Special Session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa

Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

24 February, 2020

Draft Aide memoire
I. Background

A. The Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa and its Subregional Coordination Mechanisms

1. The Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa (RCM-Africa) was established through Resolution 1998/46 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which mandated the Regional Commissions of the United Nations to hold regular inter-agency meetings in their respective regions with a view to improving cooperation and coordination among the organizations of the United Nations system. The first annual session of RCM-Africa was held in 1999 and since then, the Mechanism has sought to ensure cooperation, coordination and collaboration among United Nations agencies, funds and programmes (AFPs) working in Africa in support of the African Union (AU) in the context of global and continental development frameworks, as well as United Nations-African Union cooperation frameworks.

2. The Mechanism functions through thematic clusters whose configuration has evolved over time. The current configuration comprises nine clusters addressing various thematic areas relevant to Africa’s development agenda and four Subregional Coordination Mechanisms (SRCMs) covering the five subregions of Africa. These are, namely in order of establishment: SRCM-Central Africa, SRCM-Eastern and Southern Africa, SRCM-West Africa and SRCM-North Africa. RCM-Africa is supported by a joint secretariat with offices located at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the AUC, while the Subregional Offices of ECA (ECA-SROs) provide secretariat functions for the SRCMs in close coordination with the RECs. The annual sessions of RCM-Africa are co-chaired by the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General and the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC). The Mechanism and its SRCMs have supported the African Union and its organs and agencies, including the African Union Commission, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development Agency (NEPAD Agency) now referred to as the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs).

3. Support was initially provided within the framework of the NEPAD programme of the African Union and the Millennium Development Goals up to 2015. Over the period 2006–2016, the United Nations Ten-Year Capacity-Building Programme for the African Union served as the framework for support. Presently, support is being provided in the context of African Union Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, within the framework of the renewed United Nations-African Union Partnership on Africa’s Integration and Development Agenda for 2017–2027 (PAIDA). Furthermore, the work of the Mechanism has been aligned with the UN-AU Peace and Security Framework, the AU-UN Development Framework and the African Union strategic priorities. Following this alignment, the

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1) Sustainable and inclusive economic growth, industry, trade agriculture and agro-processing and regional integration; (2) Infrastructure development; (3) Human capital development, health, nutrition, science, technology and innovation; (4) Labour, employment creation, social protection, migration and mobility; (5) Gender equality, women and youth empowerment; (6) Humanitarian matters and disaster risk management; (7) Environment, urbanization and population; (8) Advocacy, information, communications and culture; (9) Governance, Peace and Security

2) regional integration with a focus on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the Single African Air Transport Market, and free movement of persons, goods and services;
Mechanisms have placed particular emphasis on achieving results and impact through joint implementation guided by joint workplans.

4. Since 2017, the sessions have been organized jointly with the regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group (R-UNSDG) for Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA), and West and Central Africa (WCA). In the context of the United Nations reforms, the Mechanism, currently in its twenty-first year of operationalization, has been working with the R-UNSDG platforms to strengthen coherent regional engagement in order to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of support to the African Union, particularly within the framework of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda.

**B. United Nations reforms**

5. The Secretary-General’s report to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) of June 2017, proposed key actions and recommendations to reposition the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda. On 31 May 2018, the General Assembly adopted resolution 72/279 in support of the Secretary-General’s reform agenda to reposition the United Nations development system as a key partner in implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The resolution reaffirmed the role and functions of the United Nations development system at the regional level, including the regional commissions and the regional teams of the United Nations development system. It also emphasized the need to address gaps and overlaps at the regional level and endorsed a phased approach to revamping the United Nations development system at the regional level.

6. Implementation of the first phase of the reforms, which started in the second half of 2018, focused on optimizing regional mechanisms and structures. It identified nine specific deliverables, all of which have either been completed or are in advanced stages of implementation. The second phase of the reforms focused on “options, on a region by region basis for the longer-term re-profiling and restructuring of the regional assets of the United Nations.” This phase was managed by the Internal Review Team (IRT) established by the Secretary-General and led by the Special Adviser on Reforms, under the oversight of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) Chair, the Deputy Secretary-General (DSG). The work of the IRT was complemented by consultations in all five regions organized by CEPEI, an independent think tank, to make recommendations for strengthening the regional architecture based on the assets and value proposition of regional UN entities. The conclusions confirmed the invaluable UN assets and expertise at the regional level, but stressed the need for a more optimal deployment of regional assets.

7. Building on the work of the regional review, the Secretary-General’s report on Implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, made the following five recommendations to guide the longer-term re-profiling and restructuring of UN development system assets at the regional level: (1) Create a unified

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(b) Silencing the Guns; (c) climate change; (d) gender and youth; (e) capacity-building; (f) division of labour between regional economic communities (RECs), Member States and other international actors; and (g) addressing the African Union theme of the year.
mechanism for coordination in each region-UN Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) to subsume the RCMs and the R-UNSDG platforms; (2) Establish knowledge management hubs in each region; (3) Initiate a process to enhance transparency and results-based management at the regional level; (4) Initiate a region-by-region change management process consolidating capacities on data and statistics; and (5) Identify administrative services that could be provided more efficiently to regional offices through common back offices.

