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United Nations Development Group

| Economic Commission for Africa | African Union |

Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa
Eighteenth session
First joint meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism
for Africa and the United Nations Development Group
Dakar, 25 and 26 March 2017

Coordinated United Nations support at the subregional level

I. Introduction

1. The subregional coordination mechanisms are vehicles for United Nations agencies and organizations operating at the subregional level to work with the regional economic communities and intergovernmental organizations with a view to reducing fragmentation in their operations and increasing coherence, coordination and cooperation in their support for the programmes and priorities of the regional economic communities and intergovernmental organizations. In this regard, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has established four subregional mechanisms, in North Africa, West Africa, Central Africa and East and Southern Africa. All four hold annual consultative meetings on strengthening and coordinating the support they provide with a view to achieving the priorities of their respective regional economic communities.

II. Activities of the subregional coordination mechanisms

A. Subregional coordination mechanism for East and Southern Africa

2. The annual meeting of the subregional coordination mechanism for East and Southern Africa was held in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, on 6 and 7 December 2016. The theme of the meeting was "Strengthening regional interventions towards attaining the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

3. The following recommendations were made:

(a) The African Union Commission should increase its engagement with the regional economic communities in the implementation of Agenda 2063;

(b) The business plan of the subregional coordination mechanism for East and Southern Africa and its operational modalities should be reviewed to

reflect the current priorities of the regional economic communities and intergovernmental organizations, as well as Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals;

(c)   The subregional mechanism should learn from the other regional and subregional coordination mechanisms and include lessons learned in its business plan;

(d)   The subregional coordination mechanism should seek to increase the involvement of United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Development Group regional team for East and Southern Africa, as this was crucial to the success of its work;

(e)   The lessons learned from the Tripartite Free Trade Area should be considered during the continental free trade area negotiations;

(f)   Frameworks should be developed to encourage investment from the private sector and appropriate partnership models should be explored, such as public-private partnerships, across all of the subregional coordination mechanism's flagship areas;

(g)   Regional energy security and efficiency policies and strategies should be developed and the East African Community's energy security policy framework should be mainstreamed;

(h)   Africa's growing middle class, an emerging market for tourism-related activities, should be tapped with a view to promoting intra-African tourism;

(i)   Africa's so-called blue economy should be harnessed through investments in both physical and human capacity;

(j)   Knowledge-sharing and collaboration management should be strategic and institutionalized at the subregional coordination mechanism level, including information feeding and management measures, such as the ability to launch the information-sharing platform from all stakeholders' websites or intranets;

(k)   The subregional coordination mechanism should support and facilitate the capacity-building efforts of the regional economic communities with a view to building awareness of Agenda 2063 and improving implementation, including monitoring and evaluation, reporting, and determining, catalysing and integrating regional inputs into national action plans;

(l)   In the wake of so-called Brexit, the decision of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to leave the European Union, and the problems facing the monetary union, strong and autonomous institutions should be established to underpin the regional economic communities' own projects for monetary union and deeper regional integration;

(m)   Brexit may present opportunities and challenges for countries in East and Southern Africa and the implications for Africa's regional integration agenda should be further analysed;

(n)   The regional economic communities and intergovernmental organizations should lead the implementation of regional initiatives in close collaboration with national authorities;

(o)   Additional information on the unified reporting system should be shared and engagement intensified between the regional economic communities and the African Union Commission;

(p)   Terms of reference outlining the roles and responsibilities of the chairs of the subregional coordination mechanism should be drawn up;

(q)   The regional economic communities and intergovernmental organizations should designate focal points for the subregional coordination mechanism.

B.   Subregional coordination mechanism for Central Africa

4.   The subregional coordination mechanism for Central Africa met on 6 and 7 December 2016 in Libreville. At the meeting, participants highlighted the key challenges and constraints faced during the implementation of the common indicative programme, such as weak coordination of activities among the agencies of the United Nations system, inadequate resources for implementation, insufficient time allocation for implementation and the sheer number of projects to be implemented.

5.   The participants agreed that an approach based on programmes rather than projects would help to improve the implementation of the common indicative programme. Poor knowledge of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda at the level of the regional economic communities, their specialized agencies and member States was also noted. It was agreed that both agendas were being integrated into national development plans appropriately. However, information-sharing from focal points to principals was identified as challenge. A new road map with nine steps was adopted. The regional economic communities should take the lead in the development, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the third common indicative programme. The new programme should take into account both agendas and the priorities of the subregion. In addition, partners other than those of the United Nations system should be involved in its implementation.

