



United Nations



African Union

Draft concept note

Adhoc experts group meeting

Strengthening subregional coordination in support of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development

Nairobi, Kenya

3 and 4 December, 2018

A. Background

The United Nations regional and subregional coordination mechanisms

1. The United Nations (UN) System recognizes regional cooperation as essential for promoting awareness of the UN core and global values, standards and commitments through its analytical and normative works in the area of development. In this context, UN resolution 32/197 mandated regional commissions to take leadership and responsibility for enhancing cooperation and coordination of UN activities at the regional level, taking into account the special needs and conditions of their respective regions.

2. In the context of UN's cooperation and partnership with Africa, the UN General Assembly has consistently accorded special attention to the needs of the continent. The UN has a rich presence in Africa, and brings many assets and expertise to the region and its member States. In view of the multiplicity of UN agencies and organizations at the regional level, it was found necessary to come up with an institutional arrangement that would ensure effective complementarities and synergies while building a genuine culture of cooperation among partner organizations.

3. Through UN resolution 1998/46, the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC) mandated the regional commissions to hold regular inter-agency meetings in each region with a view to improving coordination among the organizations of the UN system in that region. Consequently, since 1999, the Commissions have been convening regional meetings on policy and programmatic issues of regional nature guided by regional priorities. This has led to the establishment of a formal process for system-wide coherence to further strengthen regional cooperation and coordination, and to adopt more collaborative approaches to support development initiatives through the diverse technical capacities and know-how of the UN system.

4. The Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa (RCM-Africa) and the Subregional Coordination Mechanisms (SRCMs) covering the five subregions of Africa, have become the frameworks for the UN family to work together in supporting the priorities of the African Union (AU) and its organs, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other regional and subregional organizations. RCM-Africa aim to promote and enhance UN system-wide policy coherence, coordination and cooperation at the regional level to 'deliver as one' in response to identified regional priorities and initiatives of the AU.

5. Similarly, the SRCMs serve as vehicles for UN agencies and organizations operating at the subregional level to work with RECs and other intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) with a view to reducing fragmentation in their operations and increasing coherence, coordination and cooperation in their support of their programmes and priorities. There are currently four SRCMs covering North Africa, West Africa, Central Africa and Eastern and Southern Africa¹.

¹ Eastern and Southern Africa is served by one SRCM covering three REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES namely, EAC, COMESA and SADC considering the tripartite arrangement between the three where coordination is already institutionally operational. ECA Sub-regional Office for Eastern Africa (SRO-EA) and ECA Sub-regional Office for Southern Africa (SRO-SA) facilitate the work of this SRCM.

6. In supporting the above-stated objectives, both Mechanisms aim at fulfilling the following functions:

- Coordinating UN system interaction with AU organs and organizations, including the regional economic communities;
- Providing a high-level policy forum for exchanging views on major strategic developments and challenges faced by Africa and its subregions, as well as on the interaction of the region with global level entities;
- Devising coherent regional policy responses to selected global priorities and initiatives, and providing regional perspectives to the global level on such issues, for example, Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (the Goals);
- Promoting policy coherence and joint programming in support of regional and subregional integration efforts and initiatives, for example, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and AU Agenda 2063;
- Promoting inter-agency and inter-organization coordination and collaboration in terms of response to policy recommendations and analytical findings emanating from regional and subregional strategic priorities and plans, including through joint programming;
- Providing forums for exchange of best practices and lessons learned and for interagency and inter-organization analysis and elaboration of interagency and inter-organization normative and analytical frameworks.

Successes and challenges

7. Thus, RCM-Africa and the SRCMs have been supporting the AU and its organizations, including the RECs and other IGOs, through support for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and its successor the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), NEPAD, Agenda 2063, the Ten-Year Capacity-Building Programme for the African Union (10YCBF-AU) and its successor, the Framework for a renewed UN/AU Partnership on Africa's Integration and Development Agenda (PAIDA), 2017-2027.

8. RCM-Africa and the SRCMs have been particularly effective in terms of deepening consultations and refocusing on ways of strengthening the UN-AU partnership and the scaling up of UN support for the AU and its organizations, including the RECs.

9. The annual meetings of RCM-Africa and SRCMs provide an opportunity to take stock of achievements during the year, share experiences and good practices, identify and address challenges, and agree on ways to further improve UN support to the AU and its organs/organizations.