8. On 8 July 2019, member States of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted resolution 2019/15 calling for, among other actions, further efforts to identify and address gaps and overlaps at the regional level, as well as inclusive, intergovernmental consultations, for finalization and implementation of the regional review, on a region-by-region basis. In response to this request, the UNSDG Advisory Group on the repositioning of the UN development system in its deliberations on 30 July 2019, requested that the IRT be reconvened to implement the requests of the ECOSOC resolution. The IRT met on 4 September, 8 November and 16 December to detail and identify the functions and governance structure of the RCPs and oversee and ensure consistency in the inputs provided by working groups in the five regions on SG recommendations 2 to 5. The five recommendations will be re-submitted to ECOSOC for consideration.

9. In the context of the UN reforms, the IRT assigned task teams constituted at the level of each region to undertake consultations on recommendations 2 to 5 of the ECOSOC resolution 2019/15. In the Africa region, the consultations were co-chaired by the Under Secretary General (USG) and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Vera Songwe, and Assistant Secretary General (ASG) and UNDP Regional Director for Africa, Ahunna Eziakonwa. The followings proposed O-IBCs resulted from the consultations: (1) Strengthened integrated data and statistical systems for sustainable development; (2) Ensuring effective and efficient macroeconomic management, and accelerated economic transformation and diversification; (3) Harnessing demographic dividends, gender and youth for development; (4) Leveraging new technologies and enabling digital transitions for inclusive growth and development; (5) Fostering action on climate change, strengthening natural resources governance and enabling energy transitions for sustainable development; (6) Towards peace, security, and the respect of human rights; and (7) Displacement and migration. African Union organs and agencies will be consulted on the OIBCs.

C. Support for the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Decade for Action

10. Advancing the integrated implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a manner that ensures the realization of concrete results and impact on the ground is at the core of the work of RCM-Africa. The 2018 Africa Sustainable Development Report states that Africa was making steady progress towards building the critical ingredients for sustainable and resilient societies, but the pace was slow. Furthermore, the aggregate performance of the continent masks wide cross-country disparities. In this regard, the report asserts that effective implementation of the two Agendas requires

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3 ECOSOC resolution 2019/15 on Progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system
evidence-based policymaking to ensure the realization of multiple policy objectives through catalytic investments in key sectors. Undertaking such evidence-based policymaking calls for strengthening statistical systems to ensure better informed policymaking. Strong institutional coordination within countries and among development partners was also considered vital. In this context, the UN system pledged to continue to work in partnership with the AUC and the African Development Bank (AfDB) to leverage and optimize the use of financial and human resources to advance the development objectives of member States.

11. In this regard, with only ten years left to achieve the SDGs, the UN Secretary General (SG) in September 2019, called on all sectors of society to mobilize for a decade of action on three levels: (i) global action to secure greater leadership, more resources and smarter solutions for the SDGs; (ii) local action embedding the needed transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities and local authorities; and (iii) people action, including by youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia and other stakeholders, to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for the required transformations. The Decade of Action calls for accelerating sustainable solutions to all the world’s biggest challenges, including tackling poverty, gender inequality, climate change and closing the finance gap. In this regard, the SG considered as priority actions, investment in poverty eradication, social protection, health, education, energy, water and sanitation, sustainable transport and infrastructure and in internet access. Equally important are actions to improve governance, tackle illicit financial flows, stamp out corruption and develop effective, common sense and fair taxation systems. A particular emphasis is put on peace and security and building economies for the future and ensure decent work for all, especially young people, with a special focus on women and girls. The UNDS and development partners have all geared up to respond to the SG’s call advance the realization of the SDGs at the speed and scale required.

D. 2020 African Union Theme

12. Under the leadership of the African Union supported by the United Nations, the number of conflicts in Africa has significantly reduced over the past two decades. Civil wars in Angola, Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone have stopped. However, there are still many areas throughout the continent where the guns have yet to be silenced. There are on-going armed conflicts in Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan. The United Nations has peace keeping missions in in Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan as it responds to the on-going armed conflicts occurring in these Member States. As is often the case, the most vulnerable groups including women and children bear the brunt of the ill effects of armed conflicts. Women and girls suffer disproportionately from gender-based violence and other abuses and violations of their human rights, both during and after armed conflicts. In this context the African Union Heads of State during the 50th anniversary of the OAU/AU in 2013 adopted ‘Silencing the guns by 2020’ as a flagship project of Agenda 2063. The vision underscored that conflict is one of the biggest challenges for the implementation of Agenda 2063. In January 2017, the AU Assembly adopted the “AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by year 2020”. The 33rd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union will be held in Addis Ababa on 9 and 10 February 2020 under the theme of "Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development". 
13. With regard to United Nations support, the Security Council adopted resolution 2457 (2019) on 27 February 2019 expressing strong support for the African Union Initiative. On 4 March 2019, the Standing Principals’ Group agreed that a working group be created, led by the Assistant Secretary General (ASG) for Africa, to coordinate the different work streams to support the implementation of the initiative and present a coordinated response to the African Union and the Security Council. This led to the launching of a UN Task Force on 10 April 2019 to support the African Union Initiative on Silencing the Guns in Africa. The main objective of the task force is to serve as the main platform to coordinate within the UN System the different work streams in support to the AU Initiative, including through strengthening strategic coherence and operational collaboration. A Core Group comprising DPPA-DPO Africa, DPPA, DPO, OCT, ODA, DCO, UNDP and UNOAU will be set up to steer action and support the effective use of the Task Force. One main activity undertaken by the task force is a mapping exercise in the form of a matrix to identify the on-going and planned activities of UN agencies supporting the African Union initiative for the period 2019 and 2020. The UN family has also undertaken to prioritize the establishment of an African Human Security Index (AHSI) a tool for identifying vulnerability and development of integrated frameworks that could contribute to Silencing the Guns. The development of the AHSI is aimed at promoting regular monitoring of progress on the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs.