6.   The following recommendations were made:

(a)   ECA should review the form used to collect information and ensure follow-up and reflect the exact period rather than the year in which activities were carried out, adding a column relating to the rate of implementation of the activities, and establish a deadline for focal points to return the completed form;

(b)   ECA should provide links in the electronic forum to enable partners and focal points to exchange and access relevant information on the implementation of activities related to the common indicative programme;

(c)   ECA should consult with partners, in particular the Economic Community of Central African States, to agree on the period of implementation of the third common indicative programme, the definition of the thematic groups and the number of programmes to be implemented by each thematic group;

(d)   Technical and financial partners should strengthen the capacity of the regional economic communities to understand and take ownership of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals;

(e)   The regional economic communities and their specialized agencies should raise awareness of both agendas among member States, with the support of technical and financial partners;

(f)   The subregional coordination mechanism focal points should strive to improve the process of providing feedback and sharing information with their principals.

C. Subregional coordination mechanism for North Africa

7. The subregional coordination mechanism for North Africa met on 5 December 2016 in Rabat. During the meeting, an overview of the activities carried out during the reporting period was provided.

8. In partnership with the African Development Bank, a programme to set up a statistical unit within the Arab Maghreb Union was implemented with a budget of US$ 800,000. The programme consisted of technical assistance and the creation of a database providing statistics for the Union's publications, including a directory and statistical bulletins. The project also involved the modernization of the Union's website and institutional strengthening through organizational audits and accounting software.

9. In partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, a programme on oasis management and monitoring, water management, agricultural policy and the matching of demand and supply of agricultural products was implemented. The programme also provides for the facilitation and organization of regular meetings between agricultural professionals and the strengthening of networks to improve food security. The initiative also promotes cooperation between Maghreb countries in the fields of veterinary science, desert locust control and agricultural epidemics.

10. Technical support and advisory services were provided to the Arab Maghreb Union by ECA on issues such as climate change and the Paris Agreement, desertification, trade, industrialization through trade in North Africa in the context of the free trade area and the mega trade agreements, rules of origin, harmonization of customs procedures and electronic document exchange between customs administrations in the Arab region.

11. Other activities included the organization of a forum on youth employment in Marrakech, Morocco, in partnership with the Islamic Development Bank and the International Labour Organization; efforts by the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to support Maghreb cultural heritage; and the financing of a major study on logistics systems in the Maghreb by the African Development Bank through a donation of US$ 1.5 million.

12. The Arab Maghreb Union also presented its priorities for the future, which were trade, industry, market access and economic integration; agriculture, food security and rural development; environment, population and urbanization; human resources development, employment and public health; infrastructure, water, energy, transport and information and communications technology development; and institutional capacity-building.

13. Each of the priorities was accompanied by a set of proposals for concrete action to be taken in support of the Arab Maghreb Union. Following discussions with partners, it was agreed that appropriate responses should be identified according to the respective mandates of the partners. The Arab Maghreb Union agreed to develop a matrix setting out its priorities and support needs, which would be shared with the partners. Bilateral contacts between the Arab Maghreb Union and its partners also continued. The participants called on all partner institutions to strengthen their advocacy and include in their budgetary cycles support for Arab Maghreb Union projects. Where there was the possibility of joint action, projects could be defined jointly at meetings organized in the context of the Union's priorities. Whenever a funding gap was observed, the Arab Maghreb Union would request support from its other partners.

D. Subregional coordination mechanism for West Africa

14.   During the reporting period, the subregional coordination mechanism for West Africa, in partnership with the United Nations country teams and various United Nations agencies, provided technical support to countries, regional economic communities and intergovernmental organizations to strengthen their capacity and improve statistical systems and development planning capabilities in line with the international and regional development agendas.

15.   In Benin, technical assistance was provided for the evaluation of the country's previous development vision, ALAFIA 2025. A new development vision, "2040 vision", is being formulated and will be accompanied by a national development plan for the implementation of the vision.

16.   In Guinea, a development vision called "Guinea 2040", a development plan covering the period 2016-2020, and a national industrial development policy that takes into account the orientations of the Sustainable Development Goals were drawn up. The capacity of the country's public authorities in charge of development planning is being strengthened through training in strategic planning and monitoring and evaluation of development programmes and projects. In order to strengthen the country's statistical system and increase the funding it receives, a diagnostic study was carried out, an action plan developed and advisory support provided, including ongoing work on the revision of the computation of the country's gross domestic product.

17.   In the Niger, support was provided in the formulation of the country's strategy for sustainable development and inclusive growth and its five-year implementation plan covering the period 2017-2021, which seeks to promote regional development growth poles. Emphasis was placed on sharing best practices in Africa. In that connection, a field trip to the Bagre growth pole project in Burkina Faso was organized. Support was provided for the development of the country's economic orientation document for the period 2017-2019 in the framework of the economic and financial development programme of the International Monetary Fund, which was an opportunity to raise awareness and advocate ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national and local levels.

18.   In Liberia, technical cooperation was under way for the improvement of development planning and statistics systems, agricultural policy and the internalization of the Sustainable Development Goals in national and local policies and plans.

19.   In Senegal, efforts were made to strengthen the national planning system by setting up a platform to monitor the life cycle of development projects and improve the capacities of national planning system actors. A high-level meeting was held in Dakar to advocate the effective appropriation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level and a report was published on the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals.