10. While the contribution of the UN has been significant as indicated above, there are still gaps in terms of delivery and concrete results. At the subregional level, ECA's five subregional offices, in their capacity as the secretariats of the SRCMs, have been reporting on UN support to RECs and IGOs. The following remain key issues of concern for the SRCMs:

- *Ownership and leadership by the principal stakeholders:* there are disparities between the roles and levels of participation of the various stakeholders, which has affected performance. Increased ownership of the mechanism both at the level of the UN system, RECs and other IGOs and clear guidance from the beneficiaries will undoubtedly improve the performance of the mechanism. The capacity of RECs and other IGOs to understand

and take ownership of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals should be strengthened. The designation of focal points by each REC for full participation and involvement in the Mechanism is important in alleviating this shortcoming.

- *Weak coordination of activities among the agencies of the United Nations system:* Internal coherence, synergy and coordination of the UN needs strengthening.
- *Overlaps and the duplication of efforts:* There is a need to complete the mapping of the United Nations agencies, RECs and regional UNDGs for a better understanding of their respective comparative advantages, with a view to avoiding overlaps and duplication.
- *Linkages between the regional and the subregional coordination mechanisms:* Annual meetings of the regional and subregional mechanisms are one means but other ways of strengthening the interface between the two need to be investigated.
- *Resource constraints for implementation:* this includes absence of dedicated resources and insufficient time allocation for implementation. Resources must be made available on a sustainable basis for the mechanism to be effective and credible.
- *Unrealistic number of projects to be implemented:* there is a need for partners to agree on the definition and the number of programmes/projects to be implemented in a year (adequate collection of information and follow-up, exact time frame for activities, deadline for focal points to provide information, etc.). This should take into account the need for addressing new and emerging issues.
- *Lack of an effective planning, monitoring and evaluation framework:* there are many constraints at this level explaining the difficulties in demonstrating tangible results and achievements.
- *Weak information and communication channels:* There exists a communication strategy developed by the Advocacy and Communications Cluster and endorsed at the seventeenth session of RCM-Africa. However, there is a need to implement the strategy and the many recommendations made to increase awareness and involvement, and improve the process of providing feedback and sharing information among stakeholders at all levels.

Ongoing UN and AU reforms

11. Through its successive reform programmes, the UN has been working to create a more coherent, effective and efficient support and delivery mechanism to guarantee a better life for all citizens of the world without leaving “no one behind”. The ongoing reform is based on extensive and inclusive consultations within the UN development system and member States, and in-depth analysis of relevant studies and data on the system’s present functions and capacities to support the 2030 Agenda. These consultations provided evidence on gaps and overlaps and makes recommendations for the delivery of the Agenda. The reform is also geared towards improving the accountability and overall coordination of the entities of the United Nations Development System (UNDS) and their oversight by Member States, particularly the RCM and the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG)².

² The UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) is what used to be called the UN Development Group (UNDG).

12. In terms of division of labour, the reform proposal is for the RECs to be “empowered as the lead voice of the UN development system on policy making and research and production of knowledge products at the regional level that nurture integration and balanced progress on sustainable development”. At the country level, the UN Country Teams will “preserve the primary role in supporting national governments in implementing, monitoring and reporting on the SDGs”.

13. The proposed working modalities are to reinforce the coordination between the RCM-policy pillar and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) - operational pillar, with a common secretariat for both mechanisms. In this regard, the existing “Statement of Collaboration” between regional commissions and the UNSDG will be revised to strengthen the partnership and collaboration between regional commissions and the UNSDG with related accountabilities to ensure a clear division of labour”. It is envisaged that the revised statement will include UNDESA and UNCTAD as collaborating partners. In the medium term (2020), partners will work towards one coordinating mechanism by merging the RCM and Regional UNSDGs.

14. At the same time, AU is also implementing its reform agenda informed by the findings of the Kagame report, which was submitted in January 2017. Those relevant to the RCM include the need for the Union to focus on key priorities and to institute a division of labour between the African Union Commission (AUC) and the RECs with regard to their implementation.

The study on Strengthening Subregional Coordination in support of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development

15. In light of the foregoing, the RCM Secretariat commissioned a study on *Strengthening Subregional Coordination in support of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development*. The overall objective is to investigate how the SRCMs could be strengthened to ensure efficient and effective support to RECs and IGOs taking into account the issues and challenges presently faced by the mechanism and emerging ones. The intent is to leverage the momentum in the ongoing AU and UN reforms for a more coordinated and fit-for-purpose support at the subregional level, while ensuring effective linkages with national and regional level UN coordination mechanisms.

