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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Report

of the twenty-second meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), acting as the secretariat of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), convened the twenty-second RCM meeting at the Sheraton Grand Doha Resort in Qatar on 14 December 2016, back-to-back with the twenty-ninth ESCWA session.

Representatives of United Nations agencies and the League of Arab States attended the meeting to review the following: the recommendations and workplan of the 2030 Agenda Working Group; plans for the 2017 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development; the recommendations and workplan of the Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals Data; progress and plans of the Working Group on International Migration; and plans of the Working Group on Food Security.

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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-second RCM meeting at the Sheraton Grand Doha Resort in Qatar on 14 December 2016, back-to-back with the twenty-ninth ESCWA session.

2.   Representatives of United Nations agencies and the League of Arab States attended the meeting to review the following: the recommendations and workplan of the 2030 Agenda Working Group; plans for the 2017 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development; the recommendations and workplan of the Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals Data; progress and plans of the Working Group on International Migration; and plans of the Working Group on Food Security.

I.   RECOMMENDATIONS

3.   The following recommendations were issued at the twenty-second RCM meeting:

(a)   The RCM confirmed the criteria developed under the 2030 Agenda Working Group for identifying priority activities for regional cooperation in the areas of research and knowledge products, regional consultations and meetings, capacity-building and advisory services, and advocacy and awareness-raising. The RCM further endorsed a strategic and limited number of activities as priorities for regional coordination in 2017 on the basis of these criteria;

(b)   In response to the recommendations of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), the RCM recommended holding the next RCM and Regional United Nations Development Group (R-UNDG) meetings back-to-back to ensure coordination between the two bodies and between sub-groups, including working groups, to avoid duplication and overlap. ESCWA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will coordinate dates and agendas to this end;

(c)   The RCM agreed to set up the following two committees for preparing the 2017 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development: an organizational committee on practical arrangements and a scientific committee to prepare technical substance. The RCM further agreed that the 2017 Arab Forum would discuss the concept and substance of the 2018 Arab Sustainable Development Report, and that the 2018 Arab Forum would then validate the Arab Report prior to its submission as an input to the Global Sustainable Development Report;

(d)   The RCM invited all members to reconfirm the names of members and alternate members of the RCM working groups;

(e)   The RCM agreed that ESCWA would, on behalf of the RCM, explore the modalities of cooperation between the Arab Sustainable Development Week and the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, and report back to RCM members;

(f)   The RCM expressed its thanks to the chairs of RCM working groups and its support to the workplans presented for 2017. The RCM requested the Working Group on the 2030 Agenda to prepare a calendar of events planned by RCM members on the 2030 Agenda.

II.   PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

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

4.   The session reviewed the recommendations and workplans of the RCM working groups on the 2030 Agenda and SDG Data, and plans for the 2017 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development. Mr. Abdallah Al Dardari, Deputy Executive Secretary for Programme of ESCWA, session moderator and Chair of the twenty-second RCM meeting, opened by noting that the twenty-ninth ESCWA session would discuss

challenges in the region and that it was important for RCM members to consider how to respond to the challenges identified by member States, including coordination challenges. As a priority, he highlighted the need to identify ways to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in a context of conflict.

5. He informed RCM members that the 2030 Agenda Working Group had held a meeting in Cairo in September 2016 to discuss cooperation, and that the report of that meeting had been shared with all RCM members. The Working Group had considered the results of the mapping of regional activities in the following four specific areas: regional meetings, upcoming research, capacity-building efforts, and advocacy. Based on those discussions and the recommendations of members, ESCWA had consolidated the draft list of priority activities for cooperation among RCM members for 2017.

6. He expressed his hope that the twenty-second RCM meeting would agree on priority activities for the coming year, to maximize the impact of all United Nations agencies operating in the Arab region and to ensure that they could support member States in the most effective manner.

1. *Presentations*

7. Ms. Karima El Korri, Chief of the ESCWA Population and Social Development Section and Head of the Unit on the 2030 Agenda, presented the main outcomes of the 2030 Agenda Working Group meeting. She said that the Working Group had agreed on the following four focus areas for RCM members to work on together: research and knowledge products; regional consultations and meetings; capacity-building and advisory services; advocacy and awareness-raising.

