Report of the sixteenth session

Theme of the session: "United Nations system support for the African Union's Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063

28-29 March 2015
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Economic and Social Council

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Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa
Sixteenth session

Addis Ababa, 28 and 29 March 2015

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Theme of the session: "United Nations system support for the African Union's Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063"

I. Opening of the session [agenda item 1]

A. Attendance

1.   The sixteenth session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa of United Nations agencies and organizations working in Africa in support of the African Union and its NEPAD programme (RCM-Africa) was held on 28 and 29 March 2015 in Addis Ababa. The session was co-chaired by Mr. Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, and Mr. Martial De-Paul Ikounga, Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology of the African Union Commission.

2.   The agenda for the session was based on the draft agenda circulated in document ECA/RCM/16/1/Add.1, as follows:

  1.   Opening of the session
  2.   Discussions on the theme of the session: United Nations system support for the African Union's Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063
  3.   New framework for the United Nations-African Union partnership
  4.   Consolidated progress report of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa and the subregional coordination mechanisms
  5.   Alignment of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa clusters
  6.   Managing the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the sustainable development goals

3. The session was attended by representatives of the African Union Commission, United Nations agencies and organizations, the Planning and Coordinating Agency of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), regional economic communities, and African development partners. The full list of participants will be issued and circulated in a separate document.

4. In his welcoming remarks, Mr. Lopes underscored the importance of the regional coordination mechanisms as tools for cooperation and coordination of United Nations' activities at the regional level. He noted that the sixteenth session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa (RCM-Africa) provided a timely opportunity for all members of the United Nations system to reaffirm their commitment to the African Union, whose member States were building on the legacy of the Millennium Development Goals in an ambitious post-2015 development agenda of universal scope, comprising sustainable development goals which would take account of key issues not addressed by the Millennium Development Goals. It was essential to transform the commitments of Agenda 2063 into actions leading to long-term tangible results across the entire continent of Africa.

5. In view of the theme of the current session and the adoption of Agenda 2063 by African Heads of State and Government in January 2015, it was vital to ensure that efforts to attain the goals of Agenda 2063 were underpinned by good governance, respect for human rights and the empowerment of women and girls. While there had been notable improvements in the lives of women and girls around the world, sustainable solutions still had to be found to such issues as gender gaps, the participation of women in leadership and the enforcement of women's legal rights if discrimination against women was to be finally eliminated. To that end, continued efforts should be made to enhance the functioning of RCM-Africa and to leverage its unique advantages of collaboration, coherence and continuity.

6. In his opening statement, Mr. Ikounga recalled that the African Union Assembly had also decided to make the issue of the human rights of women its focus in 2016: as a result, the African Union Commission would be dedicating two years in a row to its agenda on women. In the context of the implementation of Agenda 2063, paramount importance attached in 2015 to the issue of the financial inclusion of women, in particular in agribusiness, given that women constituted 70 per cent of the continent's agricultural workforce. The draft framework for a new partnership for African Union-United Nations relations was another important development, emerging from extensive consultations among all the stakeholders involved. The new framework had a greater chance of succeeding than its predecessor because of its close alignment to African Union priorities, as outlined in Agenda 2063, its 10-year implementation plan, the strategic plan of the African Union Commission and the common African position on the post-2015 development agenda.

7.   The final remarks at the opening session were delivered, via a video message, by Mr. Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. In his statement, Mr. Eliasson recognized the significant contribution made by Africa to the discourse on the post-2015 development agenda through Agenda 2063 and the common African position. In that process, the forthcoming International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in Addis Ababa in July 2015, was of particular significance, as the first arena in which Africa's leadership would be needed on the issue of implementation. The year 2015 also marked the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which chimed well with the theme of the current session of RCM-Africa, and RCM-Africa should accordingly focus its efforts at the session on United Nations support in that thematic area. In Africa, women's empowerment was of crucial importance for the transformative development of the continent. Africa's vision for the future was the shared objective of the United Nations and the African Union and, as such, the United Nations remained deeply committed to supporting efforts by the African Union to achieve lives of dignity for all citizens of the continent.

II.   Discussions on the theme of the session: United Nations system support to the African Union's Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063 [agenda item 2]

A.   Introduction

8.   The first three plenary meetings were devoted to panel discussions of aspects of the theme of the session, as detailed below. To launch the discussions, Mr. Anthony Mothae Maruping, Commissioner for Economic Affairs, African Union Commission, gave a presentation on the African Union's Agenda 2063. He explained the rationale for developing Agenda 2063 in a changing global and African context: the Agenda should be seen as a new phase in efforts by Africans to catalyse the development of the continent and strengthen African integration and unity.

9.   The main objective of the Agenda was the acceleration of the continent's development, focusing on eight key areas: African identity and renaissance; the struggle against colonialism and the right to self-determination of people still under colonial rule; integration measures; social and economic development; peace and security; democratic governance; Africa's destiny; and Africa's place in the world.

B.   Panel discussion 1: United Nations system support for the African Union's Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063

10.   The first plenary meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Maruping and Mr. Lopes. The panellists were Mr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict; Ms. Bineta Diop, Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, African Union Commission; Ms. Lakshmi Puri, Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women); and

Ms. Matshidiso Rebecca Moeti, Regional Director for Africa, World Health Organization (WHO).

1. Presentations

11.   Ms. Febe Potgieter-Gqubule, Special Advisor of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, made a presentation on the significance of Agenda 2063 for the empowerment of women and youth. She stressed that the Agenda put women and youth at the centre of development and the choice of 2015 as the Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063 was testimony to that objective. Accordingly, the Agenda recognized the crucial role of women in the African social, economic and cultural renaissance and responded to the growing call for measures to strengthen the role, in particular, of young women in all sectors of society.

12.   Given the important contribution made by women to society in general, it was vital to mainstream gender in all the aspirations of Agenda 2063 and to include a specific goal on gender and women's equality. Given the wide range of important goals pursued under Agenda 2063, there was need for policy and institutional strengthening, reporting and accountability, and coordination and cooperation among stakeholders at different levels. RCM-Africa represented a good example of how coordination could help to synergize efforts, including in the roll-out of Agenda 2063, realization of which would be guided by the 10-year implementation plan to be adopted in June 2015.

