallaf@unesco.org

International Telecommunication Unit

Mr. Ebrahim Al Haddad
Regional Director
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: ebrahim.al-haddad@itu.int

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Mr. Ghaith Fariz
Director
Regional Bureau for Sciences
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: g.fariz@unesco.org

United Nations Information Centre (UNIC)

Ms. Sausan Ghosheh
Acting Director
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: ghosheh@un.org

United Nations Office for Project Services

Ms. Bana Kaloti
Regional Director for the Middle East
Amman, Jordan
E-mail: banak@unops.org

World Health Organization (WHO)

Mr. Jaouad Mahjour
Director Programme Management
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: mahjourj@who.int

Mr. Mohamed Aw-Dahir
Food Systems Economist
and Thematic Working Group Focal Point
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: mohamed.awdahir@fao.org

Ms. Rayana Bou-Haka
Manager, Country Focus Support
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: bouhakar@who.int

Ms. Isin Tellioglu
Junior Economic Policy and Development Officer
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: isin.tellioglu@fao.org

E. UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENTS AND OFFICES

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

Ms. Louise Barbar
Head, Partnerships, Policy and Analysis Unit
Regional Office for MENA (ROMENA)
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: barber@un.org

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Ms. Areti Sianni
Senior Protection Officer
MENA Office
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: sianni@unhcr.org

Mr. Kaidar Ayoub
Senior Liaison Officer (League of Arab States)
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: ayoubk@unhcr.org

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Ms. Nada Darwazeh
Regional Gender Advisor, Human Rights Officer
Regional Office for the Middle East
Beirut, Lebanon
E-mail: ndarwazeh@ohchr.org

United Nations Office for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)

Mr. Amjad Abbashar
Head of Regional Office for Arab States
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: abbashar@un.org

F. UNITED NATIONS REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

Mr. Gbaguidi Ochozias
Chief of Section, Subregional Initiative
Addis Ababa
E-mail: ochozias@un.org

Ms. Houda Mejri
Information Officer, Focal Point for Gender
and Governance
Addis Ababa
E-mail: mejrih.uneca@un.org

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Mr. Abdallah Al Dardari
Deputy Executive Secretary
E-mail: aldardari@un.org

Mr. Karim Khalil
Secretary of the Commission,
Office of the Executive Secretary
E-mail: khalil31@un.org

Mr. Juraj Riecan
Director of the Statistics Division
E-mail: rieacan@un.org

Ms. Roula Majdalani
Director, Sustainable Development
Policies Division
E-mail: majdalani@un.org

Ms. Ramla Khalidi
Chief of the Strategy, Evaluation and
Partnerships Section
Planning, Partnerships and Technical
Cooperation Division
E-mail: khalidir@un.org

Ms. Karima El Korri
Chief of the Population and Social
Development Section
Social Development Division
E-mail: elkorri@un.org

Mr. Martti Antola
Resource Mobilization Officer
Strategy, Evaluations and Partnerships Section
Planning, Partnerships and Technical
Cooperation Division
E-mail: antola@un.org

Mr. Enda Nevin
Administrative and Research Assistant
Strategy, Evaluations and Partnerships Section
Planning, Partnerships and Technical
Cooperation Division
E-mail: nevin@un.org

Ms. Nancy Ezzeddine
Administrative Assistant
Strategy, Evaluations and Partnerships Section
Planning, Partnerships and Technical
Cooperation Division
E-mail: Ezzeddine@un.org

G. OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Ms. Carmela Godeau
Regional Director
Regional Office for the Middle East
and North Africa
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: cgodeau@iom.int

Ms. Karoline Popp
Regional Liaison and Policy Officer
Regional Office for the Middle East
and North Africa
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: kpoppp@iom.int

H. REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES

Arab Administrative Development Organization (ARADO)

Ms. Taghreed Hassan Badawoud
Head of International Relations
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: tbadawoud@arado.org.eg

Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization

Ms. Noha Mehab
Economic Researcher
Regional Office
Cairo, Egypt

E-mail: aidmoroc@yahoo.com
Arab Labour Organization (ALO)

Mr. Reda Mhamad Kaisomah
Director
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: reda@alolabor.org

Arab Women Organization (AWO)

H.E. Ambassador Mervat Tallawy
Director General
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: info@arabwomenrg.net

Egyptian Organization for Human Rights

Mr. Essam Shiha
Cassation Lawyer
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: eshiha@yahoo.com

Pan Arab Project for Family Health (PAPFAM)

Mr. Ahmad Abdel-Moneim
Manager
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: ahmonem@papfam.org

Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Title	Details
OPENING	
Speech of Mr. Abdallah Al Dardari	Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCWA
Speech of Mr. Fadel Jawad	Assistant Secretary-General, Head of International Political Affairs Sector
SESSION I	
Towards Integration at Last? The Sustainable Development Goals as a Network of Targets?	Paper by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
Presentation on the Nexus Approach Knowledge and Science: Getaway for Achieving the SDGs	Prepared by Mr. David Le Blanc (DESA) Prepared by UNESCO
Speech of Mr. Ziad Bahaa-Eldin	Politician, lawyer and economist
SESSION II	
Joint Initiative for Data Collection	Prepared by PAPFAM
Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	Prepared by UNDP
SESSION III	
<i>2015 Situation Report on International Migration: Migration, Displacement and Development in a Changing Arab Region</i>	Prepared by ESCWA
Special Session on Migration, Displacement and Development	Prepared by ESCWA, IOM and League of Arab States
SESSION IV	
Matrix of activities within the framework of the United Nations-League of Arab States Collaboration	Matrix of activities agreed at United Nations-League of Arab States general meeting in Vienna (July 2012), with updates on progress
United Nations-League of Arab States Strategic Priorities	United Nations-League of Arab States strategic priorities for economic and environmental clusters
United Nations-League of Arab States Strategic Priorities	United Nations-League of Arab States strategic priorities for social and cultural clusters

Title	Details
SESSION V	
The State of Food and Agriculture	Report by FAO
Disaster Risk Reduction in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	Prepared by UNISDR
Coherence and Reinforcement Paper	Prepared by UNISDR
Briefing Note on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction	Prepared by UNISDR
Food and Security Working Group Progress Report	Prepared by the Working Group on Food Security
International Migration Working Group Progress Report	Prepared by the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region
Statistics Task Force Progress Report	Prepared by the Statistics Task Force
MDG/SDG Working Group Progress Report	Prepared by the Working Group on SDGs
Conference of Parties: Convention on Climate Change	Presentation prepared by UNEP
United Nations Environment Assembly	Presentation prepared by UNEP
Joint Calendar	Joint calendar of regional events hosted by United Nations organizations