8. She said that the Working Group had identified criteria for selecting joint activities, such as regional scope, relevance to the 2030 Agenda, the involvement of two or more RCM partners, and implementation resources. Based on those criteria and the input received from RCM members, ESCWA had consolidated and distributed a compact matrix suggesting priority areas for cooperation, aimed at optimizing resources and producing high-quality outputs. The priority in 2017 should be to maximize the ability of RCM members to focus and work together on selected pilot activities, before broadening that approach to cover more areas of cooperation.

9. She added that key outputs for 2017 included the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and the Arab Sustainable Development Report. The Arab Forum was an annual multi-stakeholder platform, for which ESCWA had a mandate from the General Assembly. It had already held three sessions, implemented jointly by several United Nations agencies and the League of Arab States, bringing together a range of different stakeholders at the regional level. The next Forum should tackle issues tables for discussion at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, notably "Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world". She said that, in 2017, only Jordan and Qatar from the Arab region were presenting voluntary national reviews at the High-level Forum. The RCM should consider advocating a culture of reporting to the High-level Political Forum, so as to increase the number of countries from the Arab region presenting their voluntary national reviews. Most regional commissions had already set dates for their respective regional forum, most of which would be held in April 2017, but ESCWA had not yet done so. The RCM should therefore consider specific issues, such as the extent to which the Arab Forum should reflect the theme of the High-level Political Forum, whether different agencies would like to prepare working papers or side events for the Arab Forum, and whether the upcoming Arab Forum should discuss means of implementation or whether it would be better to dedicate a future Forum specifically to the issue. She stressed that ESCWA was keen to discuss the roles and responsibilities of each agency with RCM members, since the Arab Forum could be structured in a way to include special sessions, side events, and related meetings prior or subsequent to Forum sessions.

10. With regard to the Arab Sustainable Development Report, she noted that it would feed into the Global Sustainable Development Report published quadrennially. ESCWA and RCM members should begin identifying the best approach to preparing the 2018 Arab Report. The 2017 Arab Forum could be an opportunity to present and finalize the concept of the Report and the 2018 Arab Forum could then validate the findings before submitting the Arab Report at the global level.

11.   Mr. Juraj Riecan, Director of the Statistics Division at ESCWA, presented the discussion outcomes of the SDG Data Working Group regarding its future workplans. He said that statistics traditionally supported decision-making and that, although it needed to adapt to meet evolving needs, revolutionary new data was not required for the SDGs. The first meeting of the SDG Data Working Group had comprised representatives of United Nations agencies with large statistical programmes in the region, and had focused on clarifying the Terms of Reference of the Working Group, and on identifying key focus issues, data sharing modalities, and the optimal division of labour between agencies for data collection purposes.

12.   He highlighted the challenge posed by the global framework of around 250 indicators, which was very complicated and designed to support global reports at the level of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. He said that the Arab region faced a specific set of challenges, however, which meant that the overlap between national indicators, regional indicators and global indicators would be limited and United Nations agencies would need to consider the cost of collecting data for different frameworks. The primary task of the RCM was to supply data for regional research and reports, but it should recognize that much of the data needed would have to be collected by RCM members as it would not be available through national statistical offices. The RCM therefore needed to be innovative in identifying data collection means, bearing in mind that data collection methodologies and data quality would need to be explained and justified to member States.

13.   He noted that the SDG Data Working Group would be co-chaired by ESCWA and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and UNFPA would link and coordinate with R-UNDG. The Working Group would focus on coordination and communication with national statistical offices. The ESCWA Statistical Committee would link the inter-agency coordination on SDG data with the intergovernmental process. The Working Group had agreed on a preliminary division of labour with regard to data collection and had started considering non-conventional data sources to fill gaps in available data. The Working Group had also identified the need to engage in capacity development with member States to enable them to collect the quality data required for tracking progress in achieving the SDGs. With regard to plans for 2017, he noted that the Working Group had decided to conduct an inventory of data-related activities undertaken by RCM members; to prepare a list of indicators with custodian agencies responsible for collecting data on those indicators; to undertake a data gap analysis and identify ways to fill those gaps; to establish a data sharing mechanism, possibly with a centralized SDG database; and to communicate with national statistical offices to engage in advocacy and capacity-building at the national level. Moreover, the Working Group agreed on the importance of inviting observers, mainly regional statistical agencies outside the RCM, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, on the basis of their specific work areas and expertise.