20.   In Côte d'Ivoire, the planning system was strengthened through support for the development of a methodological guide on the management of the development project cycle and an action plan on the appropriation of project planning, monitoring and evaluation tools at the national level.

21.   In Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, ECA, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund held a high-level policy dialogue with a view to boosting their economic transformation, using the Commission's country profiles as a base instrument. In addition, ECA, other United Nations bodies, the African Development Bank and the European Union helped Cameroon,

Chad, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar and the Niger to carry out a comprehensive assessment and develop a plan for improving their civil registration and vital statistics systems. Under the leadership of ECA, various United Nations bodies and the African Development Bank strengthened the capacity of 19 francophone countries in Africa in areas such as business mapping processes and cause-of-death registration, with a view to improving their national civil registration and vital statistics systems. ECA and partners also developed a template on civil registration and vital statistics for a technical workshop held in Addis Ababa. ECA signed memorandums of understanding with the Economic Community of West African States, the West African Economic and Monetary Union and the Mano River Union, pledging to support their member States in developing their statistics and planning system capacity. Lastly, ECA, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel are helping the Lake Chad Basin Commission to strengthen its strategic planning and operational capacity.

III. Challenges and recommendations for the way forward

22.   In the light of the issues explored in the consolidated progress report for the period April 2016-March 2017 (E/ECA/RCM/18/3) and the document entitled "Coordinated United Nations support for the thematic programmes of the African Union" (E/ECA/RCM/18/4), the following challenges and recommendations for the way forward have been identified.

23.   Ownership and leadership by the principal stakeholders of the work of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa (RCM-Africa) is essential. Increased ownership of the mechanism and more guidance from the African Union and its organs will undoubtedly improve the performance of the mechanism. The active participation of the African Union Commission as co-chair of RCM-Africa has boosted the effectiveness of its operations. Solid foundations have been laid for fruitful cooperation and many members of the African Union Commission's senior management team have shown great enthusiasm for working with RCM-Africa. Disparities between the roles and levels of participation of the various departments of the African Union Commission have, however, somewhat affected the performance of the clusters.

24.   There is general agreement on the part of both the United Nations system and the African regional and subregional institutions that more must be done to enhance RCM-Africa and support the agenda of the African Union and its organs. An enhanced mechanism would lead to better coordination of United Nations action, improved coherence and increased cost-effectiveness, which would in turn help to achieve meaningful results.

25.   The challenges faced by the mechanism relate to resource constraints and the absence of dedicated resources, weak information and communication channels, planning constraints, the lack of an effective monitoring and evaluation framework, and difficulties demonstrating tangible results and achievements.

26.   To ensure that RCM-Africa is able to play its role effectively and support the priorities of the African Union at the regional and subregional levels, the mechanism in general and its secretariat in particular need to be properly funded. Resources must be made available on a sustainable basis for the mechanism to be effective and credible.

27.   The mechanism's communications strategy, which covers advocacy and resource mobilization, was endorsed at the seventeenth session of RCM-Africa. The strategy is currently being implemented by the RCM-Africa secretariat, with a view to increasing awareness, involvement, ownership and leadership at

all levels. Regular briefings on RCM-Africa and its activities should continue to be held for African Union commissioners and directors, the leadership of the NEPAD Agency and the heads of the regional economic communities. Greater use should be made of newsletters and other means of communication to promote the mechanism. With minimum funding, the advocacy and communications cluster could create a new platform on which ideas could be exchanged in real time using contributions from the other clusters, thereby achieving the goal of mainstreaming communication in RCM-Africa. Communication-related activities should be factored into cluster business plans and provided for in their budgets. Clusters should also designate a member to work with the advocacy and communications cluster.

28.   An annual programme of work should be considered and adopted at each annual session of RCM-Africa and then implemented and reported on by the mechanism. The programme of work would be prepared and submitted by the African Union Commission and would include expected accomplishments, key indicators of success, the targets to be achieved against each area of activity and resource requirements. Progress and achievements would need to be assessed through the monitoring and evaluation framework, which has already been put in place by the RCM-Africa secretariat. Furthermore, the performance of each member in the mechanism should be taken into account in the performance reviews carried out by the member's organization.

29.   Looking forward, it is hoped that the commitment and leadership seen thus far will continue. The African Union co-chairs should show tangible leadership and ensure that the African Union's priorities and desired outcomes are clearly articulated, thereby enabling the clusters to focus on the relevant areas and provide effective support. In addition, the co-chairs have an important role to play in facilitating the engagement of the relevant African Union Commission departments, to ensure that "delivering as one" is also the African Union Commission's approach. Meanwhile, the United Nations co-chairs should demonstrate a higher level of commitment and provide complementary leadership to the African Union Commission. This involves the allocation of both time and the human and financial resources necessary for the operationalization of the clusters' activities.

30.   RCM-Africa has proved to be an effective instrument that can contribute to efforts to rebrand Africa as a rising continent. The strategic partnership between the United Nations and the African Union should be further strengthened in support of Africa's peace and development agendas.