13.   Following that presentation, the co-chairs raised a number of keys points to frame the discussion, including the need to reduce maternal mortality; to eliminate gaps in education; to increase economic opportunities for women and girls; to give women an equal voice; and to eliminate gender inequality across generations. They highlighted the importance of investing in human resources and human capital, particularly in women and youth, and of upholding gender equality as a premise of economic development and a cross-cutting objective of Agenda 2063, the incorporation of which at the national level must be vigorously promoted.

2. Discussion

14.   In the ensuing discussion, the panellists stressed the need to speed up implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action, while maintaining its principles. To date, implementation had been too slow and, at the current pace, gender equality in economic participation would only be achieved after more than 80 years and in political participation after more than 50 years. Substantial budgetary allocations were needed for gender equality and women's empowerment.

15.   In view of the specific challenges facing women in Africa, including socioeconomic inequalities, gender-based discrimination, health pandemics and maternal health issues, concerted practical action was needed to ensure achievement of the objectives of Agenda 2063. Steps must be taken, in particular, to ensure the equal rights of women and their access to justice and resources; to end violence against women and girls; to provide access to sexual and reproductive health services and education; to provide good quality education; to guarantee equal pay for work of equal value; to ensure access to decent jobs and

social protection services; to give women full representation and participation in decision-making processes at all levels, in particular in times of conflict and post-conflict periods; and to eliminate stereotypes about women and girls.

16.   Multisectoral engagement, networking and cooperation among different stakeholders, in particular in the priority areas of the 10-year implementation plan, such as gender equality, the empowerment of women and youth, good governance, science, technology and innovation, peace and security, culture sport and arts, were key to attaining the goals of Agenda 2063.

17.   Africa had an immense potential demographic dividend, given that more than 60 per cent of its population comprised young people, half of whom were girls. Accordingly, resources allocated to services targeted at girls, women and youth in health, education, employment and other sectors should not be considered as a cost, but rather as an investment in the development of the continent. Attention should also be given to the link between gender and environment: climate change had a stronger impact on women and girls because of their role in food production and household energy use.

18.   Women were also more vulnerable in other social processes, such as urbanization and migration, and governments should strive for an integrated approach to implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in June 1993, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in September 1994, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. There was also need for a common African position on women and girls, to ensure that adequate resources were invested in their potential, since investing in women was investing in the entire community.

19.   The health of women was also crucial to the flourishing of society, given the role of women in their communities: securing good health for women would have a positive impact on families and communities. Investing in women's health was therefore smart investment and public policies were needed to ensure health insurance, resilient health services, strategies to protect families and good quality health data.

20.   Traditionally, sexual violence in conflict had always been considered a crime of lesser significance affecting second-class citizens and treated as collateral damage. There was now growing awareness of the problem, thanks to enhanced reporting and new legal frameworks, established among others by the United Nations Security Council. For its part, the African Union had shown a similar commitment to the issue, through the appointment of its Special Envoy on Women Peace and Security. What was needed next was the political will to translate those commitments into action: policies alone were not enough and more action was expected from member States to tackle the problem, which was growing worse: over half of the victims of sexual violence were children and sexual violence was increasingly being used as a weapon of war and terror to destroy communities and entire generations. Given the high correlation between poverty, the social status of women and sexual violence, the economic empowerment and education of women were critical to eliminating that evil practice.

21.   Agenda 2063 represented the aspiration of African citizens for a prosperous continent at peace with itself and the rest of the world. Already significant progress had been made towards that goal and a range of good practices were evident in different African countries and continental organizations. To maintain that momentum, it was vital to have a framework for the monitoring of progress through clear and specific indicators (such as the number of women in peace negotiations, in peacekeeping operations, in mediation, and in other influential roles), and to have accurate and comprehensive data. Accordingly, regular reporting was required by member States on progress in the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda, and also of Agenda 2063. The proposed continental results framework on women, peace and security was intended to serve this purpose, providing clear indicators for monitoring implementation, and measures to develop it further and promote its implementation were already under way at both the continental and the international levels.

C.   Panel discussion 2: Economic empowerment and entrepreneurship of women

22.   The second plenary meeting was chaired by Ms. Fatima Haram Acyl, Commissioner of Trade and Industry at the African Union Commission, and Mr. Maged Abdelaziz, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Africa. The panellists were Mr. Engida Getachew, Deputy Director-General, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Ms. Aisa Kirabo Kacyira, Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Ms. Mwila Chigaga, Senior Regional Specialist on Gender Equality, International Labour Organization (ILO), and Mr. Thomas Yanga, Director, World Food Programme (WFP) Africa Office and Representative to the African Union and ECA.

1.   Presentations

23.   In their presentations the panellists stressed the need to streamline practical issues of gender equality and women's empowerment at the forthcoming global forums on climate change and financing for development and to ensure that women's empowerment was mainstreamed into the sustainable development goals to be discussed by the General Assembly in 2015.

24.   In particular, it must be understood that every African woman was an entrepreneur and had great potential to be productive. Accordingly, African governments needed to implement affirmative action measures for women's entrepreneurship to help them succeed in the market, in particular by facilitating their access to productive resources (land, finance, social protection particularly maternal protection). There was need for stronger, evidence-based policies in that area, supported by monitoring and evaluation of progress and underpinned by accurate (including sex-disaggregated) data at macro and micro-levels. Examples were cited of joint, inter-agency programmes, to promote women's empowerment and entrepreneurship.

25.   To succeed as entrepreneurs, women needed access to financing: putting money in the hands of women contributed to poverty reduction and helped tackle the root causes of hunger. It was vital to engage the private sector to facilitate access to financing at levels above micro-financing. Other channels such as venture capital, commercial banks and large financial institutions also needed to be engaged. Experience from countries in the region had demonstrated the important role that banks could play in championing women's entrepreneurship by mainstreaming the concept of inclusive financing into financial policymaking. Partnerships with governments, civil society and the private sector also played a vital role in that endeavour.

26.   Education – of good quality and at secondary and tertiary levels – was also key to the empowerment of women. The large disparity between girls and boys in secondary and tertiary school must be overcome and focus placed on non-traditional sectors such as technology, engineering, innovation, finance and economics, thereby addressing weaknesses identified during the review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In addition, enhancing knowledge and skills in financial literacy and budgeting was crucial for the greater involvement of women in the development of gender responsive macro-economic and fiscal policies.