2.   *Discussion*

14.   In the ensuing discussion, Mr. Al Dardari confirmed that the matrix of joint activities developed by the 2030 Agenda Working Group was still open for additional contributions. Mr. Khaled Abdelshafi, Director of the UNDP Regional Hub, said that R-UNDG was planning to establish a working group on the SDGs to coordinate support to country teams, stressing the importance of coordination between RCM and R-UNDG working groups on the 2030 Agenda.

15.   Mr. Luay Shabaneh, UNFPA Regional Director, said that the Arab Forum should have an organizing committee consisting of several RCM members. He also highlighted the need to improve coordination between the R-UNDG and the RCM to ensure coherence between country-level and regional-level plans.

16.   Ms. Nada El Agizy, Director of Sustainable Development and International Cooperation at the League of Arab States, said that the matrix of joint activities was clear but could include some additional activities for 2017. She expressed support for the UNFPA request to establish an organizing committee for the Arab Forum and to clarify the roles of each organization in preparing for the Forum. She added that the League had held a governmental meeting on the 2030 Agenda in November 2016 at the senior officials level. Participants had discussed the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and called for an Arab strategy on the SDGs. She also confirmed that the League would be keen to partner with RCM members on the Arab Sustainable Development Report.

17.   Ms. Rayana Bou Haka, Manager of Country Focus Support at the World Health Organization (WHO), expressed her support for a short and focused matrix of joint activities. She said that the twenty-ninth ESCWA session highlighted the need for United Nations agencies to support member States in working together with different stakeholders and across sectors. It was important to show that the United Nations could respond to that call and work together rather than duplicate efforts. To achieve that, it was necessary to develop mechanisms for regional cooperation, in addition to the RCM and its working groups. As a first step, the RCM should identify the activities of different agencies that could bring together multiple agencies at the regional level.

18.   Mr. Abdel Salam Sidahmed, Regional Representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in the Middle East Region, expressed his support for linking the R-UNDG and RCM. He questioned whether it was possible to separate the regional level from the national and global levels, and whether there was a methodology to do so. He indicated that some countries had already started implementing national plans for the SDGs, but there was still very little commitment to reporting in a way that would allow citizens to hold their Governments accountable for transforming the societies they lived in. He suggested that the regional level could focus on coordination and that the Arab Forum could be a platform for exchanging experiences gained at the country level. The Forum could also be an opportunity to discuss the Arab Strategy on SDGs mentioned by the League. OHCHR did not want to tie itself to any particular SDGs, but hoped to assess the extent to which human rights were a dimension of the entire 2030 Agenda – something that should also be reflected in the work of the RCM.

19.   Ms. Karoline Popp, Regional Liaison and Policy Officer at the Regional Office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), said that she supported focusing on a limited number of joint activities in 2017 and doing them well. Regarding the Arab Forum, one approach could be to consider what would bring the greatest added value from the point of view of member States. It was important not to overwhelm member States with too many meetings and to allow them to focus on implementing the 2030 Agenda at the national level. In past forums, government participation had been predominantly from environment ministries. Future forums should involve representatives from Government as a whole, not just line ministries, as that could lead to an overly sectoral approach. Linking the Arab Forum to the High-level Forum would ensure that the regional level did not duplicate work done elsewhere, and that the global agenda was linked to the regional and national levels.

20.   Mr. Nabil Gangi, Senior Advisor at the Regional Office of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), said he supported the suggestion that all RCM members should have a clear role in the preparation of the Arab Forum to ensure joint ownership. With regard to RCM working groups, he noted that the most active had contributed positively to regional cooperation and should be further strengthened. He added that a common voice on the SDGs was lacking, and suggested that ESCWA take the lead in developing a common voice on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs for the Arab region.