16. While its focus is on strengthening the SRCMs in Africa, it is expected to contribute to the reflections on reinforcing synergies between country, subregional and regional level actions and other cost-efficiency and rationalization measures in the context of the AU and UN reforms. This is particularly important for enhancing delivery efficiency in the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, and is in line with the UN System’s continuous search for efficiency in its delivery mechanisms in order to avoid overlaps, duplications and gaps.

B. Objective of the meeting

17. The main objective of the meeting is to provide a platform for participants to deliberate on the draft study report with a view to identifying gaps, provide comments and inputs and propose recommendations, including revisions to inform its finalization. The meeting will also provide a platform for experts and policy makers from African regional and subregional organizations, UN system agencies and organizations, to share experiences, including good practices and lessons, as well as proffer specific, practical and action-oriented

recommendations aimed at strengthening the functioning of the SRCM in the context of the ongoing AU and UN reforms. This will take into account the need to enhance linkages with RCM-Africa and UNCTs, towards the accelerated implementation of subregional priorities and programmes, Agenda 2063, the 2030 agenda for sustainable development in the context of UN-AU cooperation frameworks. The final report and outcomes of the meeting will feed into the 20th Session of the RCM-Africa that will be held in Marrakech, Morocco on 23 and 24 March, 2019.

C. Format of the meeting

18. The draft report on *Strengthening Subregional Coordination in Support of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development* is the main resource of the Meeting. In terms of format, in addition to the opening and closing sessions, the meeting will comprise the following:

(i) Plenary- presentation and general discussion on the draft report

19. The draft study report will be presented at the first plenary session. The presentation will be followed by general discussions aimed at seeking clarification, additional information and providing general comments on key aspects of the report.

(ii) Group discussions

20. Breakout group discussions to permit in-depth review and discussion on the report. Each group will critically examine assigned chapters of the draft report using structured guidelines. Furthermore, each group will review and provide comments, and inputs to the introduction, conclusions, recommendations and next steps.

(iii) Plenary- presentations and discussion on reports of the break-out groups

21. Each break-out group will make presentations on the findings of their deliberations, and as necessary, provide additional comments and inputs to the assigned chapters of the report. The session will provide an opportunity for interaction and cross-fertilization among the various groups.

D. Expected outcomes and outputs

22. The meeting is expected to lead to a number of outcomes:

- A final report informed by well-articulated comments, inputs and recommendations of the meeting;
- Appropriate modalities and measures for strengthening the functioning of the SRCMs in the context of the AU and UN reforms and other cost-efficiency and rationalization measures;
- Effective linkages of SRCMs with RCM-Africa and UNCTs, towards the accelerated implementation of subregional priorities and programmes, Agenda 2063, the 2030 agenda for sustainable development in the context of UN-AU cooperation frameworks;
- Clear understanding and appreciation of the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders at all levels;
- Deeper commitment and more active engagement of UN agencies, AUC, RECs, IGOs in the UN regional, subregional and national coordination mechanism in support of the AU and its subregional bodies.

23. A number of outputs will be delivered at the end of the meeting:

- The meeting report, including a set of specific, practical and action-oriented recommendations to inform the finalization of the study report;
- Press releases and news stories;
- Web publications.

E. Documents

24. Participants will be sent the draft study report, the meeting concept note and programme before the meeting.

F. Participants

25. In addition to officials from ECA Headquarters, its Subregional Offices (SROs) and the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), participants will include officials from the following organizations:

- The African Union Commission (AUC)
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
- Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)
- Eastern African Community (EAC)
- Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
- Southern African Development Community (SADC)
- Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD),
- Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD)
- Union du Maghreb Arabe (UMA)
- Specialised Institutions of RECs
- The NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency
- The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)
- African Development Bank (AfDB)
- UN agencies and organizations

G. Dates and venue

26. The meeting will be held in Nairobi, Kenya, on 3 and 4 December, 2018.

H. Working languages

27. The meeting will be conducted in English.

I. Administrative arrangements

28. These will be provided in a separate information note.

J. Contacts

29. Communication on the meeting should be addressed to:

(i) Technical

Ms. Nozipho Freya Simelane
Economic Affairs Officer, Regional Integration and NEPAD Section
Regional Integration and Trade Division
Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel: +251- 115-445468
E-mail: simelane@un.org

(ii) Administrative

Ms. Zewditu Befekadu
Staff Assistant, Regional Integration and NEPAD Section
Regional Integration and Trade Division
Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel: +251- 115-445785
E-mail: befekaduz@un.org

(iii) ***Copy: technical and administrative communication***

Ms. Isatou Gaye
Chief of NEPAD, Regional Integration and Trade Division
Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel: +251- 115-443089
E-mail: gaye.uneca@un.org