27.   The interaction between gender and poverty was also a potential source of exclusion, with the poorest girls often left behind in the area of education. By current trends, in sub-Saharan Africa universal completion of primary school would only be achieved in 2069 for boys and in 2086 for girls in the poorest sectors. In conflict-affected areas, girls were at the bottom of all indicators, from school enrolment to literacy. Secondary education remained a weak point in the learning cycle of girls because of costs, pregnancies and security concerns. Yet literacy empowered girls and women, enabling them to seek out vital information and to make informed choices, thereby participating effectively participate in the economy.

28.   Maternal health protection was also of great importance, given the overlap between women's reproductive years and their economically productive years. ECA was engaged in joint programmes with the World Bank and UN-Habitat to tackle issues of health protection, with particular attention to the health needs of women in specific circumstances, such as slums. Urbanization also had serious impacts on women: cities were developing in Africa often without planning and proactive leadership: as a result, only 3 per cent of women on the continent had access to land. There was therefore a need to invest and plan urbanization, as it was an important tool for economic empowerment.

29.   Women's access to productive resources must also be enhanced as women constituted 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force and accounted for the production of 60–80 per cent of the world's food. Increasing women's productivity would empower them economically and lift more than 150 million people out of hunger.

2. Discussion

30.   In the ensuing discussion, participants highlighted the need for behaviour change at all levels, to move from the mere formulation of rules and standards to practical action in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Furthermore, in carrying out the 10-year implementation plan for Agenda 2063, the timelines between United Nations and African Union processes must be synchronized. A multisectoral response was needed, combining the efforts of education, labour, finance and health ministries. In that process, strong political commitment was required and useful lessons could be learned from countries where deliberate government polices had helped enhance women's contribution in urbanization processes as service providers: women gave back more than expected when they were given opportunities.

31.   Innovative strategies were needed to promote women's economic empowerment, for example, by narrowing the gap between the formal and informal sectors and encouraging shifts from reproductive to productive roles by providing women with access to training and technology. In particular, more attention must be given to women's entrepreneurship in agriculture, given their large role in that sector. They needed full access to and control over land, capital, technology, services, skills and markets. More attention must be given to women's entrepreneurship in agriculture given women's large role in this sector. That included measures to ensure their full access to, and control over, land, capital, technology, services, skills and markets, and to develop their agro-processing and value chains.

32.   When pursuing gender equality in education, the scope of the campaign should be widened beyond schools, to include the workplace, community learning centres, and even technical and vocational training. It was important to take a lifelong approach to education and training.

33.   There were strong linkages between women's basic safety, security and development and women and girls should be more extensively involved in justice, peace-building, security, reconciliation and accountability mechanisms and structures, at all levels. Similarly, those structures should integrate a gender and women's rights perspective into their work, in order to end impunity and ensure the protection of civilians, including women, girls, the disabled and other vulnerable groups.

D.   Panel discussion 3: Financing for women's empowerment and development

34.   The third plenary meeting was chaired by Ms. Potgieter-Gqubule and Mr. Osotimehin. The panellists comprised: Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Special Envoy of the African Development Bank on Gender, Ms. Elizabeth Rasekoala, co-founder of SET4 Women and the Southern African Reference Group on Gender, Science and Technology, Ms. Tacko Ndiaye, Senior Gender and Rural Development Officer, FAO Africa Regional Office, and Ms. Birtukan G. Egziabeher, Vice-President, Enat Bank of Ethiopia.

1.   Presentations

35.   In their presentations, the panellists highlighted the links between gender equality and poverty and growth and the resulting need to include gender equality among the goals of Africa's transformative agenda. In developing Agenda 2063, en effort should be made to identify the cost of the gender deficit, as was being done for the infrastructure deficit in Africa: the cost of Africa's gender deficit was likely to be much the same as that of the infrastructure deficit.

36.   A good business case could be made for gender equality and women's empowerment. Women represented a large untapped market in the banking sector, as only one in five had bank accounts. The banking sector should thus champion gender mainstreaming in the financial sector. Where finance was concerned, however, gender equality and women's empowerment should be funded primarily through domestic resource mobilization, as competition with other sectors made it difficult for funding to be obtained from the public purse. Ministries of finance and other sectoral ministries should pursue gender-disaggregated national budgeting, to ensure that gender was mainstreamed in public finance management. Best practices in that regard could be learned from other countries in Africa where successful practices had been adopted.

37.   A financing strategy for Agenda 2063 was needed which placed more emphasis on domestic resources mobilization, including curbing illicit financial flows and corruption in the region. Financing women's economic empowerment should go beyond microfinance support for small-scale businesses and, instead, encourage women to undertake large-scale ventures with the support of large financial institutions.

38.   A framework for supporting the gender equality and empowerment of women should include inclusive agricultural growth, capacity-building, innovative financing, market access, skills and technology for women farmers. Member States were urged to implement the 2003 Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security, which called on member States to devote 10 per cent of their public expenditure to agriculture and to harness the benefits of innovative financial mechanisms with targets for financing gender equality and women's empowerment.

39.   Women who were economically and financially empowered were more productive, saved more, had healthier and better educated children and their prosperity had a domino effect on society. Key areas that should be developed in that regard included macroeconomic and fiscal policies, using credit and savings methodologies that could reach women in poverty, innovative transactions that reduced costs and the opening of special lending windows for women who lacked collateral such as land. The financial empowerment of rural women was of critical importance in harnessing their full entrepreneurship potential for inclusive agricultural growth, and for the alleviation of hunger, malnutrition and rural poverty.

40.   Strategies were needed to foster the financial and economic empowerment of women and to boost their participation in the following private economic sectors:

    (a)   Clean renewable energy: private sector procurement policies should also target women, through affirmative policies, to ensure their participation in industries that used clean and renewable energy. Financial institutions should help women to gain access to credit, to finance their entrepreneurial participation in those industries;

    (b)   Oil and gas and the extractive industries: women should be brought into the extractive industry supply chains and engaged as skilled professionals, in particular given that, in some five years, 15 African countries would have become major producers of oil or gas, creating opportunities for women;

    (d)   Infrastructure development: women must be encouraged to become entrepreneurs and professionals in the many massive infrastructure projects under way across Africa, which were worth billions of dollars and could greatly further the economic and financial empowerment of women;

    (e)   Agricultural transformation: women must be empowered in agricultural value chains, agribusinesses and agro-industries, to raise their productive capacity and incomes, increase their access to decent wage employment, and strengthen their resilience to shocks.

