Arab Consultative Meeting on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
18-19 November 2013
Ramada Plaza Hotel, Gammarth, Tunisia

INFORMATION NOTE

I. BACKGROUND

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio in 2012 (Rio+20) set a new global agenda for sustainable development over the coming years and included a number of key outcomes with implications for the Arab region. One of the most important outcomes was the agreement by governments to establish a process to develop Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and provide a new framework for the post-2015 development agenda. There is now wide support for a single post-2015 development framework containing a single set of goals that are universally applicable to all countries but adaptable to different national realities and priorities.

In January 2013, as an outcome from Rio+20, the UN General Assembly established an intergovernmental Open Working Group (OWG) to prepare a proposal for the SDGs. The OWG is co-chaired by Kenya and Hungary and includes Arab country representatives from Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. Four meetings of the OWG have taken place to date, with four remaining meetings to occur in November and December 2013, and January and February 2014. Commencing in February 2014, the OWG will prepare a report which will include a proposal for the SDGs by September 2014 for the 68th Session of the General Assembly.

In addition to the OWG, a range of other processes are underway to support the work of the OWG as well as in the context of the post-2015 development agenda more broadly. These include the work of the UN Task Team on Post 2015, the High-level Panel (HLP) of Eminent Persons, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the UN Development Group’s global, regional and national dialogues on the post-2015 agenda, and recent global meetings on the MDGs under the auspices of the General Assembly.

The many consultations and reports to date suggest that a single, balanced and comprehensive set of goals, universal to all nations, which aims to eradicate all forms of poverty and integrate sustainable development in all its dimensions, should form the core of the agenda. The framing of the set of goals for sustainable development will inevitably need to be broader than that of the MDGs in order to reflect new challenges. Illustrative goals and targets have been proposed in a range of reports, including those of the HLP, SDSN and the Global Compact, and in several initiatives from the research community.

Ultimately, to develop a proposal for the SDGs, the OWG will need to build a strong vision and narrative that frames the selection of the goals and that overcomes key conceptual issues. This narrative is emerging and centres on the need for transformative change to realize our shared vision of poverty eradication and universal human development in the context of sustainable development, respecting human dignity, protecting our planet, and living in harmony with nature for the well-being and happiness of present and future generations. To realize this agenda, all countries need to recognize the profound transformations
required to address the emerging challenges of sustainable development. These include economic shifts to sustainable patterns of production and consumption, effective governance and a renewed global partnership and means of implementation.

A range of conceptual issues will also need to be addressed by the OWG before it can articulate specific SDGs. These include: their relationship with the Rio Principles and existing international commitments in the economic, social and environmental fields; maintaining a focus on poverty eradication and building on the successes and shortcomings of the MDGs; effective integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development into a cohesive framework; differentiation between countries to take account of different levels of development; effectively addressing the drivers of sustainable development and root causes in an integrated way; international cooperation on means of implementation to achieve the SDGs; and the establishment of a robust framework to measure progress.

The implications of these processes and ongoing negotiations on SDGs for the implementation of sustainable development in the Arab region are still unfolding. It is critical that the Arab region takes stock of this emerging international framework for sustainable development and the post-2015 agenda and remains engaged in international negotiations and processes that are shaping these key outcomes to ensure the perspective and priorities of the Arab region are adequately reflected. The region also needs to consider how the framework can be best adopted and implemented at both the regional and national levels.

To this end, a number of consultations on the SDGs and the post-2015 framework have been held in the Arab region over the past several months. The SDGs formed a key topic for discussion at the recent Arab Regional Implementation Meeting for Rio+20 held in Dubai in May 2013. In addition, the post-2015 agenda has been discussed at the UN Development Group’s Arab Development Forum in Amman in April 2013, the Regional Consultation on Post-2015 with civil society in Beirut in March 2013, as well as national consultations in Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen.

A number of regional reports and papers have also served to inform the regional dialogue. The recently released 2013 Arab MDGs Report provides the latest data on progress in the region against the MDGs and includes recommendations on a post-2015 development agenda taking into account Arab regional priorities. A joint Regional Commission report on A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda also outlines key regional priority areas for a global development agenda.

To continue the Arab regional dialogue on SDGs, ESCWA, with its partners LAS, UNEP and the Ministry of Equipment and Environment in Tunisia, is organizing the Arab Consultative Meeting on the Sustainable Development Goals to take place on 18-19 November in Ramada Plaza Hotel, Gammarth, Tunisia. The meeting will provide a platform to inform Arab regional stakeholders on the international processes to date and to discuss a regional perspective on the SDGs in line with the Arab regional priorities and progress made on the MDGs.

