



**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COUNCIL**

Distr.  
LIMITED  
E/ESCWA/OES/2013/RCM.18/2/Report  
16 July 2013  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

**REPORT**

**OF THE EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM  
BEIRUT, 15 MARCH 2013**

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## **Introduction**

1. As the secretariat to the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) convened the eighteenth meeting of the RCM on 15 March 2013 at the United Nations House, Beirut.

2. The purpose of the meeting, which was attended by representatives of regional United Nations agencies, the League of Arab States and other regional organizations, was to do the following: (a) discuss ways of scaling up cooperation and coordination between the United Nations and the League of Arab States; (b) discuss findings and opportunities emerging from the Thematic Working Group on the nexus between RCM and the Economic and Social Council Annual Ministerial Review (AMR); and (c) review outcomes of ESCWA consultation with civil society on the regional priorities for the post-2015 development agenda. This report is a summary of the key discussions and outcomes of the meeting.

### **I. RECOMMENDATIONS**

3. The recommendations of the first session focused on cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States, the proposed thematic working group on international migration, and other matters.

(a) Give importance to the review of strategic priorities for cooperation between the United Nations and League of Arab States in support of countries in the region. This process will continue through virtual consultation, leading up to the preparation of a cluster report on economic, social and environmental pillars in May 2013. Priorities include:

- (i) Accelerating the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) up to 2015;
- (ii) Ensuring a coherent regional message in preparation for the post-2015 development agenda, and the preparation of sustainable development goals (SDGs);
- (iii) Strengthening governance and democracy;
- (iv) Protecting human rights and freedom of expression;
- (v) Promoting gender equality and the rights of women;
- (vi) Fostering coherence and agreement on issues related to data and statistics;
- (vii) Increasing humanitarian support in the region, and in particular in response to the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic;
- (viii) Responding to the needs of children and youth;
- (ix) Developing the Arab HIV/AIDS strategy.

(b) Review the matrix of activities developed at the July 2012 General Coordination Meeting in Vienna to include updates to activities;

(c) Use RCM as a platform for United Nations-League of Arab States cooperation in the areas of economic, social and environmental issues.

(d) Recognize the importance of the work of a thematic working group on international migration in the lead-up to the High-Level Dialogue in October 2013 and beyond. The core group of the thematic working group will include the League of Arab States, ESCWA, the International Organization on Migration (IOM), the Arab Labour Organization (ALO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). The group will also include the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Others are welcome to join.

(e) Consider the invitation issued by the League of Arab States to hold the next RCM at their headquarters in Cairo;

(f) Call upon all RCM members to continue to work with the League of Arab States to ensure the region's voice is present in international deliberations on the post-2015 framework.

4. The outcomes of the second session focused on enhancing coordination between RCM and AMR, particularly on the 2013 theme: "Science, technology and innovation, and the role of culture, for promoting sustainable development and achieving the MDGs". The meeting resulted in the following conclusions and recommendations:

(a) Invite all RCM members to review the matrix of 16 proposed activities formulated by the Thematic Working Group and suggest changes and additions during the two weeks immediately following the RCM meeting;

(b) Continue the work of the Group on each AMR theme for at least two years, in order to facilitate follow-up on the status of implementation of recommendations made by RCM one year on. Activities identified in the matrix may be longer term;

(c) Encourage all regional actors, at the invitation of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), to contribute to the Economic and Social Council report on its contribution to the post-2015 development agenda, to be presented to the High-Level Segment in July 2013. Its outcomes will be presented to the General Assembly in September 2013. The report will also serve as preparation for the July 2014 AMR on MDGs and the post-2015 framework;

(d) Encourage all regional actors, at the invitation of DESA, to participate in the preparation of the 2014 AMR on the theme of MDGs and the post-2015 framework;

(e) DESA will facilitate an invitation from the president of the Economic and Social Council to the League of Arab States to participate in the preparatory meeting for the General Assembly discussions on the post-2015 framework.