41.   Existing best practices in certain countries should be emulated by other countries, such as those of Enat Bank in Ethiopia, which promoted gender equality and women's economic empowerment in its operations.

2.   Discussion

42.   In the ensuing discussion, participants stressed the need for overarching policies which promoted gender equality and women's empowerment in the private sector. It was also vital that programmes designed by the African Union, United Nations agencies and NEPAD were gender-sensitive and promoted women's economic empowerment.

43.   When encouraging stakeholders to go beyond a mere focus on microfinance in supporting women's economic empowerment, it was important to surmount constraints preventing women's businesses from growing and qualifying for access to commercial bank loans. Attention must also be given to the prohibitive interest rates that also inhibited access to bank loans. In general, the entire financial landscape needed to be structurally transformed in concert with the economic structural transformation under way in Africa. In that regard, the issues of women's empowerment and gender equality should be at the heart of the discussions on the financing strategy for Agenda 2063.

E.   Recommendations from the plenary meetings

44.   At the end of the three plenary meetings, agreement was reached on a number of recommendations in support of Agenda 2063.

1.   Plenary 1: United Nations system support for the African Union's Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063

45.   In the light of the panel discussion on the topic of United Nations system support for the African Union's Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063, RCM-Africa agreed on the following recommendations:

(a)   The United Nations should support the 10-ten year implementation plan for Agenda 2063 with a focus on enhancing gender equality and women's empowerment;

(b)   African member States should ensure that the priorities of women and girls are mainstreamed in the goals, targets and indicators of Agenda 2063 and its 10-year implementation plan and should stipulate time frames, carry out monitoring and evaluation, and ensure accountability for implementation;

(c)   African member States should ensure that the rights and priorities of refugee and internally displaced women and girls are accorded equal attention, given the negative effects of ongoing and protracted conflicts on the continent that have caused the forcible displacement of millions of women and girls both within their countries and outside their borders to neighbouring States;

(d)   African member States should ensure that gender equality, the empowerment of women and women's rights and gender-sensitive targets and indicators are included in the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals, in line with the priorities of Agenda 2063 and with emphasis on monitoring, evaluation and accountability for implementation;

(e)   African member States should devote necessary resources to women's organizations and initiatives to ensure that women's rights are protected and that women and girls receive appropriate services;

(f)   African member States should promote gender budgeting and devote adequate resources for the education of girls and young women and ensure equal enrolment in quality primary, secondary and tertiary education and vocational training, along with gender parity in completion rates, particularly in subjects that would enhance their empowerment such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics;

(g)   African member States should put in place appropriate mechanisms to reduce and eliminate the maternal mortality of women and girls. In this regard, African member States should ensure that expectant mothers have access to health information and services, and also to food and nutrition, clean water, sanitation and other important resources;

(h)   African member States and the international community should ensure adequate, dedicated and sustainable resources, including political leadership and financial, human and technical resources, for the implementation of the agenda for women, peace and security, including for the development and implementation of national action plans on Security Council resolution 1325, and for the implementation of Agenda 2063 and its 10-year implementation plan;

(i)   African member States should ensure the full representation and active participation of women in all national structures and processes for conflict prevention and resolution, peacemaking, peacekeeping, reconciliation, justice and security sector reform, election management, constitutional reform, countering terrorism and violent extremism and post-conflict reconstruction and development;

(j)   The African Union Commission, the regional economic communities, and African member States should accelerate the implementation of the outcome of the 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;

(k)   African member States should eliminate gender differences by putting in place appropriate policies and laws that strengthen women's control over household resources, their ability to accumulate assets and their property rights;

(l)   African member States should ensure equal participation and representation of women at all levels of Africa's political leadership and decision-making structures, including in government, judicial and security institutions, and in private institutions, with the aim of ensuring that women occupy at least half of elected public offices at all levels and half of management positions in the public and private sector. Governments should consider implementing quota systems to help achieve these aims, and also gender mechanisms and offices in all government ministries and institutions;

(m)   African member States should put in place policies and strategies that expand women's socioeconomic rights and opportunities, in particular in respect of women's economic opportunities, earnings and productivity; maternal mortality and women's reproductive rights; access to education; and women's power to act and to have their voices heard;

(n)   African member States should address the increasing violation of the rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings and enhance the role played by women in conflict prevention, peace-building and resolution processes;

(o)   African member States should establish and implement legislation that empowers, protects and upholds the rights of young women and girls, including laws that give women and girls the right to own, purchase and inherit land and productive assets; ensure their reproductive rights; and prohibit early, child and forced marriages and all forms of violence against women, including sexual and gender-based violence, and female genital mutilation;

(p)   Impunity for violence against women should be ended by establishing comprehensive and effective legal frameworks and strengthening the capacity of judicial institutions to ensure full implementation of relevant legislation;

(q)   Legislative capacities should be strengthened to ensure an adequate response to the gender impact of cross-border and regional dimensions of conflicts and humanitarian crises, including arms and human trafficking, and the displacement of women and children;

(r)   Economic empowerment and secondary and tertiary education opportunities for women and girls should be promoted, as a strategy for combating sexual violence against women, uplifting their social status and eradicating poverty;

(s)   The United Nations should continue its reviews of peace operations and peacebuilding and carry out the proposed global study on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), and should fully integrate the priorities of African women and girls, including as outlined in the recommendations from the high-level dialogue convened in March 2015 at United Nations Headquarters, on the theme "Towards a continental results framework on women, peace and security in Africa".