21.   Ms. Ramla Khalidi, Chief of the ESCWA Strategy, Evaluation and Partnership Section, said that efforts had been made in the past to hold the R-UNDG and RCM meetings back-to-back and that it would be good to try to do so again. However, the RCM was not the same as the R-UNDG, so the RCM should not try to coordinate activities at the national level but rather coordinate approaches and policies at the regional level, which was why it may not be feasible or desirable to combine the RCM and R-UNDG working groups. She added that it was important to organize the Arab Forum as a joint undertaking, thus necessitating discussions on what commitments different agencies were ready to make in terms of side-events and other contributions. The 2016 High-level Political Forum had included many side-events that may have overwhelmed member States, so perhaps it would make sense to hold more side-events at the regional level instead.

22.   Mr. Al Dardari expressed his support for holding the R-UNDG and RCM meetings back-to-back and noted that ESCWA would reach out to the Regional Director of the UNDG to that end.

23.   Ms. Luna Abu-Swaireh, the Head of the Regional Office of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), said that it was important for the RCM to move from talking about coordination to actually engaging in it. The United Nations had already been overtaken by many of its civil society and private

sector partners in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and it was therefore vital to catch up and seek innovative solutions to challenges. The next joint RCM and R-UNDG meeting or the next Arab Forum should demonstrate how the United Nations system could make a difference by helping member States implement the 2030 Agenda. The Arab Sustainable Development Report could become a soft monitoring report on all the SDGs and highlight a specific theme under each Goal. The Arab Forum, on the other hand, could focus on partnerships and means of implementation, issuing recommendations on focus areas for the Arab Report.

24.   Mr. Adib Nehmeh, ESCWA Regional Advisor, said that sequencing was another important level to consider, in addition to national versus regional efforts. To date, agencies had been focusing on developing their own activities and plans, and were addressing each country from their specific point of view. The RCM should develop a common agenda for all agencies to identify a common vision for implementing the 2030 Agenda in the region. He added that the 2030 Agenda Working Group should be a substantive body, focusing on methods and substance. It could produce a common vision, tools and methodology for the 2030 Agenda, given that they were currently lacking. Member States had criticized the United Nations for sending contradictory messages and alternative methodologies, so the Working Group would be the ideal space for developing a joint approach.

25.   Mr. Al Dardari supported the idea of developing a common vision and suggested that the next Arab Sustainable Development Report should focus on providing a common methodology for the Arab region. The upcoming Arab Forum should discuss the theme of the Arab Report, its direction, and the agencies ready to contribute to it. It was important to ensure a substantive, influential and relevant regional report by April 2018. He invited all RCM members to review their upcoming activities in view of the criteria proposed for selecting activities that could be potential priorities for coordination and cooperation in 2017.

26.   Ms. El Agizy said that the League of Arab States had introduced a standing item on SDG coordination on its Higher Coordination Committee's agenda and had identified focal points in each subsidiary body for coordination purposes. She suggested holding a joint meeting with United Nations agencies to exchange experiences and discuss how to develop an integrated approach to the SDGs. She also expressed support for focusing the 2017 Arab Forum on the theme of the High-level Political Forum.

27.   Ms. Yamina Chakker, Director of the Regional Support Team of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), said that coordination challenges were structural rather than substantive, given the presence of overlapping mechanisms. It was important to address structural challenges by exploring possibilities to combine some of the mechanisms to improve coordination.

28.   Ms. El Korri said that member States had agreed to simplify the High-level Political Forum and make it more focused by selecting a set of goals for each session. The Global Sustainable Development Report would be issued quadrennially, covering progress in all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. With regard to the Arab Forum, she suggested establishing one committee for developing the substance of the Forum and another for addressing logistical and organizational issues.

29.   Mr. Shabaneh said he supported the proposal to establish an organizational and a substantive committee for the Arab Forum, and suggested the preparation of a two-page document to identify the composition of the committees and outline draft terms of reference. He also proposed that the organizational committee be co-chaired by the heads of R-UNDG and RCM.