5. The recommendations of the third session focused on the outcomes of the Civil Society Consultation on the development agenda beyond 2015, held on 14 March 2013 at the United Nations House, Beirut. In their outcome statement, civil society organizations called on the United Nations and its member countries to formulate a new development paradigm, where growth is only one of several parameters of development, and with a focus on a new social contract. The recommendations included a call for the new United Nations development framework to do the following:

(a) Establish a clear link between human rights, democratic governance, participation and development;

(b) Focus on justice, inequality, vulnerability and jobs;

(c) Extend focus beyond poverty to include the vulnerability of households and individuals;

(d) Give due attention to transformation in international trade and financial systems;

(e) Consider the nexus between peace, security and development, including the devastating impact of occupation on development;

(f) Facilitate regional integration;

(g) Address gender disparity, taking into consideration the particular context of the region;

(h) Combat corruption and put in place accountability mechanisms to monitor the achievement of development commitments at all levels;

(i) Ensure water and food security as well as natural resources are given due attention;

(j) Build on the unique role of civil society in addressing culturally sensitive challenges, such as human rights, HIV/AIDS, women's empowerment and freedom of expression.

6. Civil society representatives from the region also called upon the United Nations to do the following:

(a) Facilitate civil society participation at all levels in order to create an enabling environment, including in the post-2015 process, for example by:

(i) Exploring channels at all levels for consultation processes to ensure that the voices of all stakeholders and groups are taken into consideration in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development policies and programmes;

(ii) Facilitating regional networking among civil society and the link between the national, regional and international levels.

(b) Facilitate inclusive national dialogue among all stakeholders to tackle key issues such as the new development paradigm and the new social contract between the citizen and the State;

(c) Facilitate policy coherence and implementation at the regional level and through RCM;

(d) Facilitate the inclusion of newly emerging and vulnerable civil society actors, in particular in transition countries;

(e) Facilitate the development of knowledge as a key factor for achieving development.

7. Participants took note of the outcomes of the civil society consultation and the RCM secretariat will work with the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General to convey the recommendations and suggestions to the High-Level Panel meeting in Bali at the end of March, 2013.

## **II. PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **A. SESSION 1 – COORDINATION BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES**

8. The purpose of this session was to assess the progress to date on cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States and to respond to the call by the Secretaries-General of both organizations to identify key strategic priorities and processes for enhancing future United Nations-League of Arab States engagement. The session also reviewed a proposal by the League to establish a thematic working group on migration in the lead up to the 2013 High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development scheduled in October 2013. The working group would help coordinate efforts between RCM members before and after the Dialogue.

9. The moderator, Regional Director of UNAIDS, Ms. Renu Chahil-Graf, gave an overview of the session and its objectives, recalling the importance of effective collaboration between the United Nations system working in the Arab region and the League of Arab States.

## 1. *Presentations*

10. Mr. Nadim Khouri, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA, delivered a presentation in which he outlined the institutional framework for United Nations-League of Arab States cooperation, and proposed a number of strategic priority areas for collaborative regional work. The priorities fell into the following areas: (a) inclusive and equitable economic development; (b) good governance and human rights; (c) sustainable use of natural resources; and (d) regional integration. Drawing on the priority activities identified in the Matrix of Activities at the General United Nations-League of Arab States Coordination meeting in Vienna in July 2012, he drew attention to activities in the economic, social and environmental clusters. In addition to pointing to some successful instances of joint activities, he addressed the existing mechanisms for United Nations-League of Arab States coordination and suggested the confirmation of RCM as a key coordination platform, indicating that RCM has a historic opportunity to influence high-level regional debate and actions as “one regional voice”. He also suggested that ministerial meetings and coordination with the Arab funds are important for regional coordination. In terms of upcoming milestones and events, he indicated that ESCWA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as co-conveners of the Economic, Social and Environment Cluster, would be preparing a report on regional strategic priorities by May 2013 in coordination with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other regional United Nations entities and the League of Arab States. The United Nations-League of Arab States Sector meeting is also scheduled during the summer of 2013, while in November 2013, ESCWA will organize the nineteenth meeting of RCM. The United Nations-League of Arab States General Coordination Meeting is expected to be held in the summer of 2014.

11. Ms. Faeqa Saeed Alsaleh, Assistant Secretary General for Social Development at the League of Arab States, reiterated the call for more effective and more strategic coordination between League of Arab States and the regional United Nations organizations. She indicated that League of Arab States had already undertaken an internal review and assessment of its past and ongoing activities with United Nations agencies and had provided an update to the Matrix of Activities prepared in Vienna. She stressed the need for more enhanced collaboration in the area of crisis response, in particular in light of the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. She called on all United Nations organizations to support the implementation of the recommendation of the Arab Conference on the Implementation of the MDGs held in Cairo on 2-3 December 2012, and the recommendations of the Third Arab Economic and Social Summit, held in Riyadh on 22 January 2013. She appealed for better coordination in data collection and use and in the preparation of indicators that accurately reflect the achievements and challenges of development in the Arab region. She requested participants to join the proposed thematic working group on international migration, which is to be co-chaired by the League of Arab States, ESCWA and IOM.