2.   Plenary 2: Economic empowerment and entrepreneurship of women

46.   In the light of the panel discussion on the economic empowerment and entrepreneurship of women, RCM-Africa agreed on the following recommendations:

(a)   African member States should devote appropriate human and financial resources to building the capacities of women entrepreneurs;

(b)   African member States should adopt affirmative action policies for women's entrepreneurship, in particular with regard to access to productive resources (land, finance, social protection and, in particular, maternal protection);

(c)   African member States should encourage women entrepreneurship in all sectors of the economy including such non-traditional sectors as oil and gas, infrastructure and banking;

(d)   African member States should put in place strategies and policies that help break the glass ceiling preventing the advancement of women, so that more women have the opportunity to assume leadership roles in public and private companies;

(e)   African member States should put in place policies and strategies that encourage public and private companies to be accessible and conducive to women. In this regard, mechanisms must be put in place to make the work environment more flexible, both men and women encouraged to take parental leave, and more women promoted to higher positions, which will in turn create more mentors and role models for young women and girls;

(f)   The African Union and African member States should engage the private sector and form partnerships with it to leverage its ability to empower young African women and girls, including through gender-sensitive work policies, conducive work environments, investment in corporate social responsibility,

purchasing from women-led enterprises throughout their value chains, providing training and education, and establishing relevant public-private partnerships.

3. Plenary 3: Financing for women's empowerment and development

47. In the light of the panel discussion on the economic empowerment and entrepreneurship of women, RCM-Africa agreed on the following recommendations:

(a) Member States and the international community should devote adequate resources to gender equality and women's empowerment in the post-2015 development agenda;

(b) African member States should invest in gender equality and women's empowerment. In this regard, they should ensure that both human and financial resources are devoted to gender equality and women empowerment in Agenda 2063;

(c) African member States should put in place policies and strategies that encourage financial institutions to offer products and services targeted at women entrepreneurs;

(d) African member States should put in place policies, strategies and mechanisms that seek to remove all forms of structural barriers to women's access to financial products and services;

(e) African member States should adopt strategies to enhance women's capacity to influence macro-economic policy processes, such as the budgetary allocation of resources, and the design and implementation of monetary policies by central banks, trade policies and agreements;

(f) African member States should enact appropriate laws to strengthen the ability of women in rural Africa gain access to finance. In this regard, they should encourage financial institutions to devise innovative ways of removing the difficulties that women face in posting collateral assets in support of applications for loans;

(g) African member States should put in place policies and strategies that ensure a legal and regulatory framework on property and land rights for women; enable women to move beyond microfinance and into regular financial services; and encourage financial institutions to develop a diversified range of gender-responsive financial products that meet the needs of different groups of women;

(h) The United Nations should support the African Union, regional economic communities and member States in implementing goals and targets on gender equality and women's empowerment, including through relevant programming, capacity-building support, global advocacy, and support for national and regional statistical commissions;

(i) United Nations agencies, under the leadership of the African Union and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in close collaboration with UN-Women, should strengthen and expand the implementation of the capacity building programme on gender and macroeconomic policy management,

targeting economists, planners, and development practitioners, both men and women, for them to formulate and implement gender-responsive policies, strategies, programmes and budgets that deliver to both men and women.

III.   New framework for the United Nations-African Union partnership
[agenda item 3]

A.   Dialogue

48.   The fourth plenary meeting was chaired by Mr. Maruping and Ms. Kacyira. The panellists comprised Mr. Abdelaziz, Mr. Haile Menkerios, Head of the United Nations Office to the African Union and Special Representative to the African Union, Mr. Abdalla Hamdok, Deputy Executive Secretary of ECA, and Mr. Lebobogang Motlana, Director, UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa.

49.   The co-chairs commended the technical working group and its senior consultant, Mr. Crispin Grey-Johnson, on its preparation of the report on the framework for a renewed United Nations-African Union partnership on Africa's integration and development agendas.

1.   Presentations

50.   To launch the discussion, representatives of the African Union Commission made a presentation on the report, outlining the rationale of the new framework, its guiding principles, the African Union's development agenda as encapsulated in Agenda 2063, the common African position on the post-2015 development agenda and the strategic plan of the African Union Commission for 2014–2017. They outlined the 10 priorities of the first 10-year implementation plan for the Agenda and underscored the important need for the United Nations system to align its support to the identified issue areas, to accelerate implementation of the implementation plan. They stressed the ownership of that process by the African Union Commission and its leadership role in driving the new framework and highlighted the critical need for resources for implementation. They drew attention to areas of the report that needed further attention.

51.   In their presentations, panellists highlighted interrelated issues crucial for the effective implementation of Agenda 2063 and its 10-year action plan. Those included the need for synchronization of actions through systematic planning, coordination and the harnessing of synergies in delivering on continental and international goals in the short, medium and long term, as enunciated in existing and emerging development frameworks with different dates, timelines and issue areas. Harmonization of those timelines would be essential in prioritizing United Nations support for Africa. It was also essential to strengthen the engagement and role of the regional economic communities and the NEPAD Agency in the development and implementation of the proposed framework, at both strategic and operational levels.

52.   Dedicated resources were also needed, to support both RCM-Africa and the subregional regional coordination mechanisms in the implementation of the new framework. Great importance also attached to partnerships that included the private sector and civil society, and also the gender, women and youth structures within the African Union and the regional economic communities.

53.   In view of the importance of monitoring, evaluation and accountability, use should be made of the existing United Nations monitoring mechanism to review commitments made towards Africa's development and African Union monitoring capabilities. In addition, the United Nations and the African Union should consider the possibility of a five-year review on the progress of implementation of the new framework at the levels of the African Union Assembly and the General Assembly, and also expand the partnership within RCM-Africa to include member States, as a strategy for expanding the global partnerships and enhancing the legitimacy of Agenda 2063.

54.   In relation to the close interconnection between peace and development, the United Nations recognized that, without the African Union Commission and the regional economic communities, it would be unable effectively to tackle the question of peace and security on the African continent; for their part, the African Union Commission and the regional economic communities recognized that they could not face challenges such as terrorism, refugee flows, proliferation of arms and others without partners. That truth had been amply demonstrated by recent joint collaboration efforts between the United Nations, the African Union and regional economic communities in tackling crises in Africa. Such partnerships should be based on clear principles of equality and mutual interests, alongside leadership and ownership by the African Union and respect for African policy space. United Nations support should be linked to the priorities of the African Union, as outlined in Agenda 2063, and its response and scope of responsibilities should be articulated in the context of RCM-Africa and the subregional coordination mechanisms.