30.   Ms. Bou Haka said that there was a specific SDG on how international actors worked together. It was vital for RCM members to demonstrate how that Goal was reflected in their work across all the other SDGs. There might therefore be a need to discuss cooperation modalities separately from the Arab Forum and Arab Report.

31.   Mr. Abdelshafi suggested that the substantive committee of the Arab Forum also prepare a concept note for the Arab Report, to be discussed at the Arab Forum.

32.   Mr. Tarek El-Sheikh, Chief of UN-Habitat's Regional Office for the Gulf, stressed the importance of data and data collection, since data availability in the region was a major challenge. Habitat had developed a methodology and framework for monitoring SDG11 and was testing it in a number of countries at the city level. It was important to translate that framework into Arabic and make it available to the RCM. He stressed the role of the resident coordinator in engaging agencies at the country level, since different agencies tended to work with different line ministries as well as other stakeholders at the national level; coordination would therefore be essential. At the regional level, it was necessary to identify how the RCM could best help member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

33.   Ms. Subhra Bhattacharjee, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist at the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO), said that UNSCO had worked with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics on monitoring the SDGs. The Bureau had found figures for some 80 indicators. Many one-time studies that could serve as sources of alternate data could be conducted through national statistical offices, which would combine capacity-building and data collection and would also add an additional layer of credibility to the data produced.

34.   Ms. Abu-Swaireh noted that the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) was a strong technical entity and active in global processes, and should perhaps be included in the SDG Data Working Group. She also invited ESCWA to participate in future meetings of the global framework for developing indicators for the Sendai platform.

35.   Mr. Sidahmed expressed his concern regarding how human rights indicators were reflected in the SDG Data Working Group. He said that OHCHR have a human rights approach to data and that he would like to see reflected in the process.

36.   Mr. Amr Nour, Director of the Regional Commissions New York Office, informed RCM members that the General Assembly has just adopted a resolution on QCPR, providing guidance to the United Nations system at various levels on supporting the 2030 Agenda. The resolution called on UNDG and RCM to develop a coordination mechanism on various issues and implement a statement of collaboration.[1] It also invited UNDG and RCM to work closely on the nexus between the national and regional levels, as well as the regional and global levels.

37.   Mr. Shabaneh said that it would probably not be possible to develop a centralized SDG database. UNFPA was planning to conduct a process to identify the needs of member States in measuring the SDGs, in line with the work plans of the SDG Data Working Group. It would be useful to link up with similar initiatives planned by other agencies.

38.   Mr. Riecan stressed the need for flexibility with regard to the global list of SDG indicators, because multiple agencies were supporting national and regional processes in addition to the global United Nations process. He confirmed that the Working Group would link with other processes on specific SDG indicators and try to compile them at the regional level. ESCWA was already cooperating with SESRIC, and would support the development of the Sendai framework.

B. SESSION 2 – REVIEW UPDATES FROM RCM WORKING GROUPS

39.   The session reviewed the lessons learned from producing the first Arab Sustainable Development Report, and the progress and future plans of the working groups on international migration, food security and climate change. UNDP moderated the session.

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[1] Available from https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Statement-of-Collaboration-RECs-UNDG-Reg-UNDGs-on-SDGs-1-Jan-2016.pdf.

1. *Presentations*

40.   Ms. Reem Nejdawi, Chief of the ESCWA Food and Environment Policies Section, presented the lessons learned from the first Arab Sustainable Development Report, which reviewed all 17 SDGs before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. She said that ESCWA had begun preparing the Report by reaching out to various agencies based on their areas of expertise. It then developed the basic concept and templates for inputs from partners, and set a timeframe for the inputs. The participatory approach had greatly enhanced the quality of the Report, but also posed some challenges. One main challenge was the differing geographical coverage of RCM members, which meant that data received had to be revised for the specific set of countries covered by the Report. Those differences in geographical coverage extended to the subregional level. The comparability of data was another challenge, as data received was from different years and therefore not directly comparable. The Report had adopted a national case study approach that had been successful but required considerable coordination and follow-up, which had not been envisaged at the beginning. Several meetings had been held between national coordinators and the writing team, and feedback had been received mainly at the meetings rather than virtually, as initially envisaged. The first Arab Report was not forward-looking but rather sought to establish a good basis for subsequent reports. It was written in English and translated into Arabic, which posed another challenge as the official terms for translating from English to Arabic had not yet been agreed. The Report had not used national data, given their unavailability for many countries at two different points of time thus making them incomparable.

