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Item 3

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Consultation with member States
Repositioning of the United Nations development system:
Region-by-region review.

Note by the Secretariat

1. Background

In response to General Assembly resolution A/RES/72/279 of 1 June 2018, the regional architecture of the UN Development System (UNDS) is being revamped in a two-phased approach. The first phase in 2018 focused on optimizing regional mechanisms and structures and identified nine specific deliverables, most of which have either been completed or are in advanced stages of implementation.

The current second phase of the review focuses on the longer-term re-profiling and restructuring of the UN's regional assets on a region-by-region basis. It is managed by an Internal Review Team (IRT) established by the Secretary-General and led by his Special Adviser on Reforms.

Subsequently, the Secretary-General, in his report A/74/73-E/2019/14 of 19 April 2019 on the Implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, made five proposals on key aspects for consideration at the regional level review (see paras 104 –118):

1. Create a unified mechanism for coordination in each region (i.e., a UN Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP)) to foster collaboration on sustainable development across UN development system entities operating at the regional level. The RCP will absorb existing regional coordination mechanisms and comprise of two pillars: an SDG policy pillar and an operational pillar [SG report, para 110].
2. Establish knowledge management hubs in each region by pooling together policy expertise, by or across sectors, available through the almost 8000 human assets in the regions. This will enhance visibility and accessibility of regional assets and facilitate a more agile regional response to country needs [para 113].
3. Initiate a process to enhance transparency and results-based management at the regional level through: strengthening intergovernmental forums; annual reporting on system-wide results of UN entities at the regional level and; clarification of the regional value proposition in each region with transparent information on funding allocations, results and impact [para 114].
4. Initiate a region-by-region change management process consolidating capacities on data and statistics to minimize duplication and foster regional collaboration on data and statistics [para 115].

5. Identify administrative services that could be provided more efficiently to regional offices through common back offices, similar to efforts at the country level. Where feasible, co-location in common premises will also be sought [para 116].

Following a discussion of the Secretary-General's report, the Economic and Social Council adopted the following (resolution E/2019/L.21 of 2 July 2019, para 8):

Also takes note of the proposals of the Secretary-General for revamping the regional approach, reiterates the request contained in General Assembly resolution 72/279 for the Secretary-General to provide options, on a region-by-region basis, for longer-term reprofiling and restructuring of the regional assets of the United Nations, as soon as possible, while taking note of annex III to Council resolution 1998/46 of 31 July 1998 also stresses that further efforts are needed to identify and address gaps and overlaps at the regional level, and looks forward to inclusive, intergovernmental consultations for the finalization and implementation of the regional review, on a region-by-region basis;

2. Format of the intergovernmental consultations

In response to the request by ECOSOC to hold inclusive, intergovernmental consultations in each region, the intergovernmental consultations for the UNECE region will be held as part of the 107th meeting of the Executive Committee on 14 October 2019.

The Executive Secretary of UNECE will briefly introduce the item. To frame the discussion and inspire an interactive dialogue, for each proposal, a short update will present elements of a region-specific approach for consideration. Member States may wish to respond to the respective lead questions contained in this note and provide guidance on their positions that will serve to inform the region-by-region review.

The secretariat will document the main outcomes of the consultations as a contribution to deliberations of the Internal Review Team and the work of the Regional Task Team for Europe and Central Asia that has been established to operationalize the Secretary-General's proposal.

The secretariat of UNECE has invited Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, Chair of the Regional UN Sustainable Development Group Team for Europe and Central Asia and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC), and Regional Directors of the UN system to join the intergovernmental consultations in person or remotely.

3. Region-specific implementation of the Secretary-General's proposals

The Secretary-General's proposals provide a framework for a revamped regional architecture that is to be adapted to regional contexts. The region-by-region customization process will aim at

aligning the proposed framework to the realities of each region while retaining common standards across the regions.