II. Objectives of the Meeting

The meeting aims to consult on the SDGs and post-2015 agenda in light of recent and ongoing global consultations on the subject, particularly the outcomes from the 68th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations and the meetings of the intergovernmental Open Working Group (OWG) on the SDGs. It also provides a platform to discuss a regional perspective on the SDGs in line with the Arab regional priorities and progress made against the Millennium Development Goals. The meeting will specifically discuss the conceptual issues which will form the basis for shaping/developing the SDGs.
The objectives for the meeting are:

• To update and inform the meeting participants on progress to date and next steps with regard to the SDGs and post-2015 agenda; and
• To discuss a regional perspective on the SDGs in line with Arab regional priorities and progress on the MDGs; and
• To explore and discuss a harmonized vision on key conceptual issues that will shape the SDGs and post-2015 agenda.

The outcomes, findings and recommendations from the meeting will be reflected in a final meeting report. The meeting will also pave the way for a subsequent regional event planned to be held early in 2014, and which outcome will feed into the next session of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) which replaced the Commission on Sustainable Development in 2013.

III. **SCOPE OF THE MEETING**

The meeting will comprise a range of presentations and discussions that will aim to inform participants on the status of global processes relating to SDGs as well as regional sustainable development priorities, and elicit participant’s views relating to key regional priorities and perspectives for the formulation of the SDGs and post-2015 agenda. The sessions will focus on the following issues:

• An overview and discussion on the key global processes and priorities, including:
  o An update on progress of the OWG and other global processes related to the post-2015 agenda and post-Rio+20 follow-up;
  o An overview of the key conceptual issues that will need to be addressed by the OWG to develop a universal set of SDGs;
  o An overview of the emerging framework of SDGs based on major proposals and reports to date.

• An overview and discussion of Arab regional progress and priorities for sustainable development, including:
  o Arab regional progress on MDGs and recommendations for the post-2015 agenda from the 2013 Arab MDGs Report;
  o Outcomes from Arab regional consultations on post-2015 and SDGs to date and other regional reports and initiatives.

• A focused discussion of Arab regional perspectives relating to key conceptual issues and priorities for the SDGs.

Background documentation will be made available prior to the meeting via the meeting website when available.

IV. **ORGANISATION OF THE MEETING**

The meeting will be held over two days on 18-19 November 2013 at Ramada Plaza Hotel, Gammarth, Tunisia.

The meeting is being organized as a collaborative effort between ESCWA, LAS and UNEP, in cooperation with the Ministry of Equipment and Environment in Tunisia. It is one of several activities being coordinated by ESCWA in the follow-up to Rio+20. Arab experts, development practitioners, regional organizations, and other stakeholders will be invited to attend the meeting.

A provisional agenda for the meeting will be prepared and circulated to participants prior to the meeting, and will comprise a series of sessions broadly structured around the scope of the meeting as outlined above.
V. REGISTRATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Experts and stakeholder representatives involved in social, economic and environmental development are invited to participate in the meeting. Regional organizations engaged in post Rio+20 activities are welcome to participate and share their experiences. This includes United Nations and League of Arab States specialized agencies, financial institutions, civil society, private sector, academic institutions, in addition to partner organizations responsible for implementing programs, projects and activities related to post-Rio+20.

VI. ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Date and venue: The meeting will be held in Ramada Plaza Hotel Gammarth, Tunisia from 18 to 19 November 2013.

Language: Both Arabic and English will be used at the meeting and simultaneous translation will be provided.

Travel: Sponsored participants will receive their tickets from the organizers upon receiving their Tunisian visas if required, while non-sponsored participants are responsible for arranging for their own travel to Tunisia.

Accommodation: All participants are responsible for arranging for their own hotel accommodation in Tunisia. A list of identified hotels close to the meeting venue will be shared with registered participants.

Airport transportation: Participants will have to arrange airport/hotel transfer service at their own expenses.

Visas: Participants are responsible for securing their entry visa to Tunisia from the Tunisian Consulate in their country. If needed, participants can communicate with ESCWA staff for assistance in this regard. Requests for visa support must be received before 5 November 2013.

VII. CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence and inquiries concerning the Arab Consultative Meeting on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should be addressed to:

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Webpage of the Arab Consultative Meeting on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be accessible on:

For additional information on OWG on SDGs, please visit:
The Arab Consultative Meeting on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

الاجتماع التشاوري العربي حول أهداف التنمية المستدامة

(Ramada Plaza hotel, Gammarth Tunisia, Monday and Tuesday 18-19 November 2013)

استمارة التسجيل

Registration Form

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Please fill in the form in English and Arabic and send it back alongside a passport-size photo (JPG format) and a clear colored scanned copy of the passport to Ms. Rita Wehbé, Productive Sectors Section, Sustainable Development and Productivity Division, ESCWA, Beirut, Lebanon, E-mail: wehbe@un.org, Tel: +961-1-978513.