55.   With regard to challenges arising in such areas as partnership and ownership, and also the need for targeted intervention and resource mobilization, useful lessons could be learned from the existing cooperation framework between UNDP and the African Union Commission. In addition, advantage should be taken of forthcoming opportunities such as the forthcoming global summits on financing for development and climate change in further developing the new framework of partnership between the United Nations and the African Union, in order to strengthen the collaboration between the two bodies in tackling Africa's problems.

2.   Discussion

56.   In the ensuing discussion, participants reviewed the format, substance, funding and process of finalization of the report. Where the format was concerned, some called for the inclusion of an executive summary highlighting the priorities at the beginning of the document. On substance, it was noted that the priorities were too broad and should be shortened, to prioritize certain overarching goals. In addition, greater attention should be given to the issues of eradicating violence and discrimination against women and universalizing sexual and reproductive health rights. There was also need for a results-based framework that would facilitate effective monitoring, reporting and accountability, and for data and statistics aggregated at local, national, regional and continental levels.

57.   On funding, there was concern that the current provision in the report, calling on all United Nations agencies to make regular financial provisions, was

not feasible as United Nations agencies had different funding mechanisms. Instead, consideration could be given to means of ensuring an inclusive resource mobilization approach, including through trust funds. In addition, the alignment of national budgets to the sustainable development process could be explored as an avenue for resource mobilization. Where process was concerned, it was important to follow the "Delivering as one" approach at the regional level and to make use of the Development Operations Coordination Office in enhancing that effort.

58.   As the technical working group had completed its work, the African Union Commission would thenceforth be responsible for finalizing the report for submission to the Assembly of the African Union in June 2015 and thereafter to the General Assembly. Important revisions still had to be made, however, including the addition of a results framework, and it was hoped that the United Nations would collaborate with the African Union Commission in making those changes, although the results framework would have to wait until the renewed United Nations-African Union partnership framework had been approved by the General Assembly.

B. Recommendations

59.   Following that dialogue, participants agreed on the following recommendations:

        (a)   The proposed new framework for the United Nations-African Union partnership should be anchored on Agenda 2063 and its 10-year implementation plan, and also aligned with the strategic priorities of the United Nations relating to Africa;

        (b)   The RCM-Africa secretariat should circulate the report on the renewed framework at the close of the sixteenth session to all stakeholders for further reflection and inputs. In this regard, all stakeholders are urged to consult among themselves as widely as possible and to submit their inputs within ten days of receipt of the draft report from the secretariat, to give the secretariat time to prepare its presentation to the African Union Commission;

        (c)   The African Union Commission, in collaboration with the RCM-Africa secretariat, will finalize the report on the renewed framework and submit it to the Assembly of African Heads of State and Government to be held in June 2015 in South Africa for its consideration, and subsequently transmit it to the General Assembly at its seventieth session in September 2015, to update the Assembly on the proposed new framework for the United Nations-African Union partnership.

IV.   Consolidated progress report of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa and the subregional coordination mechanisms
[agenda item 4]

60.   At the fifth plenary meeting, the RCM-Africa secretariat made a presentation on the consolidated progress report of the activities of RCM-Africa and the subregional coordination mechanisms for the period from April 2014 to March 2015, outlining key achievements, good practices, and the challenges confronted with a view to improving the United Nations-African Union

partnership. The challenges included the lack of a specific budget allocation for the implementation of planned programmes and activities, a shortage of staff dedicated to the work of the secretariat on the African Union side and poor circulation and dissemination of information.

61.   In the area of planning, there was a lack of regular interaction between and within the clusters, undermining their ability to function in an effective cross-cutting manner in RCM-Africa. Difficulties were encountered in elaborating joint programmes and creating a common funding pool for activities. Cluster leads had been personalized and not institutionalized, rendering continuity difficult when the lead was reassigned or resigned.

62.   Where recommendations were concerned, sustainable resources should be made available to for RCM-Africa in the long term. In the meantime, the United Nations and the African Union should work together and delivers as one on key joint undertakings by pooling their resources, with the support of African Member States.

63.   In the area of advocacy and communication, the cluster on that issue was requested to provide an update on efforts to finalize and cost the draft communication strategy. The cluster would act as the focal point for implementation of the strategy, once it had been approved.

64.   With regard to planning, the clusters and subclusters were urged to ensure that key indicators and targets were included in their plans and that their activities were reflected in the regular work programmes and programme budgets of each member agency and organization. Meetings among coordinators and members should be held by the clusters on at least a quarterly basis and by subclusters in the intervals between cluster meetings.

B.   Progress reports of the subregional coordination mechanisms

65.   Presenting the progress reports of subregional coordination mechanisms, the representative of the RCM-Africa secretariat explained that, at the eleventh session of RCM-Africa, in 2010, it had been decided to establish subregional coordination mechanisms, with a view to bringing together subregional offices, regional economic communities, intergovernmental organizations and United Nations agencies to identify opportunities for joint planning and programme implementation at the subregional level. Subregional coordination mechanisms were currently at various stages of implementation in North Africa, West Africa, Central Africa and Eastern and Southern Africa.

66.   The major challenges faced by the subregional coordination mechanisms, in addition to those already highlighted in reference to RCM-Africa itself, included the lack of ownership of the mechanisms by the agencies and bodies that constituted their membership; the need to embed the mechanisms in the planning processes of the regional economic communities and United Nations agencies; the need for a better division of labour; an excessive number of projects, on the one hand, and an insufficient number of meetings and consultations, on the other; and inadequate monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

67.   Suggested future approaches for the mechanisms included the adoption of flagship projects that reflected the priorities of stakeholders; the development of a clear division of labour and responsibilities; and measures to enhance their information sharing and monitoring and evaluation systems.

V.   Alignment of the RCM-Africa clusters [agenda item 5]

A.   Presentation

68.   In his presentation on the item, the representative of the RCM-Africa secretariat recalled that, in response to the request by RCM-Africa at its fifteenth session, the secretariat had organized a retreat of the coordinators of the RCM-Africa clusters and subclusters to reflect on a possible reconfiguration of the clusters and to develop a new framework of engagement, which had been held in Debre Zeit, Ethiopia, on 13 and 14 November 2014. At the end of the retreat no agreement had been reached on the reconfiguration of the clusters and, instead, participants at the retreat had called on the RCM-Africa secretariat to consult with key stakeholders and make proposals for consideration at the sixteenth session of RCM-Africa on how the clusters could be aligned with the planned outcomes of the African Union's strategic plan for 2014–2017 and its Agenda 2063.