## 2. *Discussion*

12. Participants discussed the strategic priorities for United Nations-League of Arab States cooperation in the area of economic, social and environmental development, and agreed to several high-level areas of cooperation and intervention, including the following: (a) acceleration of the implementation of the MDGs in the lead-up to 2015; (b) consultation and coordination of a regional voice at the global discussions on the post-2015 development agenda and the post-Rio+20 discussions, including SDGs; (c) protection of human rights and freedom of expression; and (d) promotion of gender equality and the rights of women. In addition, participants also pointed to the need to coordinate efforts in preparation for the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014 Review. A regional preparatory meeting is to be held in Cairo in June 2013. Universal health coverage and the social protection floor were also identified as priorities alongside a regional AIDS strategy. A focus on youth and children was considered necessary in all of the development programmes and policies.

13. Participants discussed the many problems faced in the use of data, including issues related to data quality, reliability and comparability. It was acknowledged that problems with data were not confined to the Arab region, and that more should be done to coordinate the selection of data for use in regional and global

reports, and in the design of indicators. This was highlighted as a particular problem in the lead-up to the post-2015 agenda. The chair of the Thematic Working Group on Statistics indicated that the group was developing strategies and plans to improve the quality of data at the source.

14. In the area of humanitarian assistance, participants acknowledged the urgent need to foster closer working relationships with the League of Arab States, and in particular agencies such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and others who are working on providing shelter and emergency assistance to those affected by conflict and crisis.

15. Participants unanimously endorsed the proposal to establish a thematic working group on international migration as per the distributed concept note, and suggested including ALO and ILO as members of the core group, together with the League of Arab States, ESCWA and IOM. UN-Women, UNFPA, UNAIDS and WHO also expressed their interest to take part in the working group.

#### B. SESSION 2 – ENHANCING COORDINATION AMONG RCM MEMBERS ON PRIORITY ISSUES

16. The purpose of this session was to do the following: (a) discuss the merit of establishing a thematic working group on aligning the work of the Economic and Social Council AMR and the work of RCM; (b) discuss the work and findings of the Thematic Working Group on the 2013 AMR theme of science, technology, innovation and culture; (c) preliminarily discuss the 2014 AMR theme of MDGs.

##### 1. *Presentations*

17. Mr. Neil Pierre, Chief of the Policy Coordination Branch at DESA, presented his views regarding the potential benefits of greater alignment between AMR and RCM; actions being taken in New York to reform the Economic and Social Council and its links to the thematic working group; and preparations already underway for the 2014 AMR on MDGs. With regard to the benefits of greater alignment between AMR and RCM, he noted that the first benefit was to strengthen the region's contribution to the global AMR preparations. The second benefit was to assist in the mobilization of technical inputs from member countries on the one hand, and financial resources on the other, with a view to implementing AMR recommendations. The third benefit was to enable regional agencies to support member countries in the preparation of national voluntary presentations (NVPs), for example by conducting national workshops and preparing a national report. Finally, the working group could also assist in following up on the implementation of AMR recommendations. This follow-up was an area of weakness in the AMR process which DESA was looking to improve, by setting up a report-back system for NVPs. He added that DESA would be interested in replicating the working group on the AMR-RCM nexus in other regions as well.

18. With regard to the reform of the Economic and Social Council, he explained that the basis of the review was a report of the Secretary-General, already available, which highlights three aspects of reform. First, the Council should adopt a more substantive focus in its work, for example by working around one annual theme. Although AMR already has an annual theme, it does not permeate throughout the Economic and Social Council. Second, the Council should establish its role as a thought leader by building on work in different regions and capitalizing on the breadth of knowledge resources at its disposal. Strengthening partnerships and system-wide coherence are also a priority. Third, the working methods of the Council should be reviewed and a report should be issued each year on decisions taken to evaluate whether progress has been made in implementing policy recommendations. Finally, he noted that a key methodological change would be to set up a better system of accountability, to be measured through the development cooperation forum, where all partners – donors, recipients and the United Nations system – would be equally held accountable for progress made.