II. The special session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa

14. The special session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa (RCM-Africa) is being organized by ECA and DCO jointly with the regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group for Eastern and Southern Africa, and West and Central Africa. The session will focus on leveraging the Decade of Action for the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 in Africa. To that end, it will discuss among other things, the role of the United Nations Development System, African Union organs and agencies and other stakeholders. Given the significance of the 2020 AU theme "Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development" for UN collective and coherent support to the continental body, the special session will also deliberate on the theme.

15. The session will be held back-to-back with the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-6) in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, on 24 February, 2020. ARFSD-6 will take place from 25 to 27 February 2020. The rationale for linking the two events is to facilitate the translation of the outcomes of ARFSD sessions into programmatic responses by the UNDS. Additionally, this will provide the opportunity for collective activities of the UNDS to be showcased at sessions of the High Level Political Forums (HLPF), which among others, reviews progress towards the realization of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. In this regard, the Forum has dedicated an agenda item to the work of the UNDS and partners in support of the SDGs and Agenda 2063. Participants of RCM-Africa are expected to attend and provide substantive contributions to the Forum deliberations.

III. Objectives of the Special Session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa

16. The session has two main objectives: The first is to explore ways of accelerating the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 in Africa in the context of
the Decade of Action with a focus on the role of the United Nations Development System, African Union organs and agencies, and other relevant stakeholders. Second, it will provide a platform to deliberate on the 2020 African Union theme "Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development", with a view to garnering collective and coherent support for the implementation of the related African Union roadmap.

IV. Format
17. The Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union will co-chair the Special Session of RCM-Africa. The format will include a dialogue between the African Union and the United Nations on the focus of the session, breakout sessions to allow for in-depth discussions on the 2020 African Union theme, the data gateway and youth and the Decade of Action, and plenary sessions for interactive sessions and consensus building. These will be preceded by an opening segment which will set the tone for the session, and followed by a closing segment which will highlight the main issues arising and provide guidance on the next steps.

V. Expected outcomes
18. The session is expected to result in the following outcomes:
   (a) Consensus and recommendations on concrete actions required on the part of the United Nations Development System, African Union organs and agencies, and other stakeholders to accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs and Agenda 2063 goals in the context of the Decade of Action on the SDGs;
   (b) Improved knowledge and understanding on the data/SDG gateway and action-oriented recommendations for its effective operationalization in Africa;
   (c) Enhanced appreciation of the significance and role of youth in implementing the Decade of Action, and concrete action-oriented recommendations for their effective engagement in accelerating the achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2063;
   (d) Enhanced awareness and appreciation of the 2020 AU theme: “Silencing the Guns”, and concrete action-oriented recommendations on collective and coherent support of the United Nations Development System for the implementation of the African Union roadmap on the theme.

VI. Expected outputs
19. The session outputs will include the following:
   (a) Report of the Special Session of RCM-Africa;
   (b) Media releases;
   (c) Web publications.

VII. Documentation
20. The session documents will include the following:

(a) Aide memoire;
(b) Report of the twentieth session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa;
(c) Report on Strengthening Regional and Subregional Coordination in support of the African Union;
(f) Africa Inception Report on Re-profiling and Restructuring of UN Regional Assets;
(g) Final draft report of the Internal Review Team of 16 December 2019;
(h) Mapping of the proposed OIBCs onto relevant regional and global frameworks; and
(i) Publications and promotional materials relevant to the work of RCM-Africa.

VIII. Participants

21. The following organizations are expected to attend the session: African Development Bank (AfDB); African Peer Review Mechanism; African Union Commission; Arab Maghreb Union (AMU); African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD); Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD); East African Community (EAC); Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD); Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) of the African Union; Southern African Development Community (SADC); member States; various civil society groups, including women and youth; private sector; United Nations organizations; and development partners.

IX. Dates and venue

22. The Special Session of RCM-Africa will be held in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, on 24 February, 2020.

X. Working languages

23. The meeting will be conducted in English and French with simultaneous interpretation.

XI. Administrative arrangements

24. An information note providing details of administrative arrangements and logistics relating to the session will be made available.
XII. Contacts

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