69.   Accordingly, the secretariat had prepared made five scenarios for the consideration of participants at the sixteenth session, as outlined in the following subsections.

1.   Scenario 1: Status quo

70.   Under the status quo scenario, no changes would be made to the current configuration of nine clusters, namely:

    1.   Infrastructure development;
    2.   Governance;
    3.   Social and human development;
    4.   Environment, population and urbanization;
    5.   Agriculture, food security and rural development;
    6.   Science and technology;
    7.   Advocacy and communication;
    8.   Peace and security;
    9.   Industry, trade and market access.

71.   The current clusters faced a number of challenges, including the lack of regular meetings and the resources needed to carry out their work programmes. With the exception of the peace and security cluster, which met regularly and supported the African Union Department of Peace and Security in the implementation of its work programme, most of the clusters were not very active. Furthermore, under the current system, the Department of Economic Affairs of the African Union Commission was excluded, as it is did not form part of any of the clusters.

2. Scenario 2: Anchoring the clusters around the outcomes of the strategic framework of the African Union Commission for 2014–2017

72. Under the second scenario, the clusters would be aligned to the strategic outcomes elaborated in the strategic framework of the African Union Commission for 2014–2017, giving RCM-Africa seven clusters, one for each outcome of that strategic framework:

1. Peace and stability, good governance, democracy and human rights;
2. Sustainable development, agriculture, food and nutrition security, value addition and market access, environmental and natural resource management;
3. Infrastructure development and environment for inclusive economic development, industrialization, private sector, intra-African trade and sustainable use of natural resources;
4. Health, education, employment, investment, science, research and innovation;
5. Resource mobilization to finance Africa's development;
6. Communication and advocacy of the strategic framework of the African Union Commission for 2014–2017;
7. Institutional capacities for strengthening the organs of the African Union.

73. The advantage of that arrangement was that the clusters would cover all eight departmental focus areas of the African Union Commission. At the same time, however, overlaps would be introduced, with potential duplication of the activities of the departments. The new scenario would not necessarily resolve any of the challenges faced by the current nine clusters of RCM-Africa, and the question arose of what would happen after the strategic framework had expired in 2017.

3. Scenario 3: Anchoring the clusters around the strategic pillars of Agenda 2063

74. Anchoring the RCM-Africa to the seven pillars of Agenda 2063, which sought to capture the aspirations of the people of Africa and were consistent with the common African position on the post-2015 development agenda, would result in the following configuration:

1. Inclusive growth and sustainable development;
2. Regional integration;
3. Governance and human rights;
4. Peace and security;
5. Culture, heritage and shared values;
6. Women and youth;
7. Global partnership.

75. Although the third scenario was fully anchored to Agenda 2063, it was not clear how the clusters would interact with the departments in the African Union Commission, as the cluster arrangement cut across departments. Leadership by a department of the African Union Commission would be difficult for some of the

clusters, in particular 5, 6 and 7, and the scenario was also prone to overlaps and duplications.

4.   Scenario 4: Anchoring the clusters around the departments of the African Union Commission

76.   Under the current cluster system, the lack of alignment between the clusters and the departments of the African Union Commission rendered the formulation and implementation of joint programming extremely difficult. To overcome that difficulty, under the fourth scenario the clusters were anchored around the Commission's departments and directorates:

1.   Peace and security;
2.   Political affairs;
3.   Trade and industry;
4.   Infrastructure and energy;
5.   Social affairs;
6.   Agriculture, rural development, environment and natural resources;
7.   Human resources, science and technology;
8.   Economic affairs and integration;
9.   Information;
10. Women and youth.

77.   Clusters 9 and 10 in that scenario corresponded to directorates in the Office of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, but the relevance of their subject areas required them to be included in the cluster system.

78.   The scenario had the advantage that its clusters were configured around the eight departments of the African Union Commission which were responsible for implementation of the frameworks of the African Union, including Agenda 2063, the common Africa position on the post-2015 development agenda and the strategic plan. Each cluster would be anchored to a specific department and commissioner, enhancing ownership and guidance by the African Union Commission and avoiding duplication and overlapping. The scenario was also consistent with the implementation arrangements, under which departments were responsible for developing and nurturing the appropriate relationships with stakeholders and strategic partners. The scenario also included a new cluster for economic affairs and integration, anchored to the activities of the Department of Economic Affairs of the Commission.

5.   Scenario 5: Anchoring the clusters around the African Union's specialized technical committees

79.   Under the fifth and last scenario, the clusters were anchored around the specialized technical committees of the African Union, in keeping with the rationale for the creation of those committees, namely, to streamline the functions of sectoral ministerial meetings, following decision Assembly/AU/Dec.227(XII) of the Assembly of the African Union of February 2009, on the specialized technical committees. Accordingly, the fifth scenario set out the following clusters:

1.   Agriculture, rural development, water and environment;

2. Finance, monetary affairs, economic planning and integration;
3. Trade and industry and minerals;
4. Transport, transcontinental and interregional infrastructure, energy and tourism;
5. Gender and women's empowerment;
6. Justice and legal affairs;
7. Social development, labour and employment;
8. Public service, local government, urban development and decentralization;
9. Health, population and drug control;
10. Migration, refugees and internally displaced persons;
11. Youth, culture and sport;
12. Education, science and technology;
13. Communication and information and communications technology;
14. Defence, safety and security.

80.   The fifth scenario would pose challenges relating to ownership of the clusters and render the preparation of work plans and business plans difficult.

B.   Discussion

81.   Following his presentation, the representative of the secretariat conveyed the preference of the secretariat for the fourth scenario, in which the clusters were anchored around the departments of the African Union Commission.