19. With regard to the 2014 AMR theme, he highlighted a report due in July, addressing the contribution of the Economic and Social Council to the post-2015 agenda. The report will identify where progress has

been made and what gaps continue to exist, and therefore should become part of the post-2015 agenda. DESA is also trying to identify some cross-cutting issues that should be addressed, such as employment and decent working conditions, macroeconomic growth and its linkages to sustainable development, food security and nutrition, energy, inequality and participation as well as science, technology, innovation and the role of culture.

20. Mr. Haidar Fraihat, Director of the Information and Communication Technology Division of ESCWA and co-chair of the Thematic Working Group, presented the Group's findings on science, technology, innovation and culture. He noted that it was an initial effort to map ongoing efforts in support of Regional Preparatory Meeting recommendations and to identify possible new initiatives that could be justified within that framework. It also sought to map what each agency was doing, in order to avoid duplication of efforts. He further noted that the matrix in which these activities are mapped is a working document and welcomed all RCM members to suggest new items or changes over the two weeks immediately following the RCM meeting.

## *2. Discussion*

21. It was noted that greater alignment between AMR and RCM was important, as was following up on the implementation of recommendations made by AMR. Therefore it would be important for the Thematic Working Group to have a multi-year scope, in order to continue its work for at least one year following each AMR, when member countries would be expected to report back on the implementation of recommendations made the previous year.

22. It was further noted that the Thematic Working Group presented an opportunity for the United Nations to rally together in order to assist Governments in translating the often general recommendations into concrete activities and offer support in implementing those activities.

23. The League of Arab States inquired whether they could be a part of the Thematic Working Group and whether they could be invited to the discussions of the Economic and Social Council on the post-2015 development framework or AMR. DESA noted that the president of the Council could invite the League of Arab States to participate and agreed to facilitate such an invitation.

24. DESA further clarified the timelines involved in preparing for the 2013 AMR, the post-2015 consultations and the 2014 AMR. The 2013 AMR will be organized in July 2013. In addition, DESA is preparing a report on the progress towards MDGs and suggestions for the post-2015 development framework for the special session of the General Assembly by September 2013. The September report is also a preparatory document for the July 2014 AMR on MDGs and the post-2015 framework. Regional United Nations actors will be invited to contribute to the report to the General Assembly as well as the preparations for the 2014 AMR.

## **C. SESSION 3 – ENHANCING POLICY COHERENCE**

25. The purpose of this session was to review the key conclusions of the civil society consultation on the post-2015 agenda that was held on 14 March 2013 at the United Nations House, Beirut and to present the reflections of the United Nations on those key conclusions. The session also sought to determine the support that the United Nations could provide to civil society organizations (CSOs).

### *1. Presentations*

26. Ms. Amina Mohamed of the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General, who was connected via videolink to the session, highlighted the importance of including the perspectives of CSOs in the post-2015 development agenda. She stated that the CSO consultation process had started at the Rio+20 Conference with the consultations on sustainable development goals and on financing for development, and that it had



been continuing since then within the framework of thematic national and regional CSO consultations. She set out the coming milestones for this process, highlighting the 25-27 March 2013 meeting in Bali to brief stakeholders on the outcome reports of the CSO consultations, as well as the General Assembly High-Level Panel in September 2013, aimed at discussing the agenda with Member States. She also stressed the importance that CSOs focus on key recommendations based on the social, economic and environmental situation in the Arab region.

27. Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development, which represents CSOs, presented the outcomes of the Arab Regional Consultation on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda, held on 14 March 2013, and reviewed its recommendations. He focused on the framework's structure and on the thematic issues and goals to be included in the post-2015 development agenda. This information is reflected in the Declaration of Civil Society Organizations from the Arab Region on the Post-2015 framework, attached to this report as part of the meeting documentation.

## 2. Discussion

28. Consequent discussions focused on the issues to be captured in the post-2015 development agenda and on moving beyond the concept of 'poverty' captured in MDGs.

29. ILO stressed that employment should be a priority in the new goals and that the new indicators should be clear and measurable. As the only United Nations organization to adopt a tripartite structure that includes Governments, employers and worker representatives, it offered to help mobilize the private sector with regards to this process. UNDP added that the thresholds of the coming indicators should be adapted to the specific conditions of each country, and that the new goals should focus on food and water security. UNDP offered to share the results of its consultations with CSOs, Governments and the private sector in 10 Arab countries through the respective United Nations Country Teams. Finally, the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) stressed the importance that the new goals include access to quality education and to focus on children's rights, freedom of expression and the role of CSOs.