To this end, one UN inter-agency task team per region is established to provide recommendations on how the SG's recommendations might be tailored to the specificities of each region. In our region, a Regional Task Team for Europe and Central Asia has been established, led by the UNECE Executive Secretary and the Chair of the R-UNSDG Team, with strong support from the DCO Regional Director (a.i.), and with participation of focal points from about 20 Agencies, Funds and Programmes and other UN entities.

The focus of the task team is the region-specific operationalization of the Secretary-General's recommendations 2-4 on regional knowledge hubs, results-based reporting and consolidation of statistical capacities, taking into account that proposals 1 and 5 will be operationalized at the global level. The task team has exchanged views on the expectations associated with the regional review and has agreed on a way forward to develop roll-out plans for each proposal under consideration, which will be prepared by recommendation-specific working groups under the task team.

Recommendation #1 – Creation of a UN Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) (for information only)

SG Report para 110:

"First, I intend to create a unified mechanism for coordination in each region – a United Nations regional collaborative platform – to foster collaboration on sustainable development across entities of the United Nations development system operating at the regional level. These platforms will absorb the different United Nations coordination mechanisms that currently exist, in particular the regional coordination mechanisms convened by the regional commissions and the regional teams of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, which bring together agencies, funds and programmes at the regional level providing backstopping support to entity in-country operations."

The SG report further foresees that the high-level meetings of the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) in all regions will be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General and that the Development Coordination Office (DCO) will serve as the platform's secretariat. The work of the RCPs will be organized around an SDG policy pillar and an operational pillar.

The creation of the RCPs will be directly coordinated by the IRT at the global level, ensuring a similar architecture in all regions. It is therefore outside the mandate of the regional task teams.

UN cooperation in the Europe and Central Asia region has intensified significantly over the past 3-5 years, largely in response to the more integrated policy and country support required by the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The two existing interagency coordination mechanisms – the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) and the Regional UN Sustainable Development Group (R-UNSDG) – have held fully integrated, joint Regional UN System Meetings since 2016. This has led to improved coordination and collaborative spirit and, as a result, a range of joint products and activities in terms of advocacy, analysis, operational and programming support and contributions to intergovernmental processes.

The region is therefore well placed to move on to the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP). A consultative process has been launched with all Regional Directors to ensure a smooth transition. The first high-level meeting of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia (RCP-ECA) could be held on Wednesday, 18 March 2020, back-to-back with the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region taking place on 19-20 March 2020.

Recommendation #2 – Providing multi-dimensional support to member States: Knowledge management hubs

SG report para 113:

“Second, I plan to establish strong knowledge management hubs in each region, by pooling the policy expertise, by or across sectors, available through our almost 8,000 human assets today. The regional commissions and the Development Coordination Office will lead this effort, in close consultation with the regional teams of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. This will allow countries – and United Nations country teams – to easily identify the expertise in each region in a unified system, making that expertise more easily accessible to respond to emerging national needs related to the 2030 Agenda. As part of that effort, we will also establish rosters of expertise to ensure that we can quickly deploy surge capacities on key policy issues to respond to specific national requests, which could include, for example, multidimensional visits to support the development of Cooperation Frameworks or national development plans, to address highly specialized policy issues – including in countries in special situations – or, for example, to help bridge United Nations country team expertise in transition country contexts.”

The regional knowledge management hubs are expected to enhance the visibility and accessibility of regional assets, in particular for governments and Resident Coordinators/UN Country Teams. Knowledge management hubs are envisaged to be virtual platforms that will host a database of experts available to provide policy advice and/or deployable at short notice to provide multidimensional support to countries on demand. All countries and UNCTs could have access to

the information, and the country teams would certainly benefit from the expertise placed at the regional level.

Knowledge management hubs are also expected to be the “one stop” entry point for regional-level knowledge products. In this context, they will curate and make available the relevant regional knowledge products. Furthermore, the hubs will also be the platform where forward-looking analysis and a calendar for knowledge products will be published.