82.   In the ensuing discussion, representative of several United Nations agencies suggested that, rather than align the clusters with the organizational structure of the African Union, it would make more sense to create clusters around desired outcomes of the African Union's 10-year implementation plan and the results framework of the Partnership on Africa's Integration and Development Agenda. The key suggestion articulated by participants was that the clusters should be aligned with outcomes determined after the forthcoming Assembly of the African Union – in line with the 10-year plan and the Partnership's results framework.

VI.   Managing the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the sustainable development goals [agenda item 6]

A.   Presentation

83.   Presenting the item, the representative of the secretariat explained that, during the fifteenth session of RCM-Africa, held in Abuja in March 2014, it had been agreed that an extended meeting would be held in the margins of the annual sessions of RCM-Africa to monitor implementation of the recommendations and to follow up on the support for the common African position on the post-2015 development agenda. Members of RCM-Africa were urged to mainstream the 2008 recommendations of the MDG Africa Steering Group and the common African position into their planning, coordination and reporting processes.

84.   Accordingly, between the fifteenth and sixteenth sessions of RCM-Africa, the secretariat had undertaken activities in line with the recommendations emanating from the fifteenth session, namely: it had worked with the African

Union on public launches of the common African position in Ndjamena and Addis Ababa in 2014; it had collaborated with other United Nations agencies on the organization of a retreat on the common African position for the group of African ambassadors in New York, in April 2014; it had provided technical support to the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda; it had supported the roll-out and implementation of the Millennium Development Goals Acceleration Framework in 27 African countries; and it had provided support to the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to follow up on monitoring of the implementation of the priority actions identified under the Acceleration Framework.

B.   Discussion

85.   In the ensuing discussion, participants recalled that the sustainable development goals were intended to complete the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals. Like the Millennium Development Goals, they aimed to mobilize governments, businesses, civil society organizations and the academic community to end extreme poverty in all its forms and, by extension, to endeavour to accelerate progress towards sustainable development. To date, the international community's attention had been focused on defining goals and targets, but that focus should now be broadened to include the indicators and associated policy, partnership and monitoring system issues, so that Africa would be in a position to start implementation of the sustainable development goals on 1 January 2016 and to achieve those goals by 2030.

86.   Key milestones on the path followed by United Nations agencies in the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the sustainable development goals included the following:

    (a)   Between the current time and July 2015, work must be undertaken with national and regional institutions to scale up capacity for negotiation in the ongoing intergovernmental processes on the sustainable development goals;

    (b)   Not later than December 2015, the United Nations agencies must be able to send out a clear message on what the sustainable development goals meant for ordinary people;

    (c)   By December 2015, work must be launched with regional and statistical institutions to develop a framework for mainstreaming the sustainable development goals into national development plans, policies, programmes and strategies;

    (d)   By December 2015, a partnership strategy must be initiated for the roll-out of the sustainable development goals at national and regional levels;

    (e)   By December 2016, baselines must be established for all the goals, targets and indicators of the sustainable development goals;

    (f)   By 2017, the final Millennium Development Goals report should be prepared, fully documenting key lessons learned from implementation of the goals;

(g)   Not later than 2018, the United Nations system and its organizations, together with partner institutions such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the African Development Bank and the African Union, should have in place an accurate and meaningful annual reporting system for the sustainable development goals.

VII.   Information on the global processes [agenda item 7]

87.   Participants were briefed on the forthcoming third International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in Addis Ababa in July 2015, by Ms. Aida Opoku-Mensah, Special Adviser to the Executive Secretary of ECA.

VIII.   Conclusions and the way forward [agenda item 8]

88.   At the sixth plenary meeting, following the discussion of the agenda items, agreement was reached on the following conclusions:

(a)   RCM-Africa should maintain the status quo of the clusters until the June 2015 Assembly of the African Union and should hold a meeting after that Assembly to align the clusters with the 10-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063;

(b)   The RCM-Africa clusters should maintain their focus on the strategic flagship programmes of the African Union Commission;

(c)   The subregional coordination mechanisms should align their programmes with the priorities of the regional economic communities and, in this regard, they should base their work programmes on the priorities of those communities;

(d)   The African Union Commission and the United Nations system should develop strategies for the domestic mobilization of resources and for overseas development assistance to support the implementation of Agenda 2063 and, in this regard, RCM-Africa should explore the possibilities of tapping into potential resources committed for the implementation of the sustainable development goals and for the funding of climate-related measures and into the funding to be pledged at the forthcoming International Conference on Financing for Development;

(e)   The RCM-Africa secretariat should develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for tracking and assessing implementation of the programmes and projects of the clusters, and implementation of the RCM-Africa recommendations;

(f)   RCM-Africa should develop a communications strategy and present it to RCM-Africa at its seventeenth session;

(g)   Consideration should be given to the possible synchronization of all relevant regional and global plans and processes with those of the African Union.

IX. Other matters [agenda item 9]

89. No other matters were raised at the session.

X. Closing of the session [agenda item 10]

90. The sixteenth session of RCM-Africa was jointly closed by Mr. Lopes and Ms. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission. Prior to their closing remarks, a representative of the RCM-Africa secretariat gave a short summary of the proceedings.

91. In his statement, Mr. Lopes expressed his thanks to the leadership of the African Union and the United Nations, the RCM-Africa secretariat and all participants for the successful session. He said that the Regional Cooperation Mechanism was an important instrument for cooperation and the ideas emanating from the current session would enhance the strategic partnership between the United Nations and the African Union.

92. In her remarks, Ms. Dlamini-Zuma also expressed her appreciation to the United Nations for its continuous support for the development agenda of the African Union. She urged the United Nations to work with the African Union in addressing the issues arising from the theme of the current session and stressed the need for adequate resources and attention to the task of empowering women and tackling gender inequality. She added that both the United Nations and the African Union must work to dispel the notion that women's issues should be dealt with by micro approaches, such as meeting their credit needs through micro-finance institutions rather than through the commercial banking system. Women must be encouraged and supported in the non-traditional sectors of the economy as well, such as oil and gas.

93. In conclusion, she thanked RCM-Africa for all its endeavours and expressed her confidence that the United Nations would continue over the next 50 years, together with the African Union, to ensure that Africa was prosperous, people-centred and peaceful and a dynamic force in the world.

94. With those brief closing remarks and following the customary exchange of courtesies, the sixteenth session of RCM-Africa was duly declared closed.