41.   Ms. Popp presented the progress and future plans of the International Migration Working Group. She said that 2016 had begun with the launch of the Situation Report on International Migration in Beirut, and much of the year had consisted of activities to disseminate the Report further. The Report was presented to the European Parliament and several Arab meetings, and had been downloaded 15,000 times from the ESCWA and IOM websites. The Working Group had mapped ongoing and planned activities and used that mapping exercise to survey areas of common interest and ideas that would feed into the next Situation Report. The Working Group had started preparing for the 2017 Situation Report and had held three meetings to discuss work plans and methodologies. The next Situation Report would be a key output of 2017, mirroring the structure of the previous one, with updated trends and policy developments and a thematic chapter on the links between the SDGs and migration. The Working Group also hoped to hold a workshop for Governments, hosted by the League of Arab States, on migration and development, most likely with a focus on SDG implementation. The Working Group was focused on producing joint outputs and providing a joint space to share information about migration. She invited all RCM members to indicate as soon as possible whether they would be interested in contributing to the 2017 Situation Report, and confirmed that the chairs of the Working Group would send a message in that regard before the end of the year.

42.   Mr. Mohamed Barre, Regional Statistician at the FAO Regional Office, presented the progress and future plans of the Food Security Working Group. He noted that the first event of 2016 had been a side-event at the Committee on Nutrition, the highest platform for dealing with issues of food security and providing recommendations on the basis of scientific evidence. The Working Group had also organized a side-event at World Food Day, engaging high-level experts on food security. The Working Group was currently preparing a concept note with the League to identify policy gaps and challenges in the Arab region, and had recently launched the first panorama on food security in the region. The next issue of the panorama would be produced in 2017 and include contributions from various stakeholders. The Working Group was also planning to hold a side-event at the Planning Committee on Food Security and was preparing a food security platform with the League to promote leadership on food security and develop the resilience of the most vulnerable.

2. *Discussion*

43.   In the ensuing discussion, Ms. Bou Haka noted that the work of the International Migration Working Group was important owing to the region's situation. The United Nations should produce more evidence on the connection between conflict and migration in the region.

44.   Ms. El Korri said that the International Migration Working Group was a good example of joint cooperation between RCM members to produce high-quality output. It was important to ensure that the focal point network was up to date so that information reached the right individuals. She expressed her hope that the 2017 Situation Report would be as collaborative as the 2015 Situation Report.

45.   Mr. Eltayeb Elamin, UNAIDS Regional Community Mobilization and Networking Adviser, said that the International Migration Working Group should consider initiatives by other agencies that could bring added value to the Working Group, such as the one implemented jointly between UNAIDS and WHO on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. The Working Group should identify innovative issues to work on, such as inter-regional dialogue, since migration was often inter-regional in nature.

C. SESSION 3 – COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES

46.   The session explored key milestones of cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States in 2017. The League moderated the session.

1. *Presentations*

47.   Ms. El Agizy gave an overview of the first Arab consultative meeting for focal points on SDGs in the Arab region. She said that it had initially been planned at the ministerial level, but was ultimately held at the senior officials level. All Arab countries had been represented, mainly through representatives of ministries of planning. The meeting had decided that its governing body would be the Arab Economic and Social Council and that an Arab plan on the SDGs and an Arab progress report on SDG implementation should be prepared and submitted to the Arab Economic and Social Council. The League was planning to organize another meeting in early January 2017 to discuss the Arab plan on the SDGs. She said that the League's Higher Coordination Committee had invited Arab organizations to link their strategies and activities to the 2030 Agenda and to identify focal points on the SDGs. The League was planning to organize a week-long multi-stakeholder event on the SDGs in the region in April 2017, and invited the RCM to consider holding the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development during that week. She also informed the RCM that in a recent meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE), a decision had been taken that CAMRE would henceforth only focus on the environmental dimension of the SDGs and that all other councils were expected to follow suit. The next Arab Economic and Social Development Summit of the League would also be linked to the 2019 United Nations Sustainable Development Summit.