Against this background, the task team is considering a number of issues related to the mapping of experts and knowledge products, in particular:

- What are the needs of users, in particular governments and Resident Coordinators/UN Country Teams?
- Could an online guide be useful that points users to specific expertise available within the regional UN system?
- What is the scope and level of detail that is required?
- What type of knowledge products and which experts are useful to be included?
- How should the knowledge be categorized?
- Where should the knowledge platform be anchored and how should it be administered?
- What are the funding and technological implications?

Questions for reflection

What are the needs of member States in terms of tapping into UN system expertise in the region? Could a consolidation and easier access to UN system knowledge be useful? Which opportunities to strengthen knowledge management at the regional level should be realized as part of the UNDS reform, which challenges should be addressed?

Recommendation #3 - System-wide reporting at the regional level

SG report para 114:

“Third, we will implement a series of initiatives to enhance transparency and results-based management at the regional level. This will require the strengthening of regional and subregional intergovernmental forums to further engage Member States and other stakeholders on region-specific issues that may require collective action, such as trade, fiscal policies, technology, migration and climate change. We will also report annually on system-wide results of the United Nations at the regional level in support of the 2030 Agenda,

to be coordinated by the regional commissions with support from the Development Coordination Office to ensure that the full array of contributions of the United Nations development system are reflected. We will also work together to clarify the value proposition of the United Nations system in each region, with transparent information on funding allocation, results and the impact achieved.”

The focus of this proposal is on the preparation of an annual report on system-wide results of the UN at the regional level in support of the 2030 Agenda. Such a report could involve assessment and stock-taking of the collective impact of the activities of regional entities on member States. This includes evaluating the effectiveness of the policy and operational support provided to member States.

Inputs to such reports could emanate from the outcomes of the programmatic activities of issues-based coalitions and from the implementation of the transboundary and regional aspects of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework at the country-level. Reporting could also be underpinned by a results framework that tracks performance against defined baselines. The QCPR monitoring and reporting framework could serve as useful reference point for system-wide reporting at the regional level in this context., taking into account existing practices of QCPR monitoring and reporting.

Questions for reflection

What type of results-based report by the regional UN system would be useful for member States? What should be the scope and format?

Recommendation #4 - Strengthening the data ecosystem

SG report para 115:

“Fourth, I propose to launch a region-by-region change management process that will seek to consolidate existing capacities with regard to data and statistics, as well as other relevant analytical functions that may be currently duplicative. This exercise will have to be unique to each region and will be detailed and fleshed out in full consultation with each regional commission and respective regional team of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Any related changes to existing structures or budgets will be submitted to United Nations legislative committees for endorsement by Member States prior to implementation.”

The proposal calls for a more joined-up approach that connects the different parts of the regional data ecosystem to ensure coherent messaging including through harmonized data and reporting standards. A way forward could be the creation of a regional expert group of the regional UN system

on data and statistics focusing on the statistical needs of the 17 programme countries in the region and based on the existing Issue-based Coalition on SDG Data and Statistics. The UNECE Regional Advisor in Statistics would lead capacity development activities involving UN country teams and would co-chair the expert group. The Conference of European Statisticians (CES) will serve as the group's major interface with the intergovernmental sphere and National Statistical Offices.

Questions for reflection:

Would member states agree with the proposed approach?

Recommendation #5 - Management and Administrative: Common back offices
(for information only)

SG report para 116:

"Fifth, I am requesting the Deputy Secretary-General to work with entities of the United Nations development system to identify administrative services that could be provided more efficiently to regional offices through common back offices (such as human resources and procurement), similar to our efforts at the country level. Where feasible, co-location in common premises will also be sought."

Implementation of common back offices (CBO) and co-location of regional offices, where feasible, will involve close collaboration with the Business Innovation Group that is coordinating implementation of the CBO process, but currently focusing largely on the country-level with a target to implement CBO in all countries by 2022. The concept development and timelines for the implementation of a regional CBO and co-location of regional offices will need to follow the global level processes and is therefore not addressed at the regional level.

Furthermore, this recommendation does not apply to UNECE, as the Commission does not have subregional offices. It may be considered for other UN system entities in the region.