30. ESCWA stated that there was a need to move beyond the MDG concept of 'poverty' and suggested that the broader concept of 'vulnerability' be introduced, which would encompass not only the poor, but also many other groups such as migrants, the unemployed, persons living with HIV, disabled people and youth. The linkage of this concept with a human rights dimension would ensure its relevance and its broad acceptance. Mr. Salah Eddine el Jourshi, a CSO representative, added that there was a need to go back to the Millennium Declaration to formulate a broader development paradigm which would combine economic, political and social factors.

## III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

### A. DATE AND VENUE

31. The eighteenth meeting of RCM was held at the United Nations House, Beirut, on 15 March 2013. It convened three sessions for the discussion of agenda items.

### B. OPENING OF THE SESSION

32. United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, Ms. Rima Khalaf, opened the meeting, noting its objectives. She stressed the importance of civil society engagement and contribution in shaping the post-2015 development agenda. She highlighted that the first RCM Thematic Working Group, linked to the Economic and Social Council AMR, will strengthen coordination between the regional and global dimensions of the United Nations mandate. She referred to the RCM meeting, where participants "committed to integrate demands of freedom, dignity and social justice in the Arab region into our programmes and activities". She maintained that this commitment is still relevant today as democratic

transitions are lengthy and fraught with difficulties, and the people of the region are looking to international and regional institutions for support and guidance. She highlighted the role of RCM as the mechanism that brings together United Nations organizations and the League of Arab States to work effectively and in harmony towards a just and sustainable path to development, a path that ensures that the demands of the peoples are met and honoured. She stated that the post-2015 development agenda must adopt an integrated approach to political, social, economic and cultural rights and freedoms, considering them not merely as enabling factors, but as imperatives for achieving sustainable development.

33. The League of Arab States Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs, Ms. Faeqa Saeed Alsaleh, conveyed the commitment of the League of Arab States to scale up cooperation and coordination with the agencies and organizations of the United Nations in order to better serve the interests of the people of the region. She informed the meeting that a joint United Nations-League of Arab States working group was established to examine ways of further strengthening common action, and added that the General United Nations-League of Arab States Coordination meeting held in Vienna in July 2012 was one of the most successful joint meetings ever held. She warned that conflict and divisions still affect several Arab countries, casting a shadow over the region and threatening the achievement of the development goals and targets.

#### C. PARTICIPANTS

34. The meeting was attended by representatives of regional United Nations agencies, other regional organizations, regional banks, international financial institutions and civil society representatives. A list of participants can be found in annex I to this report.

#### D. DOCUMENTS

35. The list of documents submitted to the eighteenth meeting is contained in annex II of this report.

Annex I\*

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## Annex II

### **LIST OF DOCUMENTS**

Title	Details
OPENING	
Speech by Ms. Rima Khalaf	Under Secretary-General, Executive Secretary of ESCWA
Speech by Ms. Faeqa S. Alsaleh	Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs of League of Arab States
SESSION 1	
United Nations-League of Arab States Cooperation: Strategic Priorities and Progress Report	Presentation by ESCWA Deputy Executive Secretary, Mr. Nadim Khouri
Arab Conference on Implementation of the MDGs	Recommendations of the regional League of Arab States Conference held in Cairo on 2-3 December 2012
Matrix of United Nations-League of Arab States Activities	Matrix of Activities agreed at United Nations-League of Arab States General Meeting in Vienna in July 2012 with updates on progress
Thematic Working Group on International Migration	Concept Note submitted by League of Arab States for RCM consideration
SESSION 2	
Draft Terms of Reference Thematic Working Group	ToR of the TWG on the nexus between the RCM and the AMR for the 2013 session on Science, technology and innovation, and the potential of culture, for promoting sustainable development and achieving the MDGs
Report of the Western Asia Regional Preparatory Meeting on 'Science, technology and innovation for sustainable development' for the 2013 Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council	Report of the meeting held in November 2012 in Amman, Jordan
Matrix of Thematic Working Group tasks	Prepared as an output of the work of the TWG
Integrated STI related Proposals by United Nations Organizations for RCM 2013	Presentation by ESCWA Information and Communication Technology Division Director, Mr. Haidar Fraihat
SESSION 3	
Matrix of Key Activities contributing to the Post-2015 Agenda	Compilation of contributions provided by United Nations organization
Concept Note of the Regional Consultation on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda, Beirut 14 March 2013	Discussion on the Regional Consultation on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda, Beirut 14 March 2013
Declaration of Civil Society Organizations from the Arab Region on the Post-2015 framework, Beirut 14 March 2013	