2. *Discussion*

48.   In the ensuing discussion, Ms. Blerta Aliko, Deputy Regional Director of UN-Women, noted that her organization had been approached by the Arab Women's Organization to prepare a report on Arab Women and the SDGs. Discussions were underway on the report, although the activity was not included in the coordination matrix of the United Nations and the League. She added that each United Nations agency was currently assigned a focal point from a substantive department of the League, thus complicating an organizational approach to the partnership. She requested further efforts to clarify and centralize the communication and coordination arrangements between the United Nations and the League.

49.   Mr. Sidahmed enquired about the approach of the proposed Arab plan on the SDGs, and whether it would be guided by what member States were already doing or rather attempt to inject new ideas for member States to take into consideration when developing and implementing national plans. He also asked whether the implementation of the Arab plan would be monitored at the country or regional level. He queried whether the development of the plan would be carried out through focal points or through other forms of consultation.

50.   Mr. Elamin noted that his organization had a strong partnership with the League on the Arab strategy on HIV/AIDS for 2020. UNAIDS was already working with the department of health but would be keen to work with the department on the SDGs as the strategy also related to five SDGs.

51.   Mr. Nour said that from the perspective of the Regional Commissions New York Office, the main added value of the RCM was ensuring alignment between the collective work of the United Nations system and strategic partners such as the League. He expressed an interest in hearing more about how the planned Arab Progress Report would feed into United Nations global reporting, considering that all member States had adopted the resolution on reporting to the global level and that it would therefore be important to ensure alignment and avoid duplication.

52.   Ms. Abu-Swaireh agreed on the need to examine how different United Nations agencies work with the League through different departments, and whether a centralized focal point could improve coordination. She suggested that the United Nations and the League could meet to specifically discuss coordination and coherence in support of the 2030 Agenda.

53.   Ms. Popp suggested that ESCWA create a mapping of all upcoming events related to the work of the RCM, such as the SDG week mentioned by the League, so that RCM members could plan their possible contributions accordingly.

54.   Ms. Khalidi noted that ESCWA had attempted to create a calendar of events for the RCM several times, and that the main challenge had been receiving regular updates from RCM members to ensure that the calendar was up-to-date. She confirmed that ESCWA would make a renewed effort to create a calendar, focusing on activities related to the 2030 Agenda, updated quarterly.

55.   Ms. Bou Haka said that the WHO had received a request from Arab health ministers for a specific meeting on health issues before their upcoming intergovernmental meeting in March 2017, and enquired whether preparatory activities were envisaged prior to the SDG week in April 2017.

56.   Mr. Al Dardari highlighted the need for the RCM to produce outputs that added value to the efforts of member States, above and beyond the work RCM members individually undertook as part of their regular work. All agencies should consider what they would like from the RCM and think about ways to enhance cooperation. He stressed that, in his opinion, the RCM was moving in the right direction.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

57.   The twenty-second meeting of the RCM was held at the Sheraton Grand Doha Resort in Qatar on 14 December 2016.

B. OPENING OF THE MEETING

58.   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. He said that the RCM meeting was condensed because ESCWA had decided to hold it on the sidelines of its session to facilitate the participation of RCM members in the ESCWA session. He noted that at the ESCWA session, member States had called for greater cooperation and coordination at the national and regional levels in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The current RCM meeting would also focus on coordination, because it was an major challenge, especially with regard to the 2030 Agenda. All Agencies had specific mandates, strategies and action plans, but there was also a need to agree on a limited number of initiatives that multiple agencies would collaborate on. He invited RCM members to be innovative in proposing modalities and specific initiatives for joint cooperation.

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LIST OF DOCUMENTS

1. Agenda.

2. Presentation – Working Group on SDG Data.

3. Presentation – Working Group on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

4. 2016 Progress Report – RCM Working Group on International Migration.

5. Meeting report of the first RCM Working Group on the 2030 Agenda (25 September 2016).

6. Proposed Plan of Action – RCM Working Group on the 